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THE QUEEN'S OWN FBI TRILOGY
BRAIN TWISTER
THE IMPOSSIBLES
SUPERMIND

By

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BOOK 1
BRAIN TWISTER

Prologue

In nineteen-fourteen, it was enemy aliens.

In nineteen-thirty, it was Wobblies.

In nineteen-fifty-seven, it was fellow-travelers.

And, in nineteen seventy-one, Kenneth J. Malone rolled wearily out of bed wondering what the hell it was going to be now.

One thing, he told himself, was absolutely certain: it was going to be terrible. It always was.

He managed to stand up, although he was swaying slightly when he walked across the room to the mirror for his usual morning look at himself. He didn't much like staring at his own face, first thing in the morning, but then, he told himself, it was part of the toughening-up process every FBI agent had to go through. You had to learn to stand up and take it when things got rough, he reminded himself. He blinked and looked into the mirror.

His image blinked back.

He tried a smile. It looked pretty horrible, he thought-but, then, the mirror had a slight ripple in it, and the ripple distorted everything. Malone's face looked as if it had been gently patted with a waffle-iron.

And, of course, it was still early morning, and that meant he was having a little difficulty in focusing his eyes.

Vaguely, he tried to remember the night before. He was just ending his vacation, and he thought he recalled having a final farewell party for two or three lovely female types he had chanced to meet in what was still the world's finest City of Opportunity, Washington, D.C. (latest female-to-male ratio, five-and-a-half to one). The party had been a classic of its kind, complete with hot and cold running ideas of all sorts, and lots and lots of nice powerful liquor.

Malone decided sadly that the ripple wasn't in the mirror, but in his head. He stared at his unshaven face clearly.

Blink. Ripple.

Quite impossible, he told himself. Nobody could conceivably look as horrible as Kenneth J. Malone thought he did. Things just couldn't be as bad as all that.

Ignoring a still, small voice which asked persistently: "Why not?" he turned away from the mirror and set about finding his clothes. He determined to take his time about getting ready for work: after all, nobody could really complain if he arrived late on his first day after vacation. Everybody knew how tired vacations made a person.

And, besides, there was probably nothing happening anyway. Things had, he recalled with faint pleasure, been pretty quiet lately. Ever since the counterfeiting gang he'd caught had been put away, crime seemed to have dropped to the nice, simple levels of the 1950's and '60's. Maybe, he hoped suddenly, he'd be able to spend some time catching up on his scientific techniques, or his math, or pistol practice....

The thought of pistol practice made his head begin to throb with the authority of a true hangover. There were fifty or sixty small gnomes inside his skull, he realized, all of them with tiny little hammers. They were mining for lead.

"The lead," Malone said aloud, "is farther down. Not in the skull."

The gnomes paid him no attention. He shut his eyes and tried to relax. The gnomes went right ahead with their work, and microscopic regiments of Eagle Scouts began marching steadily along his nerves.

There were people, Malone had always understood, who bounced out of their beds and greeted each new day with a smile. It didn't sound possible, but then again there were some pretty strange people. The head of that counterfeiting ring, for instance: where had he got the idea of picking an alias like André Gide?

Clutching at his whirling thoughts, Malone opened his eyes, winced, and began to get dressed. At least, he thought, it was going to be a peaceful day.

It was at this second that his private intercom buzzed.

Malone winced again. "To hell with you," he called at the thing, but the buzz went on, ignoring the code shut-off. That meant, he knew, an emergency call, maybe from his Chief of Section. Maybe even from higher up.

"I'm not even late for work yet," he complained. "I will be, but I'm not yet. What are they screaming about?"

There was, of course, only one way to find out. He shuffled painfully across the room, flipped the switch and said:

"Malone here." Vaguely, he wondered if it were true. He certainly didn't feel as if he were here. Or there. Or anywhere at all, in fact.

A familiar voice came tinnily out of the receiver. "Malone, get down here right away!"

The voice belonged to Andrew J. Burris. Malone sighed deeply and felt grateful, for the fiftieth time, that he had never had a TV pickup installed in the intercom. He didn't want the FBI chief to see him looking as horrible as he did now, all rippled and everything. It wasn't-well, it wasn't professional, that was all.

"I'll get dressed right away," he assured the intercom. "I should be there in—"

"Don't bother to get dressed," Burris snapped. "This is an emergency!"

"But, Chief—"

"And don't call me Chief!"

"Okay," Malone said. "Sure. You want me to come down in my pyjamas. Right?"

"I want you to—" Burris stopped. "All right, Malone. If you want to waste time while our country's life is at stake, you go ahead. Get dressed. After all, Malone, when I say something is an emergency—"

"I won't get dressed, then," Malone said. "Whatever you say."

"Just do something!" Burris told him desperately. "Your country needs you. Pyjamas and all. Malone, it's a crisis!"

Conversations with Burris, Malone told himself, were bound to be a little confusing. "I'll be right down," he said.

"Fine," Burris said, and hesitated. Then he added: "Malone, do you wear the tops or the bottoms?"

"The what?"

"Of your pyjamas," Burris explained hurriedly. "The top part or the bottom part?"

"Oh," Malone said. "As a matter of fact, I wear both."

"Good," Burris said with satisfaction. "I wouldn't want an agent of mine arrested for indecent exposure." He rang off.

Malone blinked at the intercom for a minute, shut it off and then, ignoring the trip-hammers in his skull and the Eagle Scouts on his nerves, began to get dressed. Somehow, in spite of Burris' feelings of crisis, he couldn't see himself trying to flag a taxi on the streets of Washington in his pyjamas. Anyhow, not while he was awake. I dreamed I was an FBI agent, he thought sadly, in my drafty BVDs.

Besides, it was probably nothing important. These things, he told himself severely, have a way of evaporating as soon as a clear, cold intelligence got hold of them.

Then he began wondering where in hell he was going to find a clear, cold intelligence. Or even, for that matter, what one was.

CHAPTER 1

"They could be anywhere," Burris said, with an expression which bordered on exasperated horror. "They could be all around us. Heaven only knows."

He pushed his chair back from his desk and stood up, a chunky little man with bright blue eyes and large hands. He paced to the window and looked out at Washington, and then he came back to the desk. A persistent office rumor held that he had become head of the FBI purely because he happened to have an initial J in his name, but in his case the J stood for Jeremiah. And, at the moment, his tone expressed all the hopelessness of that Old Testament prophet's lamentations.

"We're helpless," he said, looking at the young man with the crisp brown hair who was sitting across the desk. "That's what it is, we're helpless."

Kenneth Malone tried to look dependable. "Just tell me what to do," he said.

"You're a good agent, Kenneth," Burris said. "You're one of the best. That's why you've been picked for this job. And I want to say that I picked you personally. Believe me, there's never been anything like it before."

"I'll do my best," Malone said at random. He was twenty-six, and he had been an FBI agent for three years. In that time, he had, among other things, managed to break up a gang of smugglers, track down a counterfeiting ring, and capture three kidnappers. For reasons which he could neither understand nor explain, no one seemed willing to attribute his record to luck.

"I know you will," Burris said. "And if anybody can crack this case, Malone, you're the man. It's just that-everything sounds so impossible. Even after all the conferences we've had."

"Conferences?" Malone said vaguely. He wished the Chief would get to the point. Any point. He smiled gently across the desk and tried to look competent and dependable and reassuring. Burris' expression didn't change.

"You'll get the conference tapes later," Burris said. "You can study them before you leave. I suggest you study them very carefully, Malone. Don't be like me. Don't get confused." He buried his face in his hands. Malone waited patiently. After a few seconds, Burris looked up. "Did you read books when you were a child?" he asked.

Malone said: "What?"

"Books," Burris said. "When you were a child. Read them."

"Sure I did," Malone said. "Bomba the Jungle Boy, and Doctor Doolittle, and Lucky Starr, and Little Women—"

"Little Women?"

"When Beth died," Malone said, "I wanted to cry. But I didn't. My father said big boys don't cry."

"And your father was right," Burris said. "Why, when I was a-never mind. Forget about Beth and your father. Think about Lucky Starr for a minute. Remember him?"

"Sure," Malone said. "I liked those books. You know it's funny, but the books you read when you're a kid, they kind of stay with you. Know what I mean? I can still remember that one about Venus, for instance. Gee, that was—"

"Never mind about Venus, too," Burris said sharply. "Keep your mind on the problem."

"Yes, sir," Malone said. He paused. "What problem, sir?" he added.

"The problem we're discussing," Burris said. He gave Malone a bright, blank stare. "My God," he said. "Just listen to me."

"Yes, sir."

"All right, then." Burris took a deep breath. He seemed nervous. Once again he stood up and went to the window. This time, he spoke without turning. "Remember how everybody used to laugh about spaceships, and orbital satellites, and life on other planets? That was just in those Lucky Starr books. That was all just for kids, wasn't it?"

"Well, I don't know," Malone said slowly.

"Sure it was all for kids," Burriss said. "It was laughable. Nobody took it seriously."

"Well, somebody must—"

"You just keep quiet and listen," Burriss said.

"Yes, sir," Malone said.

Burriss nodded. His hands were clasped behind his back. "We're not laughing any more, are we, Malone?" he said without moving.

There was silence.

"Well, are we?"

"Did you want me to answer, sir?"

"Of course I did!" Burriss snapped.

"You told me to keep quiet and—"

"Never mind what I told you," Burriss said. "Just do what I told you."

"Yes, sir," Malone said. "No, sir," he added after a second.

"No, sir, what?" Burriss asked softly.

"No, sir, we're not laughing any more," Malone said.

"Ah," Burriss said. "And why aren't we laughing any more?"

There was a little pause. Malone said, tentatively: "Because there's nothing to laugh about, sir?"

Burriss whirled. "On the head!" he said happily. "You've hit the nail on the head, Kenneth. I knew I could depend on you." His voice grew serious again, and thoughtful. "We're not laughing any more because there's nothing to laugh about. We have orbital satellites, and we've landed on the Moon with an atomic rocket. The planets are the next step, and after that the stars. Man's heritage, Kenneth. The stars. And the stars, Kenneth, belong to Man—not to the Russians!"

"Yes, sir," Malone said soberly.

"So," Burriss said, "we should learn not to laugh any more. But have we?"

"I don't know, sir."

"We haven't," Burriss said with decision. "Can you read my mind?"

"No, sir," Malone said. "Can I read your mind?"

Malone hesitated. At last he said: "Not that I know of, sir."

"Well, I can't," Burriss snapped. "And can any of us read each other's mind?"

Malone shook his head. "No, sir," he said.

Burriss nodded. "That's the problem," he said. "That's the case I'm sending you out to crack."

This time, the silence was a long one.

At last, Malone said: "What problem, sir?"

"Mind reading," Burriss said. "There's a spy at work in the Nevada plant, Kenneth. And the spy is a telepath."

* * * *

The video tapes were very clear and very complete. There were a great many of them, and it was long after nine o'clock when Kenneth Malone decided to take a break and get some fresh air. Washington was a good city for walking, even at night, and Malone liked to walk. Sometimes he pretended, even to himself, that he got his best ideas while walking, but he knew perfectly well that wasn't true. His best ideas just seemed to come to him, out of nowhere, precisely as the situation demanded them.

He was just lucky, that was all. He had a talent for being lucky. But nobody would ever believe that. A record like his was spectacular, even in the annals of the FBI, and Burriss himself believed that the record showed some kind of superior ability.

Malone knew that wasn't true, but what could he do about it? After all, he didn't want to resign, did he? It was kind of romantic and exciting to be an FBI agent, even after three years. A man got a chance to travel around a lot and see things, and it was interesting. The pay was pretty good, too.

The only trouble was that, if he didn't quit, he was going to have to find a telepath.

The notion of telepathic spies just didn't sound right to Malone. It bothered him in a remote sort of way. Not that the idea of telepathy itself was alien to him-after all, he was even more aware than the average citizen that research had been going on in that field for something over a quarter of a century, and that the research was even speeding up.

But the cold fact that a telepathy-detecting device had been invented somehow shocked his sense of propriety, and his notions of privacy. It wasn't decent, that was all.

There ought to be something sacred, he told himself angrily.

He stopped walking and looked up. He was on Pennsylvania Avenue, heading toward the White House.

That was no good. He went to the corner and turned off, down the block. He had, he told himself, nothing at all to see the President about.

Not yet, anyhow.

The streets were dark and very peaceful. I get my best ideas while walking, Malone said without convincing himself. He thought back to the video tapes.

The report on the original use of the machine itself had been on one of the first tapes, and Malone could still see and hear it. That was one thing he did have, he reflected; his memory was pretty good.

Burris had been the first speaker on the tapes, and he'd given the serial and reference number in a cold, matter-of-fact voice. His face had been perfectly blank, and he looked just like the head of the FBI people were accustomed to seeing on their TV and newsreel screens. Malone wondered what had happened to him between the time the tapes had been made and the time he'd sent for Malone.

Maybe the whole notion of telepathy was beginning to get him, Malone thought.

Burris recited the standard tape-opening in a rapid mumble, like a priest involved in the formula of the Mass: "Any person or agent unauthorized for this tape please refrain from viewing further, under penalties as prescribed by law." Then he looked off, out past the screen to the left, and said: "Dr. Thomas O'Connor, of Westinghouse Laboratories. Will you come here, Dr. O'Connor?"

Dr. O'Connor came into the lighted square of screen slowly, looking all around him. "This is very fascinating," he said, blinking in the lamplight. "I hadn't realized that you people took so many precautions—"

He was, Malone thought, somewhere between fifty and sixty, tall and thin with skin so transparent that he nearly looked like a living X-ray. He had pale blue eyes and pale white hair, and, Malone thought, if there ever were a contest for the best-looking ghost, Dr. Thomas O'Connor would win it hands (or phalanges) down.

"This is all necessary for the national security," Burris said, a little sternly.

"Oh," Dr. O'Connor said quickly. "I realize that, of course. Naturally. I can certainly see that."

"Let's go ahead, shall we?" Burris said.

O'Connor nodded. "Certainly. Certainly."

Burris said: "Well, then," and paused. After a second he started again: "Now, Dr. O'Connor, would you please give us a sort of verbal rundown on this for our records?"

"Of course," Dr. O'Connor said. He smiled into the video cameras and cleared his throat. "I take it you don't want an explanation of how this machine works. I mean: you don't want a technical exposition, do you?"

"No," Burris said, and added: "Not by any means. Just tell us what it does."

Dr. O'Connor suddenly reminded Malone of a professor he'd had in college for one of the law courses. He had, Malone thought, the same smiling gravity of demeanor, the same condescending attitude of absolute authority. It was clear that Dr. O'Connor lived in a world of his own, a world that was not even touched by the common run of men.

"Well," he began, "to put it very simply, the device indicates whether or not a man's mental-ah-processes are being influenced by outside—by outside influences." He gave the cameras another little smile. "If you will allow me, I will demonstrate on the machine itself."

He took two steps that carried him out of camera range, and returned wheeling a large heavy-looking

box. Dangling from the metal covering were a number of wires and attachments. A long cord led from the box to the floor and snaked out of sight to the left.

"Now," Dr. O'Connor said. He selected a single lead, apparently, Malone thought, at random. "This electrode—"

"Just a moment, Doctor," Burris said. He was eyeing the machine with a combination of suspicion and awe. "A while back you mentioned something about 'outside influences.' Just what, specifically, does that mean?"

With some regret, Dr. O'Connor dropped the lead. "Telepathy," he said. "By outside influences, I meant influences on the mind, such as telepathy or mind-reading of some nature."

"I see," Burris said. "You can detect a telepath with this machine."

"I'm afraid—"

"Well, some kind of a mind-reader anyhow," Burris said. "We won't quarrel about terms."

"Certainly not," Dr. O'Connor said. The smile he turned on Burris was as cold and empty as the inside of Orbital Station One. "What I meant was—if you will permit me to continue—that we cannot detect any sort of telepathy or mind-reader with this device. To be frank, I very much wish that we could; it would make everything a great deal simpler. However, the laws of psionics don't seem to operate that way."

"Well, then," Burris said, "what does the thing do?" His face wore a mask of confusion. Momentarily, Malone felt sorry for his chief. He could remember how he'd felt, himself, when that law professor had come up with a particularly baffling question in class.

"This machine," Dr. O'Connor said with authority, "detects the slight variations in mental activity that occur when a person's mind is being read."

"You mean, if my mind were being read right now—"

"Not right now," Dr. O'Connor said. "You see, the bulk of this machine is in Nevada; the structure is both too heavy and too delicate for transport. And there are other qualifications—"

"I meant theoretically," Burris said.

"Theoretically—" Dr. O'Connor began, and smiled again—"Theoretically, if your mind were being read, this machine would detect it, supposing that the machine were in operating condition and all of the other qualifications had been met. You see, Mr. Burris, no matter how poor a telepath a man may be, he has some slight ability—even if only very slight—to detect the fact that his mind is being read."

"You mean, if somebody was reading my mind, I'd know it?" Burris said. His face showed, Malone realized, that he plainly disbelieved this statement.

"You would know it," Dr. O'Connor said, "but you would never know you knew it. To elucidate: in a normal person—like you, for instance, or even like myself—the state of having one's mind read merely results in a vague, almost sub-conscious feeling of irritation, something that could easily be attributed to minor worries, or fluctuations in one's hormonal balance. The hormonal balance, Mr. Burris, is—"

"Thank you," Burris said with a trace of irritation. "I know what hormones are."

"Ah. Good," Dr. O'Connor said equably. "In any case, to continue: this machine interprets those specific feelings as indications that the mind is being-ah-'eavesdropped' upon."

You could almost see the quotation marks around what Dr. O'Connor considered slang dropping into place, Malone thought.

"I see," Burris said with a disappointed air. "But what do you mean, it won't detect a telepath? Have you ever actually worked with a telepath?"

"Certainly we have," Dr. O'Connor said. "If we hadn't, how would we be able to tell that the machine was, in fact, indicating the presence of telepathy? The theoretical state of the art is not, at present, sufficiently developed to enable us to—"

"I see," Burris said hurriedly. "Only wait a minute."

"Yes?"

"You mean you've actually got a real mind-reader? You've found one? One that works?"

Dr. O'Connor shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid I should have said, Mr. Burris, that we did once have one," he admitted. "He was, unfortunately, an imbecile, with a mental age between five and six, as nearly as we were ever able to judge."

"An imbecile?" Burris said. "But how were you able to—"

"He could repeat a person's thoughts word for word," Dr. O'Connor said. "Of course, he was utterly incapable of understanding the meaning behind them. That didn't matter; he simply repeated whatever you were thinking. Rather disconcerting."

"I'm sure," Burris said. "But he was really an imbecile? There wasn't any chance of—"

"Of curing him?" Dr. O'Connor said. "None, I'm afraid. We did at one time feel that there had been a mental breakdown early in the boy's life, and, indeed, it's perfectly possible that he was normal for the first year or so. The records we did manage to get on that period, however, were very much confused, and there was never any way of telling anything at all, for certain. It's easy to see what caused the confusion, of course: telepathy in an imbecile is rather an oddity—and any normal adult would probably be rather hesitant about admitting that he was capable of it. That's why we have not found another subject; we must merely sit back and wait for lightning to strike."

Burris sighed. "I see your problem," he said. "But what happened to this imbecile boy of yours?"

"Very sad," Dr. O'Connor said. "Six months ago, at the age of fifteen, the boy simply died. He simply-gave up, and died."

"Gave up?"

"That was as good an explanation as our medical department was able to provide, Mr. Burris. There was some malfunction-but-we like to say that he simply gave up. Living became too difficult for him."

"All right," Burris said after a pause. "This telepath of yours is dead, and there aren't any more where he came from. Or if there are, you don't know how to look for them. All right. But to get back to this machine of yours: it couldn't detect the boy's ability?"

Dr. O'Connor shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not. We've worked hard on that problem at Westinghouse, Mr. Burris, but we haven't yet been able to find a method of actually detecting telepaths."

"But you can detect—"

"That's right," Dr. O'Connor said. "We can detect the fact that a man's mind is being read." He stopped, and his face became suddenly morose. When he spoke again, he sounded guilty, as if he were making an admission that pained him. "Of course, Mr. Burris, there's nothing we can do about a man's mind being read. Nothing whatever." He essayed a grin that didn't look very healthy. "But at least," he said, "you know you're being spied on."

Burris grimaced. There was a little silence while Dr. O'Connor stroked the metal box meditatively, as if it were the head of his beloved.

At last, Burris said: "Dr. O'Connor, how sure can you be of all this?"

The look he received made all the previous conversation seem as warm and friendly as a Christmas party by comparison. It was a look that froze the air of the room into a solid chunk, Malone thought, a chunk you could have chipped pieces from, for souvenirs, later, when Dr. O'Connor had gone and you could get into the room without any danger of being quick-frozen by the man's unfriendly eye.

"Mr. Burris," Dr. O'Connor said in a voice that matched the temperature of his gaze, "please. Remember our slogan."

* * * *

Malone sighed. He fished in his pocket for a pack of cigarettes, found one, and extracted a single cigarette. He stuck it in his mouth and started fishing in various pockets for his lighter.

He sighed again. Perfectly honestly, he preferred cigars, a habit he'd acquired from the days when he'd filched them from his father's cigar-case. But his mental picture of a fearless and alert young FBI agent didn't include a cigar. Somehow, remembering his father as neither fearless nor, exactly, alert-anyway, not the way the movies and the TV screens liked to picture the words—he had the impression that cigars looked out of place on FBI agents.

And it was, in any case, a small sacrifice to make. He found his lighter and shielded it from the brisk wind. He looked out over water at the Jefferson Memorial, and was surprised that he'd managed to walk as far as he had. Then he stopped thinking about walking, and took a puff of his cigarette, and forced himself to think about the job in hand.

Naturally, the Westinghouse gadget had been declared Ultra Top Secret as soon as it had been worked out. Virtually everything was, these days. And the whole group involved in the machine and its workings had been transferred without delay to the United States Laboratories out in Yucca Flats, Nevada.

Out there in the desert, there just wasn't much to do, Malone supposed, except to play with the machine. And, of course, look at the scenery. But when you've seen one desert, Malone thought confusedly, you've seen them all.

So, the scientists ran experiments on the machine, and they made a discovery of a kind they hadn't been looking for.

Somebody, they discovered, was picking the brains of the scientists there.

Not the brains of the people working with the telepathy machine.

And not the brains of the people working on the several other Earth-limited projects at Yucca Flats.

They'd been reading the minds of some of the scientists working on the new and highly classified non-rocket space drive.

In other words, the Yucca Flats plant was infested with a telepathic spy. And how do you go about finding a telepath? Malone sighed. Spies that got information in any of the usual ways were tough enough to locate. A telepathic spy was a lot tougher proposition.

Well, one thing about Andrew J. Burris. He had an answer for everything. Malone thought of what his chief had said: "It takes a thief to catch a thief. And if the Westinghouse machine won't locate a telepathic spy, I know what will."

"What?" Malone had asked.

"It's simple," Burris had said. "Another telepath. There has to be one around somewhere. Westinghouse did have one, after all, and the Russians still have one. Malone, that's your job: go out and find me a telepath."

Burris had an answer for everything, all right, Malone thought. But he couldn't see where the answer did him very much good. After all, if it takes a telepath to catch a telepath, how do you catch the telepath you're going to use to catch the first telepath?

Malone ran that through his mind again, and then gave it up. It sounded as if it should have made sense, somehow, but it just didn't, and that was all there was to that.

He dropped his cigarette to the ground and mashed it out with the toe of his shoe. Then he looked up.

Out there, over the water, was the Jefferson Memorial. It stood, white in the floodlights, beautiful and untouchable in the darkness. Malone stared at it. What would Thomas Jefferson have done in a crisis like this?

Jefferson, he told himself without much conviction, would have been just as confused as he was.

But he'd have had to find a telepath, Malone thought. Malone determined that he would do likewise. If Thomas Jefferson could do it, the least he, Malone, could do was to give it a good try.

There was only one little problem:

Where, Malone thought, do I start looking?

CHAPTER 2

Early the next morning, Malone awoke on a plane, heading across the continent toward Nevada. He had gone home to sleep, and he'd had to wake up to get on the plane, and now here he was, waking up again. It seemed, somehow, like a vicious circle.

The engines hummed gently as they pushed the big ship through the middle stratosphere's thinly distributed molecules. Malone looked out at the purple-dark sky and set himself to think out his problem again.

He was still mulling things over when the ship lowered its landing gear and rolled to a stop on the big field near Yucca Flats. Malone sighed and climbed slowly out of his seat. There was a car waiting for him at the airfield, though, and that seemed to presage a smooth time; Malone remembered calling Dr. O'Connor the night before, and congratulated himself on his foresight.

Unfortunately, when he reached the main gate of the high double fence that surrounded the more than ninety square miles of United States Laboratories, he found out that entrance into that sanctum sanctorum of Security wasn't as easy as he'd imagined—not even for an FBI man. His credentials were checked with the kind of minute care Malone had always thought people reserved for disputed art masterpieces, and it was with a great show of reluctance that the Special Security guards passed him inside as far as the office of the Chief Security Officer.

There, the Chief Security Officer himself, a man who could have doubled for Torquemada, eyed Malone with ill-concealed suspicion while he called Burris at FBI headquarters back in Washington.

Burris identified Malone on the video screen and the Chief Security Officer, looking faintly disappointed, stamped the agent's pass and thanked the FBI chief. Malone had the run of the place.

Then he had to find a courier jeep. The Westinghouse division, it seemed, was a good two miles away.

As Malone knew perfectly well, the main portion of the entire Yucca Flats area was devoted solely to research on the new space drive which was expected to make the rocket as obsolete as the blunderbuss—at least as far as space travel was concerned. Not, Malone thought uneasily, that the blunderbuss had ever been used for space travel, but—

He got off the subject hurriedly. The jeep whizzed by buildings, most of them devoted to aspects of the non-rocket drive. The other projects based at Yucca Flats had to share what space was left—and that included, of course, the Westinghouse research project.

It turned out to be a single, rather small white building with a fence around it. The fence bothered Malone a little, but there was no need to worry; this time he was introduced at once into Dr. O'Connor's office. It was paneled in wallpaper manufactured to look like pine, and the telepathy expert sat behind a large black desk bigger than any Malone had ever seen in the FBI offices. There wasn't a scrap of paper on the desk; its surface was smooth and shiny, and behind it the nearly transparent Dr. Thomas O'Connor was close to invisible.

He looked, in person, just about the same as he'd looked on the FBI tapes. Malone closed the door of the office behind him, looked for a chair and didn't find one. In Dr. O'Connor's office, it was perfectly obvious, Dr. O'Connor sat down. You stood, and were uncomfortable.

Malone took off his hat. He reached across the desk to shake hands with the telepathy expert, and Dr. O'Connor gave him a limp fragile paw. "Thanks for giving me a little time," Malone said. "I really appreciate it." He smiled across the desk. His feet were already beginning to hurt.

"Not at all," Dr. O'Connor said, returning the smile with one of his own special quick-frozen brand. "I realize how important FBI work is to all of us, Mr. Malone. What can I do to help you?"

Malone shifted his feet. "I'm afraid I wasn't very specific on the phone last night," he said. "It wasn't anything I wanted to discuss over a line that might have been tapped. You see, I'm on the telepathy case."

Dr. O'Connor's eyes widened the merest trifle. "I see," he said. "Well, I'll certainly do everything I can to help you."

"Fine," Malone said. "Let's get right down to business, then. The first thing I want to ask you about is this detector of yours. I understand it's too big to carry around-but how about making a smaller model?"

"Smaller?" Dr. O'Connor permitted himself a ghostly chuckle. "I'm afraid that isn't possible, Mr. Malone. I would be happy to let you have a small model of the machine if we had one available-more than happy. I would like to see such a machine myself, as a matter of fact. Unfortunately, Mr. Malone—"

"There just isn't one, right?" Malone said.

"Correct," Dr. O'Connor said. "And there are a few other factors. In the first place, the person being analyzed has to be in a specially shielded room, such as is used in encephalographic analysis. Otherwise, the mental activity of the other persons around him would interfere with the analysis." He frowned a little.

"I could wish that we knew a bit more about psionic machines. The trouble with the present device, frankly, is that it is partly psionic and partly electronic, and we can't be entirely sure where one part leaves off and the other begins. Very trying. Very trying indeed."

"I'll bet it is," Malone said sympathetically, wishing he understood what Dr. O'Connor was talking about.

The telepathy expert sighed. "However," he said, "we keep working at it." Then he looked at Malone expectantly.

Malone shrugged. "Well, if I can't carry the thing around, I guess that's that," he said. "But here's the next question: do you happen to know the maximum range of a telepath? I mean: how far away can he get from another person and still read his mind?"

Dr. O'Connor frowned again. "We don't have definite information on that, I'm afraid," he said. "Poor little Charlie was rather difficult to work with. He was mentally incapable of cooperating in any way, you see."

"Little Charlie?"

"Charles O'Neill was the name of the telepath we worked with," Dr. O'Connor explained.

"I remember," Malone said. The name had been on one of the tapes, but he just hadn't associated "Charles O'Neill" with "Little Charlie." He felt as if he'd been caught with his homework undone. "How did you manage to find him, anyway?" he said. Maybe, if he knew how Westinghouse had found their imbecile-telepath, he'd have some kind of clue that would enable him to find one, too. Anyhow, it was worth a try.

"It wasn't difficult in Charlie's case," Dr. O'Connor said. He smiled. "The child babbled all the time, you

see."

"You mean he talked about being a telepath?"

Dr. O'Connor shook his head impatiently. "No," he said. "Not at all. I mean that he babbled. Literally. Here: I've got a sample recording in my files." He got up from his chair and went to the tall gray filing cabinet that hid in a far corner of the pine-paneled room. From a drawer he extracted a spool of common audio tape, and returned to his desk.

"I'm sorry we didn't get full video on this," he said, "but we didn't feel it was necessary." He opened a panel in the upper surface of the desk, and slipped the spool in. "If you like, there are other tapes—"

"Maybe later," Malone said.

Dr. O'Connor nodded and pressed the playback switch at the side of the great desk. For a second the room was silent.

Then there was the hiss of empty tape, and a brisk masculine voice that overrode it:

"Westinghouse Laboratories," it said, "sixteen April nineteen-seventy. Dr. Walker speaking. The voice you are about to hear belongs to Charles O'Neill: chronological age fourteen years, three months; mental age, approximately five years. Further data on this case will be found in the file O'Neill."

There was a slight pause, filled with more tape hiss.

Then the voice began.

"...push the switch for record ... in the park last Wednesday ... and perhaps a different set of ... poor kid never makes any sense in ... trees and leaves all sunny with the ... electronic components of the reducing stage might be ... not as predictable when others are around but ... to go with Sally some night in the...."

It was a childish, alto voice, gabbling in a monotone. A phrase would be spoken, the voice would hesitate for just an instant, and then another, totally disconnected phrase would come. The enunciation and pronunciation would vary from phrase to phrase, but the tone remained essentially the same, drained of all emotional content.

"...in receiving psychocerebral impulses there isn't any ... nonsense and nothing but nonsense all the ... tomorrow or maybe Saturday with the girl ... tube might be replaceable only if ... something ought to be done for the ... Saturday would be a good time for ... work on the schematics tonight if...."

There was a click as the tape was turned off, and Dr. O'Connor looked up.

"It doesn't make much sense," Malone said. "But the kid sure has a hell of a vocabulary for an imbecile."

"Vocabulary?" Dr. O'Connor said softly.

"That's right," Malone said. "Where'd an imbecile get words like 'psychocerebral?' I don't think I know what that means, myself."

"Ah," Dr. O'Connor said. "But that's not his vocabulary, you see. What Charlie is doing is simply repeating the thoughts of those around him. He jumps from mind to mind, simply repeating whatever he

receives.” His face assumed the expression of a man remembering a bad taste in his mouth. “That’s how we found him out, Mr. Malone,” he said. “It’s rather startling to look at a blithering idiot and have him suddenly repeat the very thought that’s in your mind.”

Malone nodded unhappily. It didn’t seem as if O’Connor’s information was going to be a lot of help as far as catching a telepath was concerned. An imbecile, apparently, would give himself away if he were a telepath. But nobody else seemed to be likely to do that. And imbeciles didn’t look like very good material for catching spies with. Then he brightened. “Doctor, is it possible that the spy we’re looking for really isn’t a spy?”

"Eh?"

"I mean, suppose he's an imbecile, too? I doubt whether an imbecile would really be a spy, if you see what I mean."

Dr. O’Connor appeared to consider the notion. After a little while he said: “It is, I suppose, possible. But the readings on the machine don’t give us the same timing as they did in Charlie’s case—or even the same sort of timing.”

"I don't quite follow you," Malone said.

Truthfully, he felt about three miles behind. But perhaps everything would clear up soon. He hoped so. On top of everything else, his feet were now hurting a lot more.

"Perhaps if I describe one of the tests we ran," Dr. O’Connor said, “things will be somewhat clearer.” He leaned back in his chair. Malone shifted his feet again and transferred his hat from his right to his left hand.

"We put one of our test subjects in the insulated room," Dr. O’Connor said, “and connected him to the detector. He was to read from a book—a book that was not too common. This was, of course, to obviate the chance that some other person nearby might be reading it, or might have read it in the past. We picked *The Blood is the Death* by Hieronymus Melanchthon, which, as you may know, is a very rare book indeed."

"Sure," Malone said. He had never heard of the book, but he was, after all, willing to take Dr. O’Connor’s word for it. The telepathy expert went on: “Our test subject read it carefully, scanning rather than skimming. Cameras recorded the movements of his eyes in order for us to tell just what he was reading at any given moment, in order to correlate what was going on in his mind with the reactions of the machine’s indicators, if you follow me."

Malone nodded helplessly.

"At the same time," Dr. O’Connor continued blithely, “we had Charlie in a nearby room, recording his babblings. Every so often, he would come out with quotations from *The Blood is the Death*, and these quotations corresponded exactly with what our test subject was reading at the time, and also corresponded with the abnormal fluctuations of the detector."

Dr. O’Connor paused. Something, Malone realized, was expected of him. He thought of several responses and chose one. “I see,” he said.

"But the important thing here," Dr. O’Connor said, “is the timing. You see, Charlie was incapable of

continued concentration. He could not keep his mind focused on another mind for very long, before he hopped to still another. The actual amount of time concentrated on any given mind at any single given period varied from a minimum of one point three seconds to a maximum of two point six. The timing samples, when plotted graphically over a period of several months, formed a skewed bell curve with a mode at two point oh seconds."

"Ah," Malone said, wondering if a skewed ball curve was the same thing as a belled skew curve, and if not, why not?

"It was, in fact," Dr. O'Connor continued relentlessly, "a sudden variation in those timings which convinced us that there was another telepath somewhere in the vicinity. We were conducting a second set of reading experiments, in precisely the same manner as the first set, and, for the first part of the experiment, our figures were substantially the same. But—" He stopped.

"Yes?" Malone said, shifting his feet and trying to take some weight off his left foot by standing on his right leg. Then he stood on his left leg. It didn't seem to do any good.

"I should explain," Dr. O'Connor said, "that we were conducting this series with a new set of test subjects: some of the scientists here at Yucca Flats. We wanted to see if the intelligence quotients of the subjects affected the time of contact which Charlie was able to maintain. Naturally, we picked the men here with the highest IQ's, the two men we have who are in the top echelon of the creative genius class." He cleared his throat. "I did not include myself, of course, since I wished to remain an impartial observer, as much as possible."

"Of course," Malone said without surprise.

"The other two geniuses," Dr. O'Connor said, "the other two geniuses both happen to be connected with the project known as Project Isle—an operation whose function I neither know, nor care to know, anything at all about."

Malone nodded. Project Isle was the non-rocket spaceship. Classified. Top Secret. Ultra Secret. And, he thought, just about anything else you could think of.

"At first," Dr. O'Connor was saying, "our detector recorded the time periods of-ah-mental invasion as being the same as before. Then, one day, anomalies began to appear. The detector showed that the minds of our subjects were being held for as long as two or three minutes. But the phrases repeated by Charlie during these periods showed that his own contact time remained the same; that is, they fell within the same skewed bell curve as before, and the mode remained constant if nothing but the phrase length were recorded."

"Hmm," Malone said, feeling that he ought to be saying something.

Dr. O'Connor didn't notice him. "At first we thought of errors in the detector machine," he went on. "That worried us not somewhat, since our understanding of the detector is definitely limited at this time. We do feel that it would be possible to replace some of the electronic components with appropriate symbolization like that already used in the purely psionic sections, but we have, as yet, been unable to determine exactly which electronic components must be replaced by what symbolic components."

Malone nodded, silently this time. He had the sudden feeling that Dr. O'Connor's flow of words had broken itself up into a vast sea of alphabet soup, and that he, Malone, was occupied in drowning in it.

"However," Dr. O'Connor said, breaking what was left of Malone's train of thought, "young Charlie died soon thereafter, and we decided to go on checking the machine. It was during this period that we found someone else reading the minds of our test subjects-sometimes for a few seconds, sometimes for several minutes."

"Aha," Malone said. Things were beginning to make sense again. Someone else. That, of course, was the spy.

"I found," Dr. O'Connor said, "on interrogating the subjects more closely, that they were, in effect, thinking on two levels. They were reading the book mechanically, noting the words and sense, but simply shuttling the material directly into their memories without actually thinking about it. The actual thinking portions of their minds were concentrating on aspects of Project Isle."

There was a little silence.

"In other words," Malone said, "someone was spying on them for information about Project Isle?"

"Precisely," Dr. O'Connor said with a frosty, teacher-to-student smile. "And whoever it was had a much higher concentration time than Charlie had ever attained. He seems to be able to retain contact as long as he can find useful information flowing in the mind being read."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "Wait a minute. If this spy is so clever, how come he didn't read your mind?"

"It is very likely that he has," O'Connor said. "What does that have to do with it?"

"Well," Malone said, "if he knows you and your group are working on telepathy and can detect what he's doing, why didn't he just hold off on the minds of those geniuses when they were being tested in your machine?"

Dr. O'Connor frowned. "I'm afraid that I can't be sure," he said, and it was clear from his tone that, if Dr. Thomas O'Connor wasn't sure, no one in the entire world was, had been, or ever would be. "I do have a theory, however," he said, brightening up a trifle.

Malone waited patiently.

"He must know our limitations," Dr. O'Connor said at last. "He must be perfectly well aware that there's not a single thing we can do about him. He must know that we can neither find nor stop him. Why should he worry? He can afford to ignore us-or even bait us. We're helpless, and he knows it."

That, Malone thought, was about the most cheerless thought he had heard in sometime.

"You mentioned that you had an insulated room," the FBI agent said after a while. "Couldn't you let your men think in there?"

Dr. O'Connor sighed. "The room is shielded against magnetic fields and electro-magnetic radiation. It is perfectly transparent to psionic phenomena, just as it is to gravitational fields."

"Oh," Malone said. He realized rapidly that his question had been a little silly to begin with, since the insulated room had been the place where all the tests had been conducted in the first place. "I don't want to take up too much of your time, Doctor," he said after a pause, "but there are a couple of other

questions."

"Go right ahead," Dr. O'Connor said. "I'm sure I'll be able to help you."

Malone thought of mentioning how little help the Doctor had been to date, but decided against it. Why antagonize a perfectly good scientist without any reason? Instead, he selected his first question, and asked it. "Have you got any idea how we might lay our hands on another telepath? Preferably one that's not an imbecile, of course."

Dr. O'Connor's expression changed from patient wisdom to irritation. "I wish we could, Mr. Malone. I wish we could. We certainly need one here to help us here with our work—and I'm sure that your work is important, too. But I'm afraid we have no ideas at all about finding another telepath. Finding little Charlie was purely fortuitous—purely, Mr. Malone, fortuitous."

"Ah," Malone said. "Sure. Of course." He thought rapidly and discovered that he couldn't come up with one more question. As a matter of fact, he'd asked a couple of questions already, and he could barely remember the answers. "Well," he said, "I guess that's about it, then, Doctor. If you come across anything else, be sure and let me know."

He leaned across the desk, extending a hand. "And thanks for your time," he added.

Dr. O'Connor stood up and shook his hand. "No trouble, I assure you," he said. "And I'll certainly give you all the information I can."

Malone turned and walked out. Surprisingly, he discovered that his feet and legs still worked. He had thought they'd turned to stone in the office long before.

* * * *

It was on the plane back to Washington that Malone got his first inkling of an idea.

The only telepath that the Westinghouse boys had been able to turn up was Charles O'Neill, the youthful imbecile.

All right, then. Suppose there were another like him. Imbeciles weren't very difficult to locate. Most of them would be in institutions, and the others would certainly be on record. It might be possible to find someone, anyway, who could be handled and used as a tool to find a telepathic spy.

And-happy thought!-maybe one of them would turn out to be a high-grade imbecile, or even a moron.

Even if they only turned up another imbecile, he thought wearily, at least Dr. O'Connor would have something to work with.

He reported back to Burris when he arrived in Washington, told him about the interview with Dr. O'Connor, and explained what had come to seem a rather feeble brainstorm.

"It doesn't seem too productive," Burris said, with a shade of disappointment in his voice, "but we'll try it."

At that, it was a better verdict than Malone had tried for. Though, of course, it meant extra work for him.

Orders went out to field agents all over the United States, and, quietly but efficiently, the FBI went to work. Agents began to probe and pry and poke their noses into the files and data sheets of every mental institution in the fifty states-as far, at any rate, as they were able.

And Kenneth J. Malone was in the lead.

There had been some talk of his staying in Washington to collate the reports as they came in, but that had sounded even worse than having to visit hospitals. "You don't need me to do a job like that," he'd told Burris. "Let's face it, Chief: if we find a telepath the agent who finds him will say so. If we don't, he'll say that, too. You could get a chimpanzee to collate reports like that."

Burris looked at him speculatively, and for one horrible second Malone could almost hear him sending out an order to find, and hire, a chimpanzee (after Security clearance, of course, for whatever organizations a chimpanzee could join). But all he said, in what was almost a mild voice, was: "All right, Malone. And don't call me Chief."

The very mildness of his tone showed how worried the man was, Malone realized, and he set out for the first hospital on his own list with grim determination written all over his face and a heartbeat that seemed to hammer at him that his country expected every man to do his duty.

"I find my duty hard to do today," he murmured under his breath. It was all right to tell himself that he had to find a telepath. But how did you go about it? Did you just knock on hospital doors and ask them if they had anybody who could read minds?

"You know," Malone told himself in a surprised tone, "that isn't such a bad idea." It would, at any rate, let him know whether the hospital had any patients who thought they could read minds. From them on, it would probably be simple to apply a test, and separate the telepathic sheep from the psychotic goats.

The image that created in his mind was so odd that Malone, in self-defense, stopped thinking altogether until he'd reached the first hospital, a small place situated in the shrinking countryside West of Washington.

It was called, he knew, the Rice Pavilion.

* * * *

The place was small, and white. It bore a faint resemblance to Monticello, but then that was true, Malone reflected, of eight out of ten public buildings of all sorts. The front door was large and opaque, and Malone went up the winding driveway, climbed a short flight of marble steps, and rapped sharply.

The door opened instantly. "Yes?" said the man inside, a tall, balding fellow wearing doctor's whites and a sad, bloodhound-like expression.

"Yes," Malone said automatically. "I mean-my name is Kenneth J. Malone."

"Mine," said the bloodhound, "is Blake. Doctor Andrew Blake." There was a brief pause. "Is there anything we can do for you?" the doctor went on.

"Well," Malone said, "I'm looking for people who can read minds."

Blake didn't seem at all surprised. He nodded quietly. "Of course," he said. "I understand perfectly."

"Good," Malone told him. "You see, I thought I'd have a little trouble finding—"

"Oh, no trouble at all, I assure you," Blake went on, just as mournfully as ever. "You've come to the right place, believe me, Mr.—ah—"

"Malone," Malone said. "Kenneth J. Frankly, I didn't think I'd hit the jackpot this early—I mean, you were the first on my list—"

The doctor seemed suddenly to realize that the two of them were standing out on the portico. "Won't you come inside?" he said, with a friendly gesture. He stepped aside and Malone walked through the doorway.

Just inside it, three men grabbed him.

Malone, surprised by this sudden reception, fought with every ounce of his FBI training. But the three men had his surprise on their side, and three against one was heavy odds for any man, trained or not.

His neck placed firmly between one upper and lower arm, his legs pinioned and his arms flailing wildly, Malone managed to shout: "What the hell is this? What's going on?"

Dr. Blake was watching the entire operation from a standpoint a few feet away. He didn't look as if his expression were ever going to change.

"It's all for your own good, Mr. Malone," he said calmly. "Please believe me."

"My God!" Malone said. He caught somebody's face with one hand and then somebody else grabbed the hand and folded it back with irresistible force. He had one arm free, and he tried to use it—but not for long. "You think I'm nuts!" he shouted, as the three men produced a strait-jacket from somewhere and began to cram him into it. "Wait!" he cried, as the canvas began to cramp him. "You're wrong! You're making a terrible mistake!"

"Of course," Dr. Blake said. "But if you'll just relax we'll soon be able to help you—"

The strait-jacket was on. Malone sagged inside it like a rather large and sweaty butterfly rewrapped in a cocoon. Dimly, he realized that he sounded like every other nut in the world. All of them would be sure to tell the doctor and the attendants that they were making a mistake. All of them would claim they were sane.

There was, of course, a slight difference. But how could Malone manage to prove it? The three men held him up.

"Now, now," Dr. Blake said. "You can walk, Mr. Malone. Suppose you just follow me to your room—"

"My room?" Malone said. "Now, you listen to me, Doctor. If you don't take this stuff off me at once I promise you the President will hear of it. And I don't know how he'll take interference in a vital mission—"

"The President?" Blake asked quietly. "What President, Mr. Malone?"

"The President of the United States, damn it!" Malone shouted.

"Hmm," Blake said.

That was no good, either, Malone realized. Every nut would have some sort of direct pipeline to the President, or God, or somebody high up. Nuts were like that.

But he was an FBI Agent. A special agent on a vital mission.

He said so.

"Now, now, Mr. Malone," Blake told him. "Let's get to your room, shall we, and then we can talk things over."

"I can prove it!" Malone told him. The three men picked him up. "My identification is in my pocket—"

"Really?" Blake said.

They started moving down the long front hall.

"All you have to do is take this thing off so I can get at my pockets—"

Malone began.

But even he could see that this new plan wasn't going to work, either.

"Take it off?" Blake said. "Oh, certainly, Mr. Malone. Certainly. Just as soon as we have you comfortably settled."

It was ridiculous, Malone told himself as the men carried him away. It couldn't happen: an FBI agent mistaken for a nut, wrapped in a strait-jacket and carried to a padded cell.

Unfortunately, ridiculous or not, it was happening.

And there was absolutely nothing to do about it.

Malone thought with real longing of his nice, safe desk in Washington. Suddenly he discovered in himself a great desire to sit around and collate reports. But no—he had to be a hero. He had to go and get himself involved.

This, he thought, will teach me a great lesson. The next time I get offered a job a chimpanzee can do, I'll start eating bananas.

It was at this point in his reflections that he reached a small door. Dr. Blake opened it and the three men carried Malone inside. He was dumped carefully on the floor. Then the door clanged shut.

Alone, Malone told himself bitterly, at last.

* * * *

After a minute or so had gone by he began to think about getting out. He could, it occurred to him, scream for help. But that would only bring more attendants, and very possibly Dr. Blake again, and somehow Malone felt that further conversation with Dr. Blake was not likely to lead to any very rational

end.

Sooner or later, he knew, they would have to let him loose.

After all, he was an FBI agent, wasn't he?

Alone, in a single cheerless cell, caught up in the toils of a strait-jacket, he began to doubt the fact. Maybe Blake was right; maybe they were all right. Maybe he, Kenneth J. Malone, was totally mad.

He told himself firmly that the idea was ridiculous.

But, then, what wasn't?

The minutes ticked slowly by. After a while the three guards came back, opening the door and filing into the room carefully. Malone, feeling more than ever like something in a cocoon, watched them with interest. They shut the door carefully behind them and stood before him.

"Now, then," one of them said. "We're going to take the jacket off, if you promise to be a good boy."

"Sure," Malone said. "And when you take my clothing, look in the pockets."

"The pockets?"

"To find my FBI identification," Malone said wearily. He only half-believed the idea himself, but half a belief, he told himself confusedly, was better than no mind at all. The attendants nodded solemnly.

"Sure we will," one of them said, "if you're a good boy and don't act up rough on us now. Okay?"

Malone nodded. Carefully, two of the attendants began to unbuckle him while the third stood by for reinforcements. Malone made no fuss.

In five minutes he was naked as-he told himself-a jay-bird. What was so completely nude about those particular birds escaped him for the moment, but it wasn't important. The three men were all holding various parts of the strait-jacket or of his clothing.

They were still watching him warily.

"Look in the pockets," Malone said.

"Sure," one said. The man holding the jacket reached into it and dropped it as if it were hot.

"Hey," he announced in a sick voice, "the guy's carrying a gun."

"A gun?" the second one asked.

The first one gestured toward the crumpled jacket on the floor. "Look for yourself," he said. "A real honest-to-God gun. I could feel it."

Malone leaned against one wall, looking as nonchalant as it was possible for him to look in the nude. The room being cool, he felt he was succeeding reasonably well. "Try the other pocket," he suggested.

The first attendant gave him a long stare. "What've you got in there, buddy?" he asked. "A howitzer?"

"Jesus," the second attendant said, without moving toward the jacket. "An armed nut. What a world."

"Try the pocket," Malone said.

A second went by. The first attendant bent down slowly, picked up the jacket and slipped his hand into the other inside pocket. He came out with a wallet and flipped it open.

The others looked over his shoulder.

There was a long minute of silence.

"Jesus," the second attendant said, as if it were the only word left in the language.

Malone sighed. "There, now," he said. "You see? Suppose you give me back my clothes and let's get down to brass tacks."

* * * *

It wasn't that simple, of course.

First the attendants had to go and get Dr. Blake, and everybody had to explain everything three or four times, until Malone was just as sick of being an FBI agent as he had ever been of being a padded-cell case. But, at last, he stood before Dr. Blake in the corridor outside, once again fully dressed. Slightly ruffled, of course, but fully dressed. It did, Malone thought, make a difference, and if clothes didn't exactly make the man they were a long way from a hindrance.

"Mr. Malone," Blake was saying, "I want to offer my apologies—"

"Perfectly okay," Malone said agreeably. "But I would like to know something. Do you treat all your visitors like this? I mean—the milkman, the mailman, relatives of patients—"

"It's not often we get someone here who claims to be from the FBI," Blake said. "And naturally our first thought was that—well, sometimes a patient will come in, just give himself up, so to speak. His unconscious mind knows that he needs help, and so he comes to us. We try to help him."

Privately, Malone told himself that it was a hell of a way to run a hospital. Aloud, all he said was: "Sure. I understand perfectly, Doctor."

Dr. Blake nodded. "And now," he said, "what did you want to talk to me about?"

"Just a minute." Malone closed his eyes. He'd told Burris he would check in, and he was late. "Have you got a phone I can use?"

"Certainly," Blake said, and led him down the corridor to a small office. Malone went to the phone at one end and began dialing even before Blake shut the door and left him alone.

The screen lit up instantly with Burris' face. "Malone, where the hell have you been?" the head of the FBI roared. "I've been trying to get in touch with you—"

"Sorry," Malone said. "I was tied up."

"What do you mean, tied up?" Burris said. "Do you know I was just about to send out a general search order? I thought they'd got you."

"They?" Malone said, interested. "Who?"

"How the hell would I know who?" Burris roared.

"Well, nobody got me," Malone said. "I've been investigating Rice Pavilion, just like I'm supposed to do."

"Then why didn't you check in?" Burris asked.

Malone sighed. "Because I got myself locked up," he said, and explained. Burris listened with patience.

When Malone was finished, Burris said: "You're coming right on back."

"But—"

"No arguments," Burris told him. "If you're going to let things like that happen to you you're better off here. Besides, there are plenty of men doing the actual searching. There's no need—"

Secretly, Malone felt relief. "Well, all right," he said. "But let me check out this place first, will you?"

"Go ahead," Burris said. "But get right on back here."

Malone agreed and snapped the phone off. Then he turned back to find Dr. Blake.

* * * *

Examining hospital records was not an easy job. The inalienable right of a physician to refuse to disclose confidences respecting a patient applied even to idiots, imbecile and morons. But Malone had a slight edge, due to Dr. Blake's embarrassment, and he put it mercilessly to work.

For all the good it did him he might as well have stayed in his cell. There wasn't even the slightest suspicion in any record that any of the Rice Pavilion patients were telepathic.

"Are you sure that's what you're looking for?" Blake asked him, some hours later.

"I'm sure," Malone said. "When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

"Oh," Blake said. After a second he added: "What does that mean?"

Malone shrugged. "It's an old saying," he told the doctor. "It doesn't have to mean anything. It just sounds good."

"Oh," Blake said again.

After a while, Malone said farewell to good old Rice Pavilion, and headed back to Washington. There, he told himself, everything would be peaceful.

And so it was. Peaceful and dispiriting.

Every agent had problems getting reports from hospitals—and not even the FBI could open the private files of a licensed and registered psychiatrist.

But the field agents did the best they could and, considering the circumstances, their best was pretty good.

Malone, meanwhile, put in two weeks sitting glumly at his Washington desk and checking reports as they arrived. They were uniformly depressing. The United States of America contained more sub-normal minds than Malone cared to think about. There seemed to be enough of them to explain the results of any election you were unhappy over. Unfortunately, subnormal was all you could call them. Like the patients at Rice Pavilion, not one of them appeared to possess any abnormal psionic abilities whatever.

There were a couple who were reputed to be poltergeists—but in neither case was there a single shred of evidence to substantiate the claim.

At the end of the second week, Malone was just about convinced that his idea had been a total washout. He himself had been locked up in a padded cell, and other agents had spent a full fortnight digging up imbeciles, while the spy at Yucca Flats had been going right on his merry way, scooping information out of the men at Project Isle as though he were scooping beans out of a pot. And, very likely, laughing himself silly at the feeble efforts of the FBI.

Who could he be?

Anyone, Malone told himself unhappily. Anyone at all. He could be the janitor who swept out the buildings, one of the guards at the gate, one of the minor technicians on another project, or even some old prospector wandering around the desert with a scintillation counter.

Is there any limit to telepathic range?

The spy could even be sitting quietly in an armchair in the Kremlin, probing through several thousand miles of solid earth to peep into the brains of the men on Project Isle.

That was, to say the very least, a depressing idea.

Malone found he had to assume that the spy was in the United States—that, in other words, there was some effective range to telepathic communication. Otherwise, there was no point in bothering to continue the search.

Therefore, he found one other thing to do. He alerted every agent to the job of discovering how the spy was getting his information out of the country.

He doubted that it would turn up anything, but it was a chance. And Malone hoped desperately for it, because he was beginning to be sure that the field agents were never going to turn up any telepathic imbeciles.

He was right. They never did.

The telephone rang.

Malone rolled over on the couch and muttered four words under his breath. Was it absolutely necessary for someone to call him at seven in the morning?

He grabbed at the receiver with one hand, and picked up his cigar from the ashtray with the other. It was bad enough to be awakened from a sound sleep-but when a man hadn't been sleeping at all, it was even worse.

He'd been sitting up since before five that morning, worrying about the telepathic spy, and at the moment he wanted sleep more than he wanted phone calls.

"Gur?" he said, sleepily and angrily, thankful that he'd never had a visiphone installed in his apartment. A taste for blondes was apparently hereditary. At any rate, Malone felt he had inherited it from his father, and he didn't want any visible strangers calling him at odd hours to interfere with his process of collection and research.

He blinked at the audio circuit, and a feminine voice said: "Mr. Kenneth J. Malone?"

"Who's this?" Malone said peevishly, beginning to discover himself capable of semirational English speech.

"Long distance from San Francisco," the voice said.

"It certainly is," Malone said. "Who's calling?"

"San Francisco is calling," the voice said primly.

Malone repressed a desire to tell the voice that he didn't want to talk to St. Francis, not even in Spanish, and said instead: "Who in San Francisco?"

There was a momentary hiatus, and then the voice said: "Mr. Thomas Boyd is calling, sir. He says this is a scramble call."

Malone took a drag from his cigar and closed his eyes. Obviously the call was a scramble. If it had been clear, the man would have dialed direct, instead of going through what Malone now recognized as an operator.

"Mr. Boyd says he is the Agent-in-Charge of the San Francisco office of the FBI," the voice offered.

"And quite right, too," Malone told her. "All right. Put him on."

"One moment," There was a pause, a click, another pause and then another click. At last the operator said: "Your party is ready, sir."

Then there was still another pause.

Malone stared at the audio receiver. He began to whistle *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*.

...And the sound of Irish laughter.... "Hello? Malone?"

"I'm here, Tom," Malone said guiltily. "This is me. What's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" Boyd said. "There isn't any trouble. Well, not really. Or maybe it is. I don't know."

Malone scowled at the audio receiver, and for the first time wished he had gone ahead and had a video circuit put in, so that Boyd could see the horrendous expression on his face.

"Look," he said. "It's seven here and that's too early. Out there, it's four, and that's practically ridiculous. What's so important?"

He knew perfectly well that Boyd wasn't calling him just for the fun of it. The man was a damned good agent. But why a call at this hour?

Malone muttered under his breath. Then, self-consciously, he squashed out his cigar and lit a cigarette while Boyd was saying: "Ken, I think we may have found what you've been looking for."

It wasn't safe to say too much, even over a scrambled circuit. But Malone got the message without difficulty.

"Yeah?" he said, sitting up on the edge of the couch. "You sure?"

"Well," Boyd said, "no. Not absolutely sure. Not absolutely. But it is worth your taking a personal look, I think."

"Ah," Malone said cautiously. "An imbecile?"

"No," Boyd said flatly. "Not an imbecile. Definitely not an imbecile. As a matter of fact, a hell of a fat long way from an imbecile."

Malone glanced at his watch and skimmed over the airline timetables in his mind. "I'll be there nine o'clock, your time," he said. "Have a car waiting for me at the field."

* * * *

As usual, Malone managed to sleep better on the plane than he'd been able to do at home. He slept so well, in fact, that he was still groggy when he stepped into the waiting car.

"Good to see you, Ken," Boyd said briskly, as he shook Malone's hand.

"You, too, Tom," Malone said sleepily. "Now what's all this about?" He looked around apprehensively. "No bugs in this car, I hope?" he said.

Boyd gunned the motor and headed toward the San Francisco Freeway. "Better not be," he said, "or I'll fire me a technician or two."

"Well, then," Malone said, relaxing against the upholstery, "where is this guy, and who is he? And how did you find him?"

Boyd looked uncomfortable. It was, somehow, both an awe-inspiring and a slightly risible sight. Six feet one and one-half inches tall in his flat feet, Boyd posted around over two hundred and twenty pounds of bone, flesh and muscle. He swung a pot-belly of startling proportions under the silk shirting he wore, and

his face, with its wide nose, small eyes and high forehead, was half highly mature, half startlingly childlike. In an apparent effort to erase those childlike qualities, Boyd sported a fringe of beard and a moustache which reminded Malone of somebody he couldn't quite place.

But whoever the somebody was, his hair hadn't been black, as Boyd's was...

He decided it didn't make any difference. Anyhow, Boyd was speaking.

"In the first place," he said, "it isn't a guy. In the second, I'm not exactly sure who it is. And in the third, Ken, I didn't find it."

There was a little silence.

"Don't tell me," Malone said. "It's a telepathic horse, isn't it? Tom, I just don't think I could stand a telepathic horse...."

"No," Boyd said hastily. "No. Not at all. No horse. It's a dame. I mean a lady." He looked away from the road and flashed a glance at Malone. His eyes seemed to be pleading for something-understanding, possibly, Malone thought. "Frankly," Boyd said, "I'd rather not tell you anything about her just yet. I'd rather you met her first. Then you could make up your own mind. All right?"

"All right," Malone said wearily. "Do it your own way. How far do we have to go?"

"Just about an hour's drive," Boyd said. "That's all."

Malone slumped back in the seat and pushed his hat over his eyes. "Fine," he said. "Suppose you wake me up when we get there."

But, groggy as he was, he couldn't sleep. He wished he'd had some coffee on the plane. Maybe it would have made him feel better.

Then again, coffee was only coffee. True, he had never acquired his father's taste for gin (and imagined, therefore, that it wasn't hereditary, like a taste for blondes), but there was always bourbon.

He thought about bourbon for a few minutes. It was a nice thought. It warmed him and made him feel a lot better. After a while, he even felt awake enough to do some talking.

He pushed his hat back and struggled to a reasonable sitting position. "I don't suppose you have a drink hidden away in the car somewhere?" he said tentatively. "Or would the technicians have found that, too?"

"Better not have," Boyd said in the same tone as before, "or I'll fire a couple of technicians." He grinned without turning. "It's in the door compartment, next to the forty-five cartridges and the Tommy-gun."

Malone opened the compartment in the thick door of the car and extracted a bottle. It was Christian Brothers Brandy instead of the bourbon he had been thinking about, but he discovered that he didn't mind at all. It went down as smoothly as milk.

Boyd glanced at it momentarily as Malone screwed the top back on.

"No," Malone said in answer to the unspoken question. "You're driving." Then he settled back again and tipped his hat forward.

He didn't sleep a wink. He was perfectly sure of that. But it wasn't over two seconds later that Boyd said: "We're here, Ken. Wake up."

"Whadyamean, wakeup," Malone said. "I wasn't asleep." He thumbed his hat back and sat up rapidly. "Where's 'here?'"

"Bayview Neuropsychiatric Hospital," Boyd said. "This is where Dr. Harman works, you know."

"No," Malone said. "As a matter of fact, I don't know. You didn't tell me-remember? And who is Dr. Harman, anyhow?"

The car was moving up a long, curving driveway toward a large, lawn—surrounded building. Boyd spoke without looking away from the road.

"Well," he said, "this Dr. Wilson Harman is the man who phoned us yesterday. One of my field agents was out here asking around about imbeciles and so on. Found nothing, by the way. And then this Dr. Harman called, later. Said he had someone here I might be interested in. So I came on out myself for a look, yesterday afternoon—after all, we had instructions to follow up every possible lead."

"I know," Malone said. "I wrote them."

"Oh," Boyd said. "Sure. Well, anyhow, I talked to this dame. Lady."

"And?"

"And I talked to her," Boyd said. "I'm not entirely sure of anything myself. But—well, hell. You take a look at her."

He pulled the car up to a parking space, slid nonchalantly into a slot marked Reserved-Executive Director Sutton, and slid out from under the wheel while Malone got out the other side.

They marched up the broad steps, through the doorway and into the glass-fronted office of the receptionist.

Boyd showed her his little golden badge, and got an appropriate gasp. "FBI," he said. "Dr. Harman's expecting us."

The wait wasn't over fifteen seconds. Boyd and Malone marched down the hall and around a couple of corners, and came to the doctor's office. The door was opaqued glass with nothing but a room number stenciled on it. Without ceremony, Boyd pushed the door open. Malone followed him inside.

The office was small but sunny. Dr. Wilson Harman sat behind a blond-wood desk, a little man with crew-cut blond hair and rimless eyeglasses, who looked about thirty-two and couldn't possibly, Malone thought, have been anywhere near that young. On a second look, Malone noticed a better age indication in the eyes and forehead, and revised his first guess upward between ten and fifteen years.

"Come in, gentlemen," Dr. Harman called. His voice was that rarity, a really loud high tenor.

"Dr. Harman," Boyd said, "this is my superior, Mr. Malone. We'd like to have a talk with Miss Thompson, if we might."

"I anticipated that, sir," Dr. Harman said. "Miss Thompson is in the next room. Have you explained to Mr. Malone that—"

"I haven't explained a thing," Boyd said quickly, and added in what was obviously intended to be a casual tone: "Mr. Malone wants to get a picture of Miss Thompson directly-without any preconceptions."

"I see," Dr. Harman said. "Very well, gentlemen. Through this door."

He opened the door in the right-hand wall of the room, and Malone took one look. It was a long, long look. Standing framed in the doorway, dressed in the starched white of a nurse's uniform, was the most beautiful blonde he had ever seen.

She had curves. She definitely had curves. As a matter of fact, Malone didn't really think he had ever seen curves before. These were something new and different and truly three-dimensional. But it wasn't the curves, or the long straight lines of her legs, or the quiet beauty of her face, that made her so special. After all, Malone had seen legs and bodies and faces before.

At least, he thought he had. Offhand, he couldn't remember where. Looking at the girl, Malone was ready to write brand-new definitions for every anatomical term. Even a term like "hands." Malone had never seen anything especially arousing in the human hand before-anyway, not when the hand was just lying around, so to speak, attached to its wrist but not doing anything in particular. But these hands, long, slender and tapering, white and cool-looking....

And yet, it wasn't just the sheer physical beauty of the girl. She had something else, something more and something different. (Something borrowed, Malone thought in a semidelirious haze, and something blue.) Personality? Character? Soul?

Whatever it was, Malone decided, this girl had it. She had enough of it to supply the entire human race, and any others that might exist in the Universe. Malone smiled at the girl and she smiled back.

After seeing the smile, Malone wasn't sure he could still walk evenly. Somehow, though, he managed to go over to her and extend his hand. The notion that a telepath would turn out to be this mind-searing Epitome had never crossed his mind, but now, somehow, it seemed perfectly fitting and proper.

"Good morning, Miss Thompson," he said in what he hoped was a winning voice.

The smile disappeared. It was like the sun going out.

The vision appeared to be troubled. Malone was about to volunteer his help-if necessary, for the next seventy years-when she spoke.

"I'm not Miss Thompson," she said.

"This is one of our nurses," Dr. Harman put in. "Miss Wilson, Mr. Malone. And Mr. Boyd. Miss Thompson, gentlemen, is over there."

Malone turned.

There, in a corner of the room, an old lady sat. She was a small old lady, with apple-red cheeks and twinkling eyes. She held some knitting in her hands, and she smiled up at the FBI men as if they were her

grandsons come for tea and cookies, of a Sunday afternoon.

She had snow-white hair that shone like a crown around her old head in the lights of the room. Malone blinked at her. She didn't disappear.

"You're Miss Thompson?" he said.

She smiled sweetly. "Oh, my, no," she said.

There was a long silence. Malone looked at her. Then he looked at the unbelievably beautiful Miss Wilson. Then he looked at Dr. Harman. And, at last, he looked at Boyd.

"All right," he said. "I get it. You're Miss Thompson."

"Now, wait a minute, Malone," Boyd began.

"Wait a minute?" Malone said. "There are four people here, not counting me. I know I'm not Miss Thompson. I never was, not even as a child. And Dr. Harman isn't, and Miss Wilson isn't, and Whistler's Great-Grandmother isn't, either. So you must be. Unless she isn't here. Or unless she's invisible. Or unless I'm crazy."

"It isn't you, Malone," Boyd said. "What isn't me?"

"That's crazy," Boyd said.

"Okay," Malone said. "I'm not crazy. Then will somebody please tell me—"

The little old lady cleared her throat. A silence fell. When it was complete she spoke, and her voice was as sweet and kindly as anything Malone had ever heard.

"You may call me Miss Thompson," she said. "For the present, at any rate. They all do here. It's a pseudonym I have to use."

"A pseudonym?" Malone said.

"You see, Mr. Malone," Miss Wilson began.

Malone stopped her. "Don't talk," he said. "I have to concentrate and if you talk I can barely think." He took off his hat suddenly, and began twisting the brim in his hands. "You understand, don't you?"

The trace of a smile appeared on her face. "I think I do," she said.

"Now," Malone said. "You're Miss Thompson, but not really, because you have to use a pseudonym." He blinked at the little old lady. "Why?"

"Well," she said, "otherwise people would find out about my little secret."

"Your little secret," Malone said.

"That's right," the little old lady said. "I'm immortal, you see."

Malone said: "Oh." Then he kept quiet for a long time. It didn't seem to him that anyone in the room was breathing.

He said: "Oh," again, but it didn't sound any better than it had the first time. He tried another phrase. "You're immortal," he said.

"That's right," the little old lady agreed sweetly.

There was only one other question to ask, and Malone set his teeth grimly and asked it. It came out just a trifle indistinct, but the little old lady nodded.

"My real name?" she said. "Elizabeth. Elizabeth Tudor, of course. I used to be Queen."

"Of England," Malone said faintly. "Malone, look—" Boyd began.

"Let me get it all at once," Malone told him. "I'm strong. I can take it." He twisted his hat again and turned back to the little old lady.

"You're immortal, and you're not really Miss Thompson, but Queen Elizabeth I?" he said slowly.

"That's right," she said. "How clever of you. Of course, after little Jimmy-cousin Mary's boy, I mean-said I was dead and claimed the Throne, I decided to change my name and all. And that's what I did. But I am Elizabeth Regina." She smiled, and her eyes twinkled merrily. Malone stared at her for a long minute.

Burris, he thought, is going to love this.

"Oh, I'm so glad," the little old lady said. "Do you really think he will? Because I'm sure I'll like your Mr. Burris, too. All of you FBI men are so charming. Just like poor, poor Essex."

Well, Malone told himself, that was that. He'd found himself a telepath.

And she wasn't an imbecile.

Oh, no. That would have been simple.

Instead, she was battier than a cathedral spire.

* * * *

The long silence was broken by the voice of Miss Wilson.

"Mr. Malone," she said. "You've been thinking." She stopped. "I mean, you've been so quiet."

"I like being quiet," Malone said patiently. "Besides—" He stopped and turned to the little old lady. Can you really read my mind? he thought deliberately. After a second he added: ... your Majesty?

"How sweet of you, Mr. Malone," she said. "Nobody's called me that for centuries. But of course I can. Although it's not reading, really. After all, that would be like asking if I can read your voice. Of course I can, Mr. Malone."

"That does it," Malone said. "I'm not a hard man to convince. And when I see the truth, I'm the first one

to admit it, even if it makes me look like a nut.” He turned back to the little old lady. “Begging your pardon,” he said.

"Oh, my," the little old lady said. "I really don't mind at all. Sticks and stones, you know, can break my bones. But being called nuts, Mr. Malone, can never hurt me. After all, it's been so many years—so many hundreds of years—"

"Sure," Malone said easily.

Boyd broke in. "Listen, Malone," he said. "Do you mind telling me what the hell is going on?"

"It's very simple," Malone said. "Miss Thompson here—pardon me; I mean Queen Elizabeth I—really is a telepath. That's all. I think I want to lie down somewhere until it goes away."

"Until what goes away?" Miss Wilson said.

Malone stared at her almost without seeing her, if not quite. "Everything," he said. He closed his eyes.

"My goodness," the little old lady said after a second. "Everything's so confused. Poor Mr. Malone is terribly shaken up by everything." She stood up, still holding her knitting, and went across the room. Before the astonished eyes of the doctor and nurse, and Tom Boyd, she patted the FBI agent on the shoulder. "There, there, Mr. Malone," she said. "It will all be perfectly all right. You'll see." Then she returned to her seat.

Malone opened his eyes. "My God," he said. He closed them again but they flew open as if of their own accord. He turned to Dr. Harman. "You called up Boyd here," he said, "and told him that—er—Miss Thompson was a telepath. How'd you know?"

"It's all right," the little old lady put in from her chair. "I don't mind your calling me Miss Thompson, not right now, anyhow."

"Thanks," Malone said faintly.

Dr. Harman was blinking in a kind of befuddled astonishment. "You mean she really is a—" He stopped and brought his tenor voice to a squeaking halt, regained his professional poise, and began again. "I'd rather not discuss the patient in her presence, Mr. Malone," he said. "If you'll just come into my office—" "Oh, bosh, Dr. Harman," the little old lady said primly. "I do wish you'd give your own Queen credit for some ability. Goodness knows you think you're smart enough."

"Now, now, Miss Thompson," he said in what was obviously his best Grade A Choice Government Inspected couchside manner. "Don't—"

"-upset yourself," she finished for him. "Now, really, Doctor. I know what you're going to tell them."

"But Miss Thompson, I—"

"You didn't honestly think I was a telepath," the little old lady said. "Heavens, we know that. And you're going to tell them how I used to say I could read minds—oh, years and years ago. And because of that you thought it might be worthwhile to tell the FBI about me—which wasn't very kind of you, Doctor, before you know anything about why they wanted somebody like me."

"Now, now, Miss Thompson," Miss Wilson said, walking across the room to put an arm around the little old lady's shoulder. Malone wished for one brief second that he were the little old lady. Maybe if he were a patient in the hospital he would get the same treatment.

He wondered if he could possibly work such a deal.

Then he wondered if it would be worthwhile, being nuts. But of course it would. He was nuts anyhow, wasn't he?

Sure, he told himself. They were all nuts.

"Nobody's going to hurt you," Miss Wilson said. She was talking to the old lady. "You'll be perfectly all right and you don't have to worry about a thing."

"Oh, yes, dear, I know that," the little old lady said. "You only want to help me, dear. You're so kind. And these FBI men really don't mean any harm. But Doctor Harman didn't know that. He just thinks I'm crazy and that's all."

"Please, Miss Thompson—" Dr. Harman began.

"Just crazy, that's all," the little old lady said. She turned away for a second and nobody said anything.

Then she turned back. "Do you all know what he's thinking now?" she said. Dr. Harman turned a dull purple, but she ignored him. "He's wondering why I didn't take the trouble to prove all this to you years ago. And besides that, he's thinking about—"

"Miss Thompson," Dr. Harman said. His bedside manner had cracked through and his voice was harsh and strained. "Please."

"Oh, all right," she said, a little petulantly. "If you want to keep all that private."

Malone broke in suddenly, fascinated. "Why didn't you prove you were telepathic before now?" he said.

The little old lady smiled at him. "Why, because you wouldn't have believed me," she said. She dropped her knitting neatly in her lap and folded her hands over it. "None of you wanted to believe me," she said, and sniffed. Miss Wilson moved nervously and she looked up. "And don't tell me it's going to be all right. I know it's going to be all right. I'm going to make sure of that."

Malone felt a sudden chill. But it was obvious, he told himself, that the little old lady didn't mean what she was saying. She smiled at him again, and her smile was as sweet and guileless as the smile on the face of his very own sainted grandmother.

Not that Malone remembered his grandmother; she had died before he'd been born. But if he'd had a grandmother, and if he'd remembered her, he was sure she would have had the same sweet smile.

So she couldn't have meant what she'd said. Would Malone's own grandmother make things difficult for him? The very idea was ridiculous.

Dr. Harman opened his mouth, apparently changed his mind, and shut it again. The little old lady turned to him.

"Were you going to ask why I bothered to prove anything to Mr. Malone?" she said. "Of course you were, and I shall tell you. It's because Mr. Malone wanted to believe me. He wants me. He needs me. I'm a telepath, and that's enough for Mr. Malone. Isn't it?"

"Gur," Malone said, taken by surprise. After a second he added: "I guess so."

"You see, Doctor?" the little old lady said.

"But you—" Dr. Harman began.

"I read minds," the little old lady said. "That's right, Doctor. That's what makes me a telepath."

Malone's brain was whirling rapidly, like a distant galaxy. Telepath was a nice word, he thought. How do you telepath from a road?

Simple.

The road is paved.

Malone thought that was pretty funny, but he didn't laugh. He thought he would never laugh again. He wanted to cry, a little, but he didn't think he'd be able to manage that either.

He twisted his hat, but it didn't make him feel any better. Gradually, he became aware that the little old lady was talking to Dr. Harman again.

"But," she said, "since it will make you feel so much better, Doctor, we give you our Royal permission to retire, and to speak to Mr. Malone alone."

"Malone alone," Dr. Harman muttered. "Hmm. My. Well." He turned and seemed to be surprised that Malone was actually standing near him. "Yes," he said. "Well. Mr. Alone-Mr. Malone-please, whoever you are, just come into my office, please?"

Malone looked at the little old lady. One of her eyes closed and opened. It was an unmistakable wink.

Malone grinned at her in what he hoped was a cheerful manner. "All right," he said to the psychiatrist, "let's go." He turned with the barest trace of regret, and Boyd followed him.

Leaving the little old lady and, unfortunately, the startling Miss Wilson, behind, the procession filed back into Dr. Harman's office.

The doctor closed the door, and leaned against it for a second. He looked as though someone had suddenly revealed to him that the world was square. But when he spoke his voice was almost even.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said, and indicated chairs. "I really-well, I don't know what to say. All this time, all these years, she's been reading my mind! My mind. She's been reading ... looking right into my mind, or whatever it is."

"Whatever what is?" Malone asked, sincerely interested. He had dropped gratefully into a chair near Boyd's, across the desk from Dr. Harman.

"Whatever my mind is," Dr. Harmon said. "Reading it. Oh, my."

"Dr. Harman," Malone began, but the psychiatrist gave him a bright blank stare.

"Don't you understand?" he said. "She's a telepath."

"We—"

The phone on Dr. Harman's desk chimed gently. He glanced at it and said: "Excuse me. The phone." He picked up the receiver and said: "Hello?"

There was no image on the screen.

But the voice was image enough. "This is Andrew J. Burris," it said. "Is Kenneth J. Malone there?"

"Mr. Malone?" the psychiatrist said. "I mean, Mr. Burris? Mr. Malone is here. Yes. Oh, my. Do you want to talk to him?"

"No, you idiot," the voice said. "I just want to know if he's all tucked in."

"Tucked in?" Dr. Harman gave the phone a sudden smile. "A joke," he said. "It is a joke, isn't it? The way things have been happening, you never know whether—"

"A joke," Burris' voice said. "That's right. Yes. Am I talking to one of the patients?"

Dr. Harman gulped, got mad, and thought better of it. At last he said, very gently; "I'm not at all sure," and handed the phone to Malone.

The FBI agent said: "Hello, Chief. Things are a little confused."

Burris' face appeared on the screen. "Confused, sure," he said. "I feel confused already." He took a breath. "I called the San Francisco office, and they told me you and Boyd were out there. What's going on?"

Malone said cautiously: "We've found a telepath."

Burris' eyes widened slightly. "Another one?"

"What are you talking about, another one?" Malone said. "We have one. Does anybody else have any more?"

"Well," Burris said, "we just got a report on another one-maybe. Besides yours, I mean."

"I hope the one you've got is in better shape than the one I've got," Malone said. He took a deep breath, and then spat it all out at once: "The one we've found is a little old lady. She thinks she's Queen Elizabeth I. She's a telepath, sure, but she's nuts."

"Queen Elizabeth?" Burris said. "Of England?"

"That's right," Malone said. He held his breath.

"Damn it," Burris exploded, "they've already got one!"

Malone sighed. "This is another one," he said. "Or, rather, the original one. She also claims she's immortal."

"Lives forever?" Burriss said. "You mean like that?"

"Immortal," Malone said. "Right."

Burriss nodded. Then he looked worried. "Tell me, Malone," he said. "She isn't, is she?"

"Isn't immortal, you mean?" Malone said. Burriss nodded. Malone said confidently: "Of course not."

There was a little pause. Malone thought things over.

Hell, maybe she was immortal. Stranger things had happened, hadn't they?

He looked over at Dr. Harman. "How about that?" he said. "Could she be immortal?"

The psychiatrist shook his head decisively. "She's been here for over forty years, Mr. Malone, ever since her late teens. Her records show all that, and her birth certificate is in perfect order. Not a chance."

Malone sighed and turned back to the phone. "Of course she isn't immortal, Chief," he said. "She couldn't be. Nobody is. Just a nut."

"I was afraid of that," Burriss said. "Afraid?" Malone said.

Burriss nodded. "We've got another one, or anyhow we think we have," he said. "If he checks out, that is. Right here in Washington."

"Not at-Rice Pavilion?" Malone asked.

"No," Burriss said absently. "St. Elizabeths."

Malone sighed. "Another nut?"

"Strait-jacket case," Burriss said. "Delusions of persecution, they tell me, and paranoia, and a whole lot of other things that sound nasty as hell. I can't pronounce any of them, and that's always a bad sign."

"Can he talk?" Malone said.

"Who knows?" Burriss told him, and shrugged. "I'm sending him on out to Yucca Flats anyhow, under guard. You might find a use for him."

"Oh, sure," Malone said. "We can use him as a horrible example. Suppose he can't talk, or do anything? Suppose he turns violent? Suppose—"

"We can't afford to overlook a thing," Burriss said, looking stern.

Once again, Malone sighed deeply. "I know," he said. "But all the same—"

"Don't worry about a thing, Malone," Burriss said with a palpably false air of confidence. "Everything is

going to be perfectly all right.” He looked like a man trying very hard to sell the Brooklyn Bridge to a born New Yorker. “You get this Queen Elizabeth of yours out of there and take her to Yucca Flats, too,” he added.

Malone considered the possibilities that were opening up. Maybe, after all, they were going to find more telepaths. And maybe all the telepaths would be nuts. When he thought about it, that didn't seem at all unlikely. He imagined himself with a talent nobody would believe he had.

A thing like that, he told himself glumly, could drive you buggy in short order-and then where were you?

In a loony bin, that's where you were.

Or, possibly, in Yucca Flats. Malone pictured the scene: there they would be, just one big happy family. Kenneth J. Malone, and a convention of bats straight out of the nation's foremost loony bins.

Fun!

Malone began to wonder why he had gone into FBI work in the first place.

"Listen, Chief," he said. "I—"

"Sure, I understand," Burris said quickly. "She's batty. And this new one is batty, too. But what else can we do? Malone, don't do anything you'll regret."

"Regret?" Malone said. "Like what?"

"I mean, don't resign."

"Chief, how did you know-you're not telepathic too, are you?"

"Of course not," Burris said. "But that's what I'd do in your place."

"Well—"

"Remember, Malone," Burris said. His face took on a stern, stuffed expression. "Do not ask what your country can do for you," he quoted the youngest living ex-President. "Ask rather what you can do for your country."

"Sure," Malone said sadly.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" Burris asked.

"What if it is?" Malone said. "It's still terrible. Everything is terrible. Look at the situation."

"I am looking," Burris said. "And it's another New Frontier. Just like it was when President Kennedy first said those words."

"A New Frontier inhabited entirely by maniacs," Malone said. "Perfectly wonderful. What a way to run a world."

"That," Burris said, "is the way the ball bounces. Or whatever you're supposed to say. Malone, don't

think you haven't got my sympathy. You have. I know how hard the job is you're doing."

"You couldn't," Malone told him bitterly.

"Well, anyhow," Burris went on, "don't resign. Stay on the job. Don't give it up, Malone. Don't desert the ship. I want you to promise me you won't do it."

"Look, chief," Malone said. "These nuts—"

"Malone, you've done a wonderful job so far," Burris said. "You'll get a raise and a better job when all this is over. Who else would have thought of looking in the twitch-bins for telepaths? But you did, Malone, and I'm proud of you, and you're stuck with it. We've got to use them now. We have to find that spy!" He took a breath. "On to Yucca Flats!" he said. Malone gave up. "Yes, sir," he said. "Anything else?"

"Not right now," Burris said. "If there is, I'll let you know."

Malone hung up unhappily as the image vanished. He looked across at Dr. Harman. "Well," he said, "that's that. What do I have to do to get a release for Miss Thompson?"

Harman stared at him. "But, Mr. Malone," he said, "that just isn't possible. Really. Miss Thompson is a ward of the state, and we couldn't possibly allow her release without a court order."

Malone thought that over. "Okay," he said at last. "I can see that." He turned to Boyd. "Here's a job for you, Tom," he said. "Get one of the judges on the phone. You'll know which one will do us the most good, fastest."

"Mmm," Boyd said. "Say Judge Dunning," he said. "Good man. Fast worker."

"I don't care who," Malone said. "Just get going, and get us a release for Miss Thompson." He turned back to the doctor. "By the way," he said. "Has she got any other name? Besides Elizabeth Tudor, I mean," he added hurriedly.

"Her full name," Dr. Harman said, "is Rose Walker Thompson. She is not Queen Elizabeth I, II or XXVIII, and she is not immortal."

"But she is," Malone pointed out, "a telepath. And that's why I want her."

"She may," Dr. Harman said, "be a telepath." It was obvious that he had partly managed to forget the disturbing incidents that had happened a few minutes before. "I don't even want to discuss that part of it."

"Okay, never mind it," Malone said agreeably. "Tom, get us a court order for Rose Walker Thompson. Effective yesterday-day before, if possible."

Boyd nodded, but before he could get to the phone Dr. Harman spoke again.

"Now, wait a moment, gentlemen," he said. "Court order or no court order, Miss Thompson is definitely not a well woman, and I can't see my way clear to—"

"I'm not well myself," Malone said. "I need sleep and I probably have a cold. But I've got to work for the national security, and—"

"This is important," Boyd put in.

"I don't dispute that," Dr. Harman said. "Nevertheless, I—"

The door that led into the other room burst suddenly open. The three men turned to stare at Miss Wilson, who stood in the doorway for a long second and then stepped into the office, closing the door quietly behind her.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she said.

"Not at all," Malone said. "It's a pleasure to have you. Come again soon." He smiled at her.

She didn't smile back. "Doctor," she said, "you'd really better talk to Miss Thompson. I'm not at all sure what I can do. It's something new."

"New?" he said. The worry lines on his face were increasing, but he spoke softly.

"The poor dear thinks she's going to get out of the hospital now," Miss Wilson said. "For some reason, she's convinced that the FBI is going to get her released, and—"

As she saw the expression on three faces, she stopped.

"What's wrong?" she said.

"Miss Wilson," Malone said, "we-may I call you by your first name?"

"Of course, Mr. Malone," she said. There was a little silence.

"Miss Wilson," Malone said, "what is your first name?"

She smiled now, very gently. Malone wanted to walk through mountains, or climb fire. He felt confused, but wonderful. "Barbara," she said.

"Lovely," he said. "Well, Barbara-and please call me Ken. It's short for Kenneth."

The smile on her face broadened. "I thought it might be," she said.

"Well," Malone said softly, "it is. Kenneth. That's my name. And you're Barbara."

Boyd cleared his throat.

"Ah," Malone said. "Yes. Of course. Well, Barbara-well, that's just what we intend to do. Take Miss Thompson away. We need her-badly."

Dr. Harman had said nothing at all, and had barely moved. He was staring at a point on his desk. "She couldn't possibly have heard us," he muttered. "That's a soundproof door. She couldn't have heard us."

"But you can't take Miss Thompson away," Miss Wilson said.

"We have to, Barbara," Malone said gently. "Try to understand. It's for the national security."

"She heard us thinking," Dr. Harman muttered. "That's what; she heard us thinking. Behind a soundproof door. She can see inside their minds. She can even see inside my mind."

"She's a sick woman," Barbara said. "But you have to understand—"

"Vital necessity," Boyd put in. "Absolutely vital."

"Nevertheless—" Barbara said. "She can read minds," Dr. Harman whispered in an awed tone. "She knows. Everything. She knows."

"It's out of the question," Barbara said. "Whether you like it or not, Miss Thompson is not going to leave this hospital. Why, what could she do outside these walls? She hasn't left in over forty years! And furthermore, Mr. Malone—"

"Kenneth," Malone put in, as the door opened again. "I mean Ken."

The little old lady put her haloed head into the room. "Now, now, Barbara," she said. "Don't you go spoiling things. Just let these nice men take me away and everything will be fine, believe me. Besides, I've been outside more often than you imagine."

"Outside?" Barbara said.

"Of course," the little old lady said. "In other people's minds. Even yours. I remember that nice young man-what was his name?—"

"Never mind his name," Barbara said, flushing furiously.

Malone felt instantly jealous of every nice young man he had ever even heard of. He wasn't a nice young man; he was an FBI agent, and he liked to get drunk and smoke cigars and carouse with loose women. Anyway, reasonably loose women.

All nice young men, he decided, should be turned into ugly old men as soon as possible. That'll fix them!

He noticed the little old lady smiling at him, and tried to change his thoughts rapidly. But the little old lady said nothing at all.

"At any rate," Barbara said, "I'm afraid that we just can't—"

Dr. Harman cleared his throat imperiously. It was a most impressive noise, and everyone turned to look at him. His face was a little gray, but he looked, otherwise, like a rather pudgy, blond, crew-cut Roman emperor.

"Just a moment," he said with dignity. "I think you're doing the United States of America a grave injustice, Miss Wilson-and that you're doing an injustice to Miss Thompson, too."

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I think it would be nice for her to get away from me-I mean from here," the psychiatrist said. "Where did you say you were taking her?" he asked Malone.

"Yucca Flats," Malone said.

"Ah." The news seemed to please the psychiatrist. "That's a long distance from here, isn't it? It's quite a few hundred miles away. Perhaps even a few thousand miles away. I feel sure that will be the best thing for me—I mean, of course, for Miss Thompson. I shall recommend that the court so order."

"Doctor—" But even Barbara saw, Malone could tell, that it was no good arguing with Dr. Harman. She tried a last attack. "Doctor, who's going to take care of her?"

A light the size and shape of North America burst in Malone's mind. He almost chortled. But he managed to keep his voice under control. "What she needs," he said, "is a trained psychiatric nurse."

Barbara Wilson gave him a look that had carloads of U235 stacked away in it, but Malone barely minded. She'd get over it, he told himself.

"Now, wasn't that sweet of you to think of that," the little old lady said. Malone looked at her and was rewarded with another wink. Good God, he thought. She reads minds!

"I'm certainly glad you thought of Barbara," the little old lady went on. "You will go with me, won't you, dear? I'll make you a duchess. Wouldn't you like to be a duchess, dear?"

Barbara looked from Malone to the little old lady, and then she looked at Dr. Harman. Apparently what she saw failed to make her happy.

"We'll take good care of her, Barbara," Malone said.

She didn't even bother to give him an answer. After a second Boyd said: "Well, I guess that settles it. If you'll let me use your phone, Dr. Harman, I'll call Judge Dunning."

"Go right ahead," Dr. Harman said. "Go right ahead."

The little old lady smiled softly without looking at anybody at all. "Won't it be wonderful," she whispered. "At last I've been recognized. My country is about to pay me for my services. My loyal subjects...." She stopped and wiped what Malone thought was a tear from one cornflower-blue eye.

"Now, now, Miss Thompson," Barbara said.

"I'm not sad," the little old lady said, smiling up at her. "I'm just so very happy. I am about to get my reward, my well-deserved reward at last, from all of my loyal subjects. You'll see." She paused and Malone felt a faint stirring of stark, chill fear.

"Won't it be wonderful?" said the little old lady.

CHAPTER 4

"You're where?" Andrew J. Burris said.

Malone looked at the surprised face on the screen and wished he hadn't called. He had to report in, of course—but, if he'd had any sense, he'd have ordered Boyd to do the job for him.

Oh, well, it was too late for that now. "I'm in Las Vegas," he said. "I tried to get you last night, but I couldn't, so I—"

"Las Vegas," Burriss said. "Well, well. Las Vegas." His face darkened and his voice became very loud. "Why aren't you in Yucca Flats?" he screamed.

"Because she insisted on it," Malone said. "The old lady. Miss Thompson. She says there's another telepath here."

Burriss closed his eyes. "Well, that's a relief," he said at last. "Somebody in one of the gambling houses, I suppose. Fine, Malone." He went right on without a pause: "The boys have uncovered two more in various parts of the nation. Not one of them is even close to sane." He opened his eyes. "Where's this one?" he said.

Malone sighed. "In the looney bin," he said.

Burriss' eyes closed again. Malone waited in silence. At last Burriss said: "All right. Get him out."

"Right," Malone said.

"Tell me," Burriss said. "Why did Miss Thompson insist that you go to Las Vegas? Somebody else could have done the job. You could have sent Boyd, couldn't you?"

"Chief," Malone said slowly, "what sort of mental condition are those other telepaths in?"

"Pretty bad," Burriss said. "As a matter of fact, very bad. Miss Thompson may be off her trolley, but the others haven't even got any tracks." He paused. "What's that got to do with it?" he said.

"Well," Malone said, "I figured we'd better handle Miss Thompson with kid gloves—at least until we find a better telepath to work with." He didn't mention Barbara Wilson. The chief, he told himself, didn't want to be bothered with details.

"Doggone right you'd better," Burriss said. "You treat that old lady as if she were the Queen herself, understand?"

"Don't worry," Malone said unhappily. "We are." He hesitated. "She says she'll help us find our spy, all right, but we've got to do it her way—or else she won't cooperate."

"Do it her way, then," Burriss said. "That spy—"

"Chief, are you sure?"

Burriss blinked. "Well, then," he said, "what is her way?"

Malone took a deep breath. "First," he said, "we had to come here and pick this guy up. This William Logan, who's in a private sanitarium just outside of Las Vegas. That's number one. Miss Thompson wants to get all the telepaths together, so they can hold mental conversations or something."

"And all of them batty," Burriss said.

"Sure," Malone said. "A convention of nuts—and me in the middle. Listen, Chief—"

"Later," Burris said. "When this is over we can all resign, or go fishing, or just plain shoot ourselves. But right now the national security is primary, Malone. Remember that."

"Okay," Malone sighed. "Okay. But she wants all the nuts here."

"Go along with her," Burris snapped. "Keep her happy. So far, Malone, she's the only lead we have on the guy who's swiping information from Yucca Flats. If she wants something, Malone, you do it."

"But, Chief—"

"Don't interrupt me," Burris said. "If she wants to be treated like a Queen, you treat her like one. Malone, that's an order!"

"Yes, sir," Malone said sadly. "But, Chief, she wants us to buy her some new clothes."

"My God," Burris exploded. "Is that all? New clothes? Get 'em. Put 'em on the expense account. New clothes are a drop in the bucket."

"Well-she thinks we need new clothes, too."

"Maybe you do," Burris said. "Put the whole thing on the expense account. You don't think I'm going to quibble about a few dollars, do you?"

"Well—"

"Get the clothes. Just don't bother me with details like this. Handle the job yourself, Malone-you're in charge out there. And get to Yucca Flats as soon as possible."

Malone gave up. "Yes, sir," he said.

"All right, then," Burris said. "Call me tomorrow. Meanwhile-good luck, Malone. Chin up."

Malone said: "Yes, sir," and reached for the switch. But Burris' voice stopped him.

"Just one thing," he said.

"Yes, Chief?" Malone said.

Burris frowned. "Don't spend any more for the clothes than you have to," he said.

Malone nodded, and cut off.

When the Director's image had vanished, he got up and went to the window of the hotel room. Outside, a huge sign told the world, and Malone, that this was the Thunderbird-Hilton-Zeckendorf Hotel, but Malone ignored it. He didn't need a sign; he knew where he was.

In hot water, he thought. That's where he was.

Behind him, the door opened. Malone turned as Boyd came in.

"I found a costume shop, Ken," he said.

"Great," Malone said. "The Chief authorized it."

"He did?" Boyd's round face fell at the news.

"He said to buy her whatever she wants. He says to treat her like a Queen."

"That," Boyd said, "we're doing now."

"I know it," Malone said. "I know it altogether too well."

"Anyhow," Boyd said, brightening, "the costume shop doesn't do us any good. They've only got cowboy stuff and bullfighters' costumes and Mexican stuff—you know, for their Hellsboro Week here."

"You didn't give up, did you?" Malone said.

Boyd shook his head. "Of course not," he said. "Ken: this is on the expense account, isn't it?"

"Expense account," Malone said. "Sure it is."

Boyd looked relieved. "Good," he said. "Because I had the proprietor phone her size in, to New York."

"Better get two of 'em," Malone said. "The Chief said anything she wanted, she was supposed to have."

"I'll go back right away. I told him we wanted the stuff on the afternoon plane, so—"

"And give him Bar-Miss Wilson's size, and yours, and mine. Tell him to dig up something appropriate."

"For us?" Boyd blanched visibly. "For us," Malone said grimly.

Boyd set his jaw. "No," he said.

"Listen, Tom," Malone said, "I don't like this any better than you do. But if I can't resign, you can't either. Costumes for everybody."

"But," Boyd said, and stopped. After a second he went on: "Malone-Ken-FBI agents are supposed to be inconspicuous, aren't they?"

Malone nodded.

"Well, how inconspicuous are we going to be in this stuff?"

"It's an idea," Malone said. "But it isn't a very good one. Our first job is to keep Miss Thompson happy. And that means costumes."

Boyd said: "My God."

"And what's more," Malone added, "from now on she's 'Your Majesty.' Got that?"

"Ken," Boyd said, "you've gone nuts."

Malone shook his head. "No, I haven't," he said. "I just wish I had. It would be a relief."

"Me too," Boyd said. He started for the door and turned. "I wish I could have stayed in San Francisco," he said. "Why should she insist on taking me along?"

"The beard," Malone said. "My beard?" Boyd recoiled.

"Right," Malone said. "She says it reminds her of someone she knows. Frankly, it reminds me of someone, too. Only I don't know who."

Boyd gulped. "I'll shave it off," he said, with the air of a man who can do no more to propitiate the Gods.

"You will not," Malone said firmly. "Touch but a hair of yon black chin, and I'll peel off your entire skin."

Boyd winced.

"Now," Malone said, "go back to that costume shop and arrange things. Here." He fished in his pockets and came out with a crumpled slip of paper and handed it to Boyd. "That's a list of my clothing sizes. Get another list from B-Miss Wilson." Boyd nodded. Malone thought he detected a strange glint in the other man's eye. "Don't measure her yourself," he said. "Just ask her."

Boyd scratched his bearded chin and nodded slowly. "All right, Ken," he said. "But if we just don't get anywhere, don't blame me."

"If you get anywhere," Malone said, "I'll snatch you baldheaded. And I'll leave the beard."

"I didn't mean with Miss Wilson, Ken," Boyd said. "I meant in general." He left, with the air of a man whose world has betrayed him. His back looked, to Malone, like the back of a man on his way to the scaffold or guillotine.

The door closed.

Now, Malone thought, who does that beard remind me of? Who do I know who knows Miss Thompson?

And what difference does it make?

Nevertheless, he told himself, Boyd's beard (Beard's boyd?) was really an admirable fact of nature. Ever since beards had become popular again in the mid-sixties, and FBI agents had been permitted to wear them, Malone had thought about growing one. But, somehow, it didn't seem right.

Now, looking at Boyd, he began to think about the prospect again.

He shrugged the notion away. There were things to do.

He picked up the phone and called Information.

"Can you give me," he said, "the number of the Desert Edge Sanatorium?"

* * * *

The crimson blob of the setting sun was already painting the desert sky with its customary purples and oranges by the time the little caravan arrived at the Desert Edge Sanatorium, a square white building several miles out of Las Vegas. Malone, in the first car, wondered briefly about the kind of patients they catered to. People driven mad by vingt-et-un or poker-dice? Neurotic chorus ponies? Gambling czars with delusions of non-persecution?

Sitting in the front seat next to Boyd, he watched the unhappy San Francisco agent manipulating the wheel. In the back seat, Queen Elizabeth Thompson and Lady Barbara, the nurse, were located, and Her Majesty was chattering away like a magpie.

Malone eyed the rearview mirror to get a look at the car following them and the two local FBI agents in it. They were, he thought, unbelievably lucky. He had to sit and listen to the Royal Personage in the back seat.

"Of course, as soon as Parliament convenes and recognizes me," she was saying, "I shall confer personages on all of you. Right now, the best I could do was to knight you all, and of course that's hardly enough. But I think I shall make Sir Kenneth the Duke of Columbia."

Sir Kenneth, Malone realized, was himself. He wondered how he'd like being Duke of Columbia-and wouldn't the President be surprised!

"And Sir Thomas," the Queen continued, "will be the Duke of-what? Sir Thomas?"

"Yes, Your Majesty?" Boyd said, trying to sound both eager and properly respectful.

"What would you like to be Duke of?" she said.

"Oh," Boyd said after a second's thought, "anything that pleases Your Majesty." But apparently, his thoughts gave him away.

"You're from upstate New York?" the Queen said. "How very nice. Then you must be made the Duke of Poughkeepsie."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Boyd said. Malone thought he detected a note of pride in the man's voice, and shot a glance at Boyd, but the agent was driving with a serene face and an economy of motion.

Duke of Poughkeepsie! Malone thought. Hah!

He leaned back and adjusted his fur-trimmed coat. The plume that fell from his cap kept tickling his neck, and he brushed at it without success.

All four of the inhabitants of the car were dressed in late Sixteenth Century costumes, complete with ruffs and velvet and lace filigree. Her Majesty and Lady Barbara were wearing the full skirts and small skullcaps of the era (and on Barbara, Malone thought privately, the low-cut gowns didn't look at all disappointing), and Sir Thomas and Malone (Sir Kenneth, he thought sourly) were clad in doublet, hose and long coats with fur trim and slashed sleeves. And all of them were loaded down, weighted down, staggeringly, with gems.

Naturally, the gems were fake. But then, Malone thought, the Queen was mad. It all balanced out in the end.

As they approached the sanitarium, Malone breathed a thankful prayer that he'd called up to tell the head physician how they'd all be dressed. If he hadn't....

He didn't want to think about that.

He didn't even want to pass it by hurriedly on a dark night.

The head physician, Dr. Frederic Dowson, was waiting for them on the steps of the building. He was a tall, thin, cadaverous-looking man with almost no hair and very deep-sunken eyes. He had the kind of face that a gushing female would probably describe, Malone thought, as "craggy," but it didn't look in the least attractive to Malone. Instead, it looked tough and forbidding.

He didn't turn a hair as the magnificently robed Boyd slid from the front seat, opened the rear door, doffed his plumed hat, and in one low sweep made a great bow. "We are here, Your Majesty," Boyd said.

Her Majesty got out, clutching at her voluminous skirts in a worried manner, to keep from catching them on the door-jamb. "You know, Sir Thomas," she said when she was standing free of the car, "I think we must be related."

"Ah?" Boyd said worriedly.

"I'm certain of it, in fact," Her Majesty went on. "You look just exactly like my poor father. Just exactly. I dare say you come from one of the sinister branches of the family. Perhaps you are a half-brother of mine-removed, of course."

Malone grinned, and tried to hide the expression. Boyd was looking puzzled, then distantly angered. Nobody had ever called him illegitimate in just that way before.

But Her Majesty was absolutely right, Malone thought. The agent had always reminded him of someone, and now, at last, he knew exactly who. The hair hadn't been black, either, but red.

Boyd was, in Elizabethan costume, the deadest of dead ringers for Henry VIII.

Malone went up the steps to where Dr. Dowson was standing.

"I'm Malone," he said, checking a tendency to bow. "I called earlier today. Is this William Logan of yours ready to go? We can take him back with us in the second car."

Dr. Dowson compressed his lips and looked worried. "Come in, Mr. Malone," he said. He turned just as the second carload of FBI agents began emptying itself over the hospital grounds.

The entire procession filed into the hospital office, the two local agents following up the rear. Since they were not a part of Her Majesty's personal retinue, they had not been required to wear court costumes. In a way, Malone was beginning to feel sorry for them. He himself cut a nice figure in the outfit, he thought-rather like Errol Flynn in the old black-and-white print of *The Prince and the Pauper*.

But there was no denying that the procession looked strange. File clerks and receptionists stopped their work to gape at the four bedizened walkers and their plainly dressed satellites. Malone needed no telepathic talent to tell what they were thinking.

"A whole roundup of nuts," they were thinking. "And those two fellows in the back must be bringing them in-along with Dr. Dowson."

Malone straightened his spine. Really, he didn't see why Elizabethan costumes had ever gone out of style. Elizabeth was back, wasn't she—either Elizabeth II, on the throne, or Elizabeth I, right behind him. Either way you looked at it....

When they were all inside the waiting room, Dr. Dowson said: "Now, Mr. Malone, just what is all this about?" He rubbed his long hands together. "I fail to see the humor of the situation."

"Humor?" Malone said.

"Doctor," Barbara Wilson began, "let me explain. You see—"

"These ridiculous costumes," Dr. Dowson said, waving a hand at them. "You may feel that poking fun at insanity is humorous, Mr. Malone, but let me tell you—"

"It wasn't like that at all," Boyd said.

"And," Dr. Dowson continued in a somewhat louder voice, "wanting to take Mr. Logan away from us. Mr. Logan is a very sick man, Mr. Malone. He should be properly cared for."

"I promise we'll take good care of him," Malone said earnestly. The Elizabethan clothes were fine outdoors, but in a heated room one had a tendency to sweat.

"I take leave to doubt that," Dr. Dowson said, eyeing their costumes pointedly.

"Miss Wilson here," Malone volunteered, "is a trained psychiatric nurse."

Barbara, in her gown, stepped forward. "Dr. Dowson," she said, "let me assure you that these costumes have their purpose. We—"

"Not only that," Malone said. "There are a group of trained men from St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington who are going to take the best of care of him." He said nothing whatever about Yucca Flats, or about telepathy.

Why spread around information unnecessarily?

"But I don't understand," Dr. Dowson said. "What interest could the FBI have in an insane man?"

"That's none of your business," Malone said. He reached inside his fur-trimmed robe and, again suppressing a tendency to bow deeply, withdrew an impressive-looking legal document. "This," he said, "is a court order, instructing you to hand over to us the person of one William Logan, herein identified and described." He waved it at the Doctor.

"That's your William Logan," he said, "only now he's ours."

Dr. Dowson took the papers and put in some time frowning at them. Then he looked up again at Malone. "I assume that I have some discretion in this matter," he said. "And I wonder if you realize just how ill Mr. Logan is? We have his case histories here, and we have worked with him for some time."

Barbara Wilson said: "But—"

"I might say that we are beginning to understand his illness," Dr. Dowson said. "I honestly don't think it would be proper to transfer this work to another group of therapists. It might set his illness back-cause, as it were, a relapse. All our work could easily be nullified."

"Please, Doctor," Barbara Wilson began.

"I'm afraid the court order's got to stand," Malone said. Privately, he felt sorry for Dr. Dowson, who was, obviously enough, a conscientious man trying to do the best he could for his patient. But—

"I'm sorry, Dr. Dowson," he said. "We'll expect that you send all of your data to the government psychiatrists-and, naturally, any concern for the patient's welfare will be our concern also. The FBI isn't anxious for its workers to get the reputation of careless men." He paused, wondering what other bone he could throw the man. "I have no doubt that the St. Elizabeth's men will be happy to accept your cooperation," he said at last. "But, I'm afraid that our duty is clear. William Logan goes with us."

Dr. Dowson looked at them sourly. "Does he have to get dressed up like a masquerade, too?" Before Malone could answer, the psychiatrist added: "Anyhow, I don't even know you're FBI men. After all, why should I comply with orders from a group of men, dressed insanely, whom I don't even know?"

Malone didn't say anything. He just got up and walked to a phone on a small table, near the wall. Next to it was a door, and Malone wondered uncomfortably what was behind it. Maybe Dr. Dowson had a small arsenal there, to protect his patients and prevent people from pirating them.

He looked back at the set and dialed Burris' private number in Washington. When the Director's face appeared on the screen, Malone said: "Mr. Burris, will you please identify me to Dr. Dowson?" He looked over at Dowson. "You recognize Mr. Andrew J. Burris, I suppose?" he said.

Dowson nodded. His grim face showed a faint shock. He walked to the phone, and Malone stepped back to let him talk with Burris.

"My name is Dowson," he said. "I'm psychiatric director here at Desert Edge Sanatorium. And your men—"

"My men have orders to take William Logan from your care," Burris said.

"That's right," Dowson said. "But—"

While they were talking, Queen Elizabeth I sidled quietly up to Malone and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Sir Kenneth," she whispered in the faintest of voices, "I know where your telepathic spy is. And I know who he is."

"Who?" Malone said. "What? Why? Where?" He blinked and whirled. It couldn't be true. They couldn't solve the case so easily.

But the Queen's face was full of a majestic assurance. "He's right there," she said, and she pointed.

Malone followed her finger.

It was aimed directly at the glowing image of Andrew J. Burris, Director of the FBI.

CHAPTER 5

Malone opened his mouth, but nothing came out. Not even air.

He wasn't breathing.

He stared at Burris for a long moment, then took a breath and looked again at Her Majesty. "The spy?" he whispered.

"That's right," she said.

"But that's—" He had to fight for control. "That's the head of the FBI," he managed to say. "Do you mean to say he's a spy?"

Burris was saying: "...I'm afraid this is a matter of importance, Dr. Dowson. We cannot tolerate delay. You have the court order. Obey it."

"Very well, Mr. Burris," Dowson said with an obvious lack of grace. "I'll release him to Mr. Malone immediately, since you insist."

Malone stared, fascinated. Then he turned back to the little old lady. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that Andrew J. Burris is a telepathic spy?"

"Oh, dear me," Her Majesty said, obviously aghast. "My goodness gracious. Is that Mr. Burris on the screen?"

"It is," Malone assured her. A look out of the corner of his eye told him that neither Burris, in Washington, nor Dowson or any others in the room, had heard any of the conversation. Malone lowered his whisper some more, just in case. "That's the head of the FBI," he said.

"Well, then," Her Majesty said, "Mr. Burris couldn't possibly be a spy, then, could he? Not if he's the head of the FBI. Of course not. Mr. Burris simply isn't a spy. He isn't the type. Forget all about Mr. Burris."

"I can't," Malone said at random. "I work for him." He closed his eyes. The room, he had discovered, was spinning slightly. "Now," he said, "you're sure he's not a spy?"

"Certainly I'm sure," she said, with her most regal tones. "Do you doubt the word of your sovereign?"

"Not exactly," Malone said. Truthfully, he wasn't at all sure. Not at all. But why tell that to the Queen?

"Shame on you," she said. "You shouldn't even think such things. After all, I am the Queen, aren't I?" But there was a sweet, gentle smile on her face when she spoke; she didn't seem to be really irritated.

"Sure you are," Malone said. "But—"

"Malone!" It was Burris' voice, from the phone. Malone spun around. "Take Mr. Logan," Burris said,

"and get going. There's been enough delay as it is."

"Yes, sir," Malone said. "Right away, sir. Anything else?"

"That's all," Burris said. "Good night." The screen blanked.

There was a little silence.

"All right, Doctor," Boyd said. He looked every inch a king, and Malone knew exactly what king. "Bring him out."

Dr. Dowson heaved a great sigh. "Very well," he said heavily. "But I want it known that I resent this highhanded treatment, and I shall write a letter complaining of it." He pressed a button on an instrument panel in his desk. "Bring Mr. Logan in," he said.

Malone wasn't in the least worried about the letter. Burris, he knew, would take care of anything like that. And, besides, he had other things to think about.

The door to the next room had opened almost immediately, and two husky, white-clad men were bringing in a strait-jacketed figure whose arms were wrapped against his chest, while the jacket's extra-long sleeves were tied behind his back. He walked where the attendants led him, but his eyes weren't looking at anything in the room. They stared at something far away and invisible, an impalpable shifting nothingness somewhere in the infinite distances beyond the world.

For the first time, Malone felt the chill of panic. Here, he thought, was insanity of a very real and frightening kind. Queen Elizabeth Thompson was one thing-and she was almost funny, and likeable, after all. But William Logan was something else, and something that sent a wave of cold shivering into the room.

What made it worse was that Logan wasn't a man, but a boy, barely nineteen. Malone had known that, of course-but seeing it was something different. The lanky, awkward figure wrapped in a hospital strait-jacket was horrible, and the smooth, unconcerned face was, somehow, worse. There was no threat in that face, no terror or anger or fear. It was merely-a blank.

It was not a human face. Its complete lack of emotion or expression could have belonged to a sleeping child of ten-or to a member of a different race. Malone looked at the boy, and looked away.

Was it possible that Logan knew what he was thinking?

Answer me, he thought, directly at the still boy.

There was no reply, none at all. Malone forced himself to look away. But the air in the room seemed to have become much colder.

The attendants stood on either side of him, waiting. For one long second no one moved, and then Dr. Dowson reached into his desk drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

"If you'll sign these for the government," he said, "you may have Mr. Logan. There seems little else that I can do, Mr. Malone-in spite of my earnest pleas—"

"I'm sorry," Malone said. After all, he needed Logan, didn't he? After a look at the boy, he wasn't sure

any more-but the Queen had said she wanted him, and the Queen's word was law. Or what passed for law, anyhow, at least for the moment.

Malone took the papers and looked them over. There was nothing special about them; they were merely standard release forms, absolving the staff and management of Desert Edge Sanatorium from every conceivable responsibility under any conceivable circumstances, as far as William Logan was concerned. Dr. Dowson gave Malone a look that said: "Very well, Mr. Malone; I will play Pilate and wash my hands of the matter—but you needn't think I like it." It was a lot for one look to say, but Dr. Dowson's dark and sunken eyes got the message across with no loss in transmission. As a matter of fact, there seemed to be more coming—a much less printable message was apparently on the way through those glittering, sad and angry eyes.

Malone avoided them nervously, and went over the papers again instead. At last he signed them and handed them back. "Thanks for your cooperation, Dr. Dowson," he said briskly, feeling ten kinds of a traitor.

"Not at all," Dowson said bitterly. "Mr. Logan is now in your custody. I must trust you to take good care of him."

"The best care we can," Malone said. It didn't seem sufficient. He added: "The best possible care, Doctor," and tried to look dependable and trustworthy, like a Boy Scout. He was aware that the effort failed miserably.

At his signal, the two plainclothes FBI men took over from the attendants. They marched Logan out to their car, and Malone led the procession back to Boyd's automobile, a procession that consisted (in order) of Sir Kenneth Malone, prospective Duke of Columbia, Queen Elizabeth I, Lady Barbara, prospective Duchess of an unspecified county, and Sir Thomas Boyd, prospective Duke of Poughkeepsie. Malone hummed a little of the first Pomp and Circumstance march as they walked; somehow, he thought it was called for.

They piled into the car, Boyd at the wheel with Malone next to him, and the two ladies in back, with Queen Elizabeth sitting directly behind Sir Thomas. Boyd started the engine and they turned and roared off.

"Well," said Her Majesty with an air of great complacency, "that's that. That makes six of us."

Malone looked around the car. He counted the people. There were four. He said, puzzled: "Six?"

"That's right, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "You have it exactly. Six."

"You mean six telepaths?" Sir Thomas asked in a deferent tone of voice.

"Certainly I do," Her Majesty replied. "We telepaths, you know, must stick together. That's the reason I got poor little Willie out of that sanatorium of his, you know—and, of course, the others will be joining us."

"Don't you think it's time for your nap, dear?" Lady Barbara put in suddenly.

"My what?" It was obvious that Queen Elizabeth was Not Amused.

"Your nap, dear," Lady Barbara said.

"Don't call me dear," Her Majesty snapped.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty," Barbara murmured. "But really—"

"My dear girl," Her Majesty said, "I am not a child. I am your sovereign. Do try to have a little respect. Why, I remember when Shakespeare used to say to me-but that's no matter, not now."

"About those telepaths—" Boyd began.

"Telepaths," Her Majesty said. "Ah, yes. We must all stick together. In the hospital, you know, we had a little joke-the patients for Insulin Shock Therapy used to say: 'If we don't stick together, we'll all be stuck separately.' Do you see, Sir Thomas?"

"But," Sir Kenneth Malone said, trying desperately to return to the point. "Six?" He had counted them up in his mind. Burris had mentioned one found in St. Elizabeths, and two more picked up later. With Queen Elizabeth, and now William Logan, that made five.

Unless the Queen was counting him in. There didn't seem any good reason why not.

"Oh, no," Her Majesty said with a little trill of laughter, "not you, Sir Kenneth. I meant Mr. Miles."

Sir Thomas Boyd asked: "Mr. Miles?"

"That's right," Her Majesty said. "His name is Barry Miles, and your FBI men found him an hour ago in New Orleans. They're bringing him to Yucca Flats to meet the rest of us; isn't that nice?"

Lady Barbara cleared her throat.

"It really isn't necessary for you to try to get my attention, dear," the Queen said. "After all, I do know what you're thinking."

Lady Barbara blinked. "I still want to suggest, respectfully, about that nap—" she began.

"My dear girl," the Queen said, with the faintest trace of impatience, "I do not feel the least bit tired, and this is such an exciting day that I just don't want to miss any of it. Besides, I've already told you I don't want a nap. It isn't polite to be insistent to your Queen-no matter how strongly you feel about a matter. I'm sure you'll learn to understand that, dear."

Lady Barbara opened her mouth, shut it again, and opened it once more. "My goodness," she said.

"That's the idea," Her Majesty said approvingly. "Think before you speak-and then don't speak. It really isn't necessary, since I know what you're thinking."

Malone said grimly: "About this new telepath-this Barry Miles. Did they find him—"

"In a nut-house?" Her Majesty said sweetly. "Why, of course, Sir Kenneth. You were quite right when you thought that telepaths went insane because they had a sense they couldn't effectively use, and because no one believed them. How would you feel, if nobody believed you could see?"

"Strange," Malone admitted.

"There," Her Majesty said. "You see? Telepaths do go insane-it's sort of an occupational disease. Of course, not all of them are insane."

"Not all of them?" Malone felt the faint stirrings of hope. Perhaps they would turn up a telepath yet who was completely sane and rational.

"There's me, of course," Her Majesty said.

Lady Barbara gulped audibly. Boyd said nothing, but gripped the wheel of the car more tightly.

And Malone thought to himself: That's right. There's Queen Elizabeth-who says she isn't crazy.

And then he thought of one more sane telepath. But the knowledge didn't make him feel any better.

It was, of course, the spy.

How many more are going to turn up? Malone wondered.

"Oh, that's about all of us," the Queen said. "There is one more, but she's in a hospital in Honolulu, and your men won't find her until tomorrow."

Boyd turned. "Do you mean you can foretell the future, too?" he asked in a strained voice.

Lady Barbara screamed: "Keep your eyes on the wheel and your hands on the road!"

"What?" Boyd said.

There was a terrific blast of noise, and a truck went by in the opposite direction. The driver, a big, ugly man with no hair on his head, leaned out to curse at the quartet, but his mouth remained open. He stared at the four Elizabethans and said nothing at all as he whizzed by.

"What was that?" Boyd asked faintly.

"That," Malone snapped, "was a truck. And it was due entirely to the mercy of God that we didn't hit it. Barbara's right. Keep your eyes on the wheel and your hands on the road." He paused and thought that over. Then he said: "Does that mean anything at all?"

"Lady Barbara was confused by the excitement," the Queen said calmly.

"It's all right now, dear."

Lady Barbara blinked across the seat. "I was-afraid," she said.

"It's all right," the Queen said. "I'll take care of you."

"This," Malone announced to no one in particular, "is ridiculous."

Boyd swept the car around a curve and concentrated grimly on the road. After a second the Queen said: "Since you're still thinking about the question, I'll answer you."

"What question?" Malone said, thoroughly baffled.

"Sir Thomas asked me if I could foretell the future," the Queen said equably. "Of course I can't. That's silly. Just because I'm immortal and I'm a telepath, don't go hog-wild."

"Then how did you know the FBI agents were going to find the girl in Honolulu tomorrow?" Boyd said.

"Because," the Queen said, "they're thinking about looking in the hospital tomorrow, and when they look they'll certainly find her."

Boyd said: "Oh," and was silent.

But Malone had a grim question. "Why didn't you tell me about these other telepaths before?" he said. "You could have saved us a lot of work."

"Oh, heavens to Betsy, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty exclaimed. "How could I? After all, the proper precautions had to be taken first, didn't they? I told you all the others were crazy-really crazy, I mean. And they just wouldn't be safe without the proper precautions."

"Perhaps you ought to go back to the hospital, too," Barbara said, and added: "Your Majesty," just in time.

"But if I did, dear," Her Majesty said, "you'd lose your chance to become a Duchess, and that wouldn't be at all nice. Besides, I'm having so much fun?" She trilled a laugh again. "Riding around like this is just wonderful!" she said.

And you're important for national security, Malone said to himself.

"That's right, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "The country needs me, and I'm happy to serve. That is the job of a sovereign."

"Fine," Malone said, hoping it was.

"Well, then," said Her Majesty, "that settles that. We have a whole night ahead of us, Sir Kenneth. What do you say we make a night of it?"

"Knight who?" Malone said. He felt confused again. It seemed as if he was always feeling confused lately.

"Don't be silly, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "There are times and times."

"Sure," Malone said at random. And time and a half, he thought. Possibly for overtime. "What is Your Majesty thinking of?" he asked with trepidation.

"I want to take a tour of Las Vegas," Her Majesty said primly.

Lady Barbara shook her head. "I'm afraid that's not possible, Your Majesty," she said.

"And why not, pray?" Her Majesty said. "No. I can see what you're thinking. It's not safe to let me go wandering around in a strange city, and particularly if that city is Las Vegas. Well, dear, I can assure you that it's perfectly safe."

"We've got work to do," Boyd contributed.

Malone said nothing. He stared bleakly at the hood ornament on the car.

"I have made my wishes known," the Queen said.

Lady Barbara said: "But—"

Boyd, however, knew when to give in. "Yes, Your Majesty," he said.

She smiled graciously at him, and answered Lady Barbara only by a slight lift of her regal eyebrow.

Malone had been thinking about something else. When he was sure he had a firm grip on himself he turned. "Your Majesty, tell me something," he said. "You can read my mind, right?"

"Well, of course, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "I thought I'd proved that to you. And, as for what you're about to ask—"

"No," Malone said. "Please. Let me ask the questions before you answer them. It's less confusing that way. I'll cheerfully admit that it shouldn't be—but it is. Please?"

"Certainly, Sir Kenneth, if you wish," the Queen said. She folded her hands in her lap and waited quietly.

"Okay," Malone said. "Now, if you can read my mind, then you must know that I don't really believe that you are Queen Elizabeth of England. The First, I mean."

"Mr. Malone," Barbara Wilson said suddenly. "I—"

"It's all right, child," the Queen said. "He doesn't disturb me. And I do wish you'd call him Sir Kenneth. That's his title, you know."

"Now that's what I mean," Malone said. "Why do you want us to act as if we believe you, when you know we don't?"

"Because that's the way people do act," the Queen said calmly. "Very few people really believe that their so-called superiors are superior. Almost none of them do, in fact."

"Now wait a minute," Boyd began.

"No, no, it's quite true," the Queen said, "and, unpleasant as it may be, we must learn to face the truth. That's the path of sanity." Lady Barbara made a strangled noise but Her Majesty continued, unruffled. "Nearly everybody suffers from the silly delusion that he's possibly equal to, but very probably superior to, everybody else—my goodness, where would we be if that were true?"

Malone felt that a comment was called for, and he made one. "Who knows?" he said.

"All the things people do toward their superiors," the Queen said, "are done for social reasons. For instance, Sir Kenneth: you don't realize fully how you feel about Mr. Burris."

"He's a hell of a fine guy," Malone said. "I work for him. He's a good Director of the FBI."

"Of course," the Queen said. "But you believe you could do the job just as well, or perhaps a little better."

"I do not," Malone said angrily.

Her Majesty reserved a dignified silence.

After a while Malone said: "And what if I do?"

"Why, nothing," Her Majesty said. "You don't think Mr. Burriss is any smarter or better than you are-but you treat him as if you did. All I am insisting on is the same treatment."

"But if we don't believe—" Boyd began.

"Bless you," Her Majesty said, "I can't help the way you think, but, as Queen, I do have some control over the way you act."

Malone thought it over. "You have a point there," he said at last.

Barbara said: "But—"

"Yes, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said, "I do." She seemed to be ignoring Lady Barbara. Perhaps, Malone thought, she was still angry over the nap affair. "It's not that," the Queen said.

"Not what?" Boyd said, thoroughly confused.

"Not the naps," the Queen said.

"What naps?" Boyd said. Malone said: "I was thinking—"

"Good," Boyd said. "Keep it up. I'm driving. Everything's going to hell around me, but I'm driving."

A red light appeared ahead. Boyd jammed on the brakes with somewhat more than the necessary force, and Malone was thrown forward with a grunt. Behind him there were two ladylike squeals.

Malone struggled upright. "Barbara?" he called. "Are you all right—" Then he remembered the Queen.

"It's all right," Her Majesty said. "I can understand your concern for Lady Barbara." She smiled at Malone as he turned.

Malone gaped at her. Of course she knew what he thought about Barbara; she'd been reading his mind. And, apparently, she was on his side. That was good, even though it made him slightly nervous to think about.

"Now," the Queen said suddenly, "what about tonight?"

"Tonight?"

"Yes, of course," the Queen said. She smiled, and put up a hand to pat at her white hair under the Elizabethan skullcap. "I think I should like to go to the Palace," she said. "After all, isn't that where a Queen should be?"

Boyd said, in a kind of explosion: "London? England?"

"Oh, dear me.... "the Queen began, and Barbara said:

"I'm afraid that I simply can't allow anything like that. Overseas—"

"I didn't mean overseas, dear," Her Majesty said. "Sir Kenneth, please explain to these people."

The Palace, Malone knew, was more properly known as the Golden Palace. It was right in Las Vegas-convenient to all sources of money.

As a matter of fact, it was one of the biggest gambling houses along the Las Vegas strip, a veritable chaos of wheels, cards, dice, chips and other such devices. Malone explained all this to the others, wondering meanwhile why Miss Thompson wanted to go there.

"Not Miss Thompson, please, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said.

"Not Miss Thompson what?" Boyd said. "What's going on anyhow?"

"She's reading my mind," Malone said.

"Well, then," Boyd snapped, "tell her to keep it to herself." The car started up again with a roar and Malone and the others were thrown around again, this time toward the back. There was a chorus of groans and squeals, and they were on their way once more.

"To reply to your question, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said.

Lady Barbara said, with some composure: "What question-Your Majesty?"

The Queen nodded regally at her. "Sir Kenneth was wondering why I wished to go to the Golden Palace," she said. "And my reply is this: it is none of your business why I want to go there. After all, is my word law, or isn't it?"

There didn't seem to be a good enough answer to that, Malone thought sadly. He kept quiet and was relieved to note that the others did the same. However, after a second he thought of something else.

"Your Majesty," he began carefully, "we've got to go to Yucca Flats tomorrow. Remember?"

"Certainly," the Queen said. "My memory is quite good, thank you. But that is tomorrow morning. We have the rest of the night left. It's only a little after nine, you know."

"Heavens," Barbara said. "Is it that late?"

"It's even later," Boyd said sourly. "It's much later than you think."

"And it's getting later all the time," Malone added. "Pretty soon the sun will go out and all life on earth will end. Won't that be nice and peaceful?"

"I'm looking forward to it," Boyd said.

"I'm not," Barbara said. "But I've got to get some sleep tonight, if I'm going to be any good at all tomorrow."

You're pretty good right now, Malone thought, but he didn't say a word. He felt the Queen's eye on him but didn't turn around. After all, she was on his side-wasn't she?

At any rate, she didn't say anything.

"Perhaps it would be best," Barbara said, "if you and I-Your Majesty-just went home and rested up. Some other time, then, when there's nothing vital to do, we could—"

"No," the Queen said. "We couldn't. Really, Lady Barbara, how often will I have to remind you of the duties you owe your sovereign-not the least of which is obedience, as dear old Ben used to say."

"Ben?" Malone said, and immediately wished he hadn't.

"Johnson, dear boy," the Queen said. "Really a remarkable man-and such a good friend to poor Will. Why, did you ever hear the story of how he actually paid Will's rent in London once upon a time? That was while Will and that Anne of his were having one of their arguments, of course. I didn't tell you that story, did I?"

"No," Malone said truthfully, but his voice was full of foreboding. "If I might remind Your Majesty of the subject," he added tentatively, "I should like to say—"

"Remind me of the subject!" the Queen said, obviously delighted. "What a lovely pun! And how much better because purely unconscious! My, my, Sir Kenneth, I never suspected you of a pointed sense of humor-could you be a descendant of Sir Richard Greene, I wonder?"

"I doubt it," Malone said. "My ancestors were all poor but Irish." He paused. "Or, if you prefer, Irish, but poor." Another pause, and then he added: "If that means anything at all. Which I doubt."

"In any case," the Queen said, her eyes twinkling, "you were about to enter a new objection to our little visit to the Palace, were you not?"

Malone admitted as much. "I really think that—"

Her eyes grew suddenly cold. "If I hear any more objections, Sir Kenneth, I shall not only rescind your knighthood and-when I regain my rightful kingdom-deny you your dukedom, but I shall refuse to cooperate any further in the business of Project Isle."

Malone turned cold. His face, he knew without glancing in the mirror, was white and pale. He thought of what Burris would do to him if he didn't follow through on his assigned job.

Even if he wasn't as good as Burris thought he was, he really liked being an FBI agent. He didn't want to be fired.

And Burris had said: "Give her anything she wants."

He gulped and tried to make his face look normal. "All right," he said. "Fine. We'll go to the Palace."

He tried to ignore the pall of apprehension that fell over the car.

CHAPTER 6

The management of the Golden Palace had been in business for many long, dreary, profitable years, and each member of the staff thought he or she had seen just about everything there was to be seen. And those that were new felt an obligation to look as if they'd seen everything.

Therefore, when the entourage of Queen Elizabeth I strolled into the main salon, not a single eye was batted. Not a single gasp was heard.

Nevertheless, the staff kept a discreet eye on the crew. Drunks, rich men or Arabian millionaires were all familiar. But a group out of the Sixteenth Century was something else again.

Malone almost strutted, conscious of the sidelong glances the group was drawing. But it was obvious that Sir Thomas was the major attraction. Even if you could accept the idea of people in strange costumes, the sight of a living, breathing absolute duplicate of King Henry VIII was a little too much to take. It has been reported that two ladies named Jane, and one named Catherine, came down with sudden headaches and left the salon within five minutes of the group's arrival.

Malone felt he knew, however, why he wasn't drawing his full share of attention. He felt a little out of place.

The costume was one thing, and, to tell the truth, he was beginning to enjoy it. Even with the weight of the stuff, it was going to be a wrench to go back to single-breasted suits and plain white shirts. But he did feel that he should have been carrying a sword.

Instead, he had a .44 Magnum Colt snuggled beneath his left armpit.

Somehow, a .44 Magnum Colt didn't seem as romantic as a sword. Malone pictured himself saying: "Take that, varlet." Was varlet what you called them, he wondered. Maybe it was valet.

"Take that, valet," he muttered. No, that sounded even worse. Oh, well, he could look it up later.

The truth was that he had been born in the wrong century. He could imagine himself at the Mermaid Tavern, hob-nobbing with Shakespeare and all the rest of them. He wondered if Richard Greene would be there. Then he wondered who Richard Greene was.

Behind Sir Kenneth, Sir Thomas Boyd strode, looking majestic, as if he were about to fling purses of gold to the citizenry. As a matter of fact, Malone thought, he was. They all were.

Purses of good old United States of America gold.

Behind Sir Thomas came Queen Elizabeth and her Lady-in-Waiting, Lady Barbara Wilson. They made a beautiful foursome.

"The roulette table," Her Majesty said with dignity. "Precede me."

They pushed their way through the crowd. Most of the customers were either excited enough, drunk enough, or both to see nothing in the least incongruous about a Royal Family of the Tudors invading the Golden Palace. Very few of them, as a matter of fact, seemed to notice the group.

They were roulette players. They noticed nothing but the table and the wheel. Malone wondered what they were thinking about, decided to ask Queen Elizabeth, and then decided against it. He felt it would make him nervous to know.

Her Majesty took a handful of chips.

The handful was worth, Malone knew, exactly five thousand dollars. That, he'd thought, ought to last them an evening, even in the Golden Palace. In the center of the strip, inside the city limits of Las Vegas itself, the five thousand would have lasted much longer-but Her Majesty wanted the Palace, and the Palace it was.

Malone began to smile. Since he couldn't avoid the evening, he was determined to enjoy it. It was sort of fun, in its way, indulging a sweet harmless old lady. And there was nothing they could do until the next morning, anyhow.

His indulgent smile faded very suddenly.

Her Majesty plunked the entire handful of chips-five thousand dollars! Malone thought dazedly-onto the table. "Five thousand," she said in clear, cool measured tones, "on number one."

The croupier blinked only slightly. He bowed. "Yes, Your Majesty," he said.

Malone was briefly thankful, in the midst of his black horror, that he had called the management and told them that the Queen's plays were backed by the United States Government. Her Majesty was going to get unlimited credit-and a good deal of awed and somewhat puzzled respect.

Malone watched the spin begin with mixed feelings. There was five thousand dollars riding on the little ball. But, after all, Her Majesty was a telepath. Did that mean anything?

He hadn't decided by the time the wheel stopped, and by then he didn't have to decide.

"Thirty-four," the croupier said tonelessly. "Red, Even and High."

He raked in the chips with a nonchalant air.

Malone felt as if he had swallowed his stomach. Boyd and Lady Barbara, standing nearby, had absolutely no expressions on their faces. Malone needed no telepath to tell him what they were thinking.

They were exactly the same as he was. They were incapable of thought.

But Her Majesty never batted an eyelash. "Come, Sir Kenneth," she said. "Let's go on to the poker tables."

She swept out. Her entourage followed her, shambling a little, and blank-eyed. Malone was still thinking about the five thousand dollars. Oh, well, Burriss had said to give the lady anything she wanted. But my God! he thought. Did she have to play for royal stakes?

"I am, after all, a Queen," she whispered back to him.

Malone thought about the National Debt. He wondered if a million more or less would make any real

difference. There would be questions asked in committees about it. He tried to imagine himself explaining the evening to a group of Congressmen. "Well, you see, gentlemen, there was this roulette wheel—"

He gave it up.

Then he wondered how much hotter the water was going to get, and he stopped thinking altogether in self-defense.

In the next room, there were scattered tables. At one, a poker game was in full swing. Only five were playing; one, by his white-tie-and-tails uniform, was easily recognizable as a house dealer. The other four were all men, one of them in full cowboy regalia. The Tudors descended upon them with great suddenness, and the house dealer looked up and almost lost his cigarette.

"We haven't any money, Your Majesty," Malone whispered.

She smiled up at him sweetly, and then drew him aside. "If you were a telepath," she said, "how would you play poker?"

Malone thought about that for a minute, and then turned to look for Boyd. But Sir Thomas didn't even have to be given instructions. "Another five hundred?" he said.

Her Majesty sniffed audibly. "Another five thousand," she said regally.

Boyd looked Malonewards. Malone looked defeated.

Boyd turned with a small sigh and headed for the cashier's booth. Three minutes later, he was back with a fat fistful of chips.

"Five grand?" Malone whispered to him.

"Ten," Boyd said. "I know when to back a winner."

Her Majesty went over to the table. The dealer had regained control, but looked up at them with a puzzled stare.

"You know," the Queen said, with an obvious attempt to put the man at his ease, "I've always wanted to visit a gambling hall."

"Sure, lady," the dealer said. "Naturally."

"May I sit down?"

The dealer looked at the group. "How about your friends?" he said cautiously.

The queen shook her head. "They would rather watch, I'm sure."

For once Malone blessed the woman's telepathic talent. He, Boyd and Barbara Wilson formed a kind of Guard of Honor around the chair which Her Majesty occupied. Boyd handed over the new pile of chips, and was favored with a royal smile.

"This is a poker game, ma'am," the dealer said to her quietly.

"I know, I know," Her Majesty said with a trace of testiness. "Roll 'em."

The dealer stared at her popeyed. Next to her, the gentleman in the cowboy outfit turned. "Ma'am, are you from around these parts?" he said.

"Oh, no," the Queen said. "I'm from England."

"England?" The cowboy looked puzzled. "You don't seem to have any accent, ma'am," he said at last.

"Certainly not," the Queen said. "I've lost that; I've been over here a great many years."

Malone hoped fervently that Her Majesty wouldn't mention just how many years. He didn't think he could stand it, and he was almost grateful for the cowboy's nasal twang.

"Oil?" he said.

"Oh, no," Her Majesty said. "The Government is providing this money."

"The Government?"

"Certainly," Her Majesty said. "The FBI, you know."

There was a long silence.

At last, the dealer said: "Five-card draw your game, ma'am?"

"If you please," Her Majesty said.

The dealer shrugged and, apparently, commended his soul to a gambler's God. He passed the pasteboards around the table with the air of one who will have nothing more to do with the world.

Her Majesty picked up her hand.

"The ante's ten, ma'am," the dealer said softly.

Without looking, Her Majesty removed a ten-dollar chip from the pile before her and sent it spinning to the middle of the table.

The dealer opened his mouth, but said nothing. Malone, meanwhile, was peering over the Queen's shoulder.

She held a pair of nines, a four, a three and a Jack.

The man to the left of the dealer announced glumly: "Can't open."

The next man grinned. "Open for twenty," he said.

Malone closed his eyes. He heard the cowboy say: "I'm in," and he opened his eyes again. The Queen was pushing two ten-dollar chips toward the center of the table.

The next man dropped, and the dealer looked round the table. "How many?"

The man who couldn't open took three cards. The man who'd opened for twenty stood pat. Malone shuddered invisibly. That, he figured, meant a straight or better. And Queen Elizabeth Thompson was going in against at least a straight with a pair of nines, Jack high.

For the first time, it was borne in on Malone that being a telepath did not necessarily mean that you were a good poker player. Even if you knew what every other person at the table held, you could still make a whole lot of stupid mistakes.

He looked nervously at Queen Elizabeth, but her face was serene. Apparently she'd been following the thoughts of the poker players, and not concentrating on him at all. That was a relief. He felt, for the first time in days, as if he could think freely.

The cowboy said: "Two," and took them. It was Her Majesty's turn.

"I'll take two," she said, and threw away the three and four. It left her with the nine of spades and the nine of hearts, and the Jack of diamonds.

These were joined, in a matter of seconds, by two bright new cards: the six of clubs and the three of hearts.

Malone closed his eyes. Oh, well, he thought.

It was only thirty bucks down the drain. Practically nothing.

Of course Her Majesty dropped at once; knowing what the other players held, she knew she couldn't beat them after the draw. But she did like to take long chances, Malone thought miserably. Imagine trying to fill a full house on one pair!

Slowly, as the minutes passed, the pile of chips before Her Majesty dwindled. Once Malone saw her win with two pair against a reckless man trying to fill a straight on the other side of the table. But whatever was going on, Her Majesty's face was as calm as if she were asleep.

Malone's worked overtime. If the Queen hadn't been losing so obviously, the dealer might have mistaken the play of naked emotion across his visage for a series of particularly obvious signals.

An hour went by. Barbara left to find a ladies' lounge where she could sit down and try to relax. Fascinated in a horrible sort of way, both Malone and Boyd stood, rooted to the spot, while hand after hand went by and the ten thousand dollars dwindled to half that, to a quarter, and even less....

Her Majesty, it seemed, was a damn poor poker player.

The ante had been raised by this time.

Her Majesty was losing one hundred dollars a hand, even before the betting began. But she showed not the slightest indication to stop.

"We've got to get up in the morning," Malone announced to no one in particular, when he thought he couldn't possibly stand another half-hour of the game.

"So we do," Her Majesty said with a little regretful sigh. "Very well, then. Just one more hand."

"It's a shame to lose you," the cowboy said to her, quite sincerely. He had been winning steadily ever since Her Majesty sat down, and Malone thought that the man should, by this time, be awfully grateful to the United States Government. Somehow, he doubted that this gratitude existed.

Malone wondered if she should be allowed to stay for one more hand. There was, he estimated, about two thousand dollars in front of her. Then he wondered how he was going to stop her.

The cards were dealt.

The first man said quietly: "Open for two hundred."

Malone looked at the Queen's hand. It contained the Ace, King, Queen and ten of clubs-and the seven of spades.

Oh, no. He thought. She couldn't possibly be thinking of filling a flush.

He knew perfectly well that she was.

The second man said: "And raise two hundred."

The Queen equably tossed (counting, Malone thought, the ante) five hundred into the pot.

The cowboy muttered to himself for a second, and finally shoved in his money.

"I think I'll raise it another five hundred," the Queen said calmly.

Malone wanted to die of shock.

Unfortunately, he remained alive and watching. He saw the last man, after some debate internal, shove a total of one thousand dollars into the pot.

"Cards?" said the dealer. The first man said: "One."

It was too much to hope for, Malone thought. If that first man were trying to fill a straight or a flush, maybe he wouldn't make it. And maybe something final would happen to all the other players. But that was the only way he could see for Her Majesty to win.

The card was dealt. The second man stood pat and Malone's green tinge became obvious to the veriest dunce. The cowboy, on Her Majesty's right, asked for a card, received it and sat back without a trace of expression.

The Queen said: "I'll try one for size." She'd picked up poker lingo, and the basic rules of the game, Malone realized, from the other players-or possibly from someone at the hospital itself, years ago.

He wished she'd picked up something less dangerous instead, like a love of big-game hunting, or stunt-flying.

But no. It had to be poker.

The Queen threw away her seven of spades, showing more sense than Malone had given her credit for at any time during the game. She let the other card fall and didn't look at it.

She smiled up at Malone and Boyd. "Live dangerously," she said gaily.

Malone gave her a hollow laugh.

The last man drew one card, too, and the betting began.

The Queen's remaining thousand was gone before an eye could notice it. She turned to Boyd.

"Sir Thomas," she said. "Another five thousand, please. At once."

Boyd said nothing at all, but marched off. Malone noticed, however, that his step was neither as springy nor as confident as it had been before. For himself, Malone was sure that he could not walk at all.

Maybe, he thought hopefully, the floor would open up and swallow them all. He tried to imagine explaining the loss of \$20,000 to Burris and some congressmen, and after that he watched the floor narrowly, hoping for the smallest hint of a crack in the palazzo marble.

"May I raise the whole five thousand?" the Queen said.

"It's okay with me," the dealer said. "How about the rest of you?"

The four grunts he got expressed a suppressed eagerness. The Queen took the new chips Boyd had brought her and shoved them into the center of the table with a fine, careless gesture of her hand. She smiled gaily at everybody. "Seeing me?" she said.

Everybody was.

"Well, you see, it was this way," Malone muttered to himself, rehearsing. He half-thought that one of the others would raise again, but no one did. After all, each of them must be convinced that he held a great hand, and though raising had gone on throughout the hand, each must now be afraid of going the least little bit too far and scaring the others out.

"Mr. Congressman," Malone muttered. "There's this game called poker. You play it with cards and money. Chiefly money."

That wasn't any good.

"You've been called," the dealer said to the first man, who'd opened the hand a year or so before.

"Why, sure," the player said, and laid down a pair of aces, a pair of threes-and a four. One of the threes, and the four, were clubs. That reduced the already improbable chances of the Queen's coming up with a flush.

"Sorry," said the second man, and laid down a straight with a single gesture.

The straight was nine-high and there were no clubs in it. Malone felt devoutly thankful for that.

The second man reached for the money but, under the popeyed gaze of the dealer, the fifth man laid

down another straight-this one ten high. The nine was a club Malone felt the odds go down, right in his own stomach.

And now the cowboy put down his cards. The King of diamonds. The King of hearts. The Jack of diamonds. The Jack of spades. And-the Jack of hearts.

Full house. "Well," said the cowboy, "I suppose that does it."

The Queen said: "Please. One moment."

The cowboy stopped halfway in his reach for the enormous pile of chips. The Queen laid down her four clubs-Ace, King, Queen and ten—and for the first time flipped over her fifth card.

It was the Jack of clubs.

"My God," the cowboy said, and it sounded like a prayer. "A royal flush."

"Naturally," the Queen said. "What else?"

Her Majesty calmly scooped up the tremendous pile of chips. The cowboy's hands fell away. Five mouths were open around the table.

Her Majesty stood up. She smiled sweetly at the men around the table. "Thank you very much, gentlemen," she said. She handed the chips to Malone, who took them in nerveless fingers. "Sir Kenneth," she said, "I hereby appoint you temporary Chancellor of the Exchequer-at least until Parliament convenes."

There was, Malone thought, at least thirty-five thousand dollars in the pile. He could think of nothing to say.

So, instead of using up words, he went and cashed in the chips. For once, he realized, the Government had made money on an investment. It was probably the first time since 1775.

Malone thought vaguely that the government ought to make more investments like the one he was cashing in. If it did, the National Debt could be wiped out in a matter of days.

He brought the money back. Boyd and the Queen were waiting for him, but Barbara was still in the ladies' lounge. "She's on the way out," the Queen informed him, and, sure enough, in a minute they saw the figure approaching them. Malone smiled at her, and, tentatively, she smiled back. They began the long march to the exit of the club, slowly and regally, though not by choice.

The crowd, it seemed, wouldn't let them go. Malone never found out, then or later, how the news of Her Majesty's winnings had gone through the place so fast, but everyone seemed to know about it. The Queen was the recipient of several low bows and a few drunken curtsies, and, when they reached the front door at last, the doorman said in a most respectful tone: "Good evening, Your Majesty."

The Queen positively beamed at him. So, to his own great surprise, did Sir Kenneth Malone.

Outside, it was about four in the morning. They climbed into the car and headed back toward the hotel.

Malone was the first to speak. "How did you know that was a Jack of clubs?" he said in a strangled sort

of voice.

The little old lady said calmly: "He was cheating."

"The dealer?" Malone asked. The little old lady nodded. "In your favor?"

"He couldn't have been cheating," Boyd said at the same instant. "Why would he want to give you all that money?"

The little old lady shook her head. "He didn't want to give it to me," she said. "He wanted to give it to the man in the cowboy's suit. His name is Elliott, by the way—Bernard L. Elliott. And he comes from Weehawken. But he pretends to be a Westerner so nobody will be suspicious of him. He and the dealer are in cahoots—isn't that the word?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Boyd said. "That's the word." His tone was awed and respectful, and the little old lady gave a nod and became Queen Elizabeth I once more.

"Well," she said, "the dealer and Mr. Elliott were in cahoots, and the dealer wanted to give the hand to Mr. Elliott. But he made a mistake, and dealt the Jack of clubs to me. I watched him, and, of course, I knew what he was thinking. The rest was easy."

"My God," Malone said. "Easy." Barbara said: "Did she win?"

"She won," Malone said with what he felt was positively magnificent understatement.

"Good," Barbara said, and lost interest at once.

Malone had seen the lights of a car in the rear-view mirror a few minutes before. When he looked now, the lights were still there—but the fact just didn't register until, a couple of blocks later, the car began to pull around them on the left. It was a Buick, while Boyd's was a new Lincoln, but the edge wasn't too apparent yet.

Malone spotted the gun barrel protruding from the Buick and yelled just before the first shot went off.

Boyd, at the wheel, didn't even bother to look. His reflexes took over and he slammed his foot down on the brake. The specially-built FBI Lincoln slowed down instantly. The shotgun blast splattered the glass of the curved windshield all over—but none of it came into the car itself.

Malone already had his hand on the butt of the .44 Magnum under his left armpit, and he even had time to be grateful, for once, that it wasn't a smallsword. The women were in the back seat, frozen, and he yelled: "Duck, damn it, duck!" and felt, rather than saw, both of them sink down onto the floor of the car.

The Buick had slowed down, too, and the gun barrel was swiveling back for a second shot. Malone felt naked and unprotected. The Buick and the Lincoln were even on the road now.

Malone had his revolver out. He fired the first shot without even realizing fully that he'd done so, and he heard a piercing scream from Barbara in the back seat. He had no time to look back.

A .44 Magnum is not, by any means, a small gun. As handguns go—revolvers and automatics—it is about as large as a gun can get to be. An ordinary car has absolutely no chance against it.

Much less the glass in an ordinary car.

The first slug drilled its way through the window glass as though it were not there, and slammed its way through an even more unprotected obstacle, the frontal bones of the triggerman's skull. The second slug from Malone's gun followed it right away, and missed the hole the first slug had made by something less than an inch.

The big, apelike thug who was holding the shotgun had a chance to pull the trigger once more, but he wasn't aiming very well. The blast merely scored the paint off the top of the Lincoln.

The rear window of the Buick was open, and Malone caught sight of another glint of blued steel from the corner of his eye. There was no time to shift aim-not with bullets flying like swallows on the way to Capistrano. Malone thought faster than he had imagined himself capable of doing, and decided to aim for the driver.

Evidently the man in the rear seat of the Buick had had the same inspiration. Malone blasted two more high-velocity lead slugs at the driver of the big Buick, and at the same time the man in the Buick's rear seat fired at Boyd.

But Boyd had shifted tactics. He'd hit the brakes. Now he came down hard on the accelerator instead.

The chorus of shrieks from the Lincoln's back seat increased slightly in volume. Barbara, Malone knew, wasn't badly hurt; she hadn't even stopped for breath since the first shot had been fired. Anybody who could scream like that, he told himself, had to be healthy.

As the Lincoln leaped ahead, Malone pulled the trigger of his .44 twice more. The heavy, high-speed chunks of streamlined copper-coated lead leaped from the muzzle of the gun and slammed into the driver of the Buick without wasting any time. The Buick slewed across the highway.

The two shots fired by the man in the back seat went past Malone's head with a whizz, missing both him and Boyd by a margin too narrow to think about.

But those were the last shots. The only difference between the FBI and the Enemy seemed to be determination and practice.

The Buick spun into a flat sideskid, swiveled on its wheels and slammed into the ditch at the side of the road, turning over and over, making a horrible noise, as it broke up.

Boyd slowed the car again, just as there was a sudden blast of fire. The Buick had burst into flame and was spitting heat and smoke and fire in all directions. Malone sent one more bullet after it in a last flurry of action-saving his last one for possible later emergencies.

Boyd jammed on the brakes and the Lincoln came to a screaming halt. In silence he and Malone watched the burning Buick roll over and over into the desert beyond the shoulder.

"My God," Boyd said. "My ears!"

Malone understood at once. The blast from his own still-smoking .44 had roared past Boyd's head during the gun battle. No wonder the man's ears hurt. It was a wonder he wasn't altogether deaf.

But Boyd shook off the pain and brought out his own .44 as he stepped out of the car. Malone followed

him, his gun trained.

From the rear, Her Majesty said: "It's safe to rise now, isn't it?"

"You ought to know," Malone said. "You can tell if they're still alive."

There was silence while Queen Elizabeth frowned for a moment in concentration. A look of pain crossed her face, and then, as her expression smoothed again, she said: "The traitors are dead. All except one, and he's—" She paused. "He's dying," she finished. "He can't hurt you."

There was no need for further battle. Malone reholstered his .44 and turned to Boyd. "Tom, call the State Police," he said. "Get 'em down here fast."

He waited while Boyd climbed back under the wheel and began punching buttons on the dashboard. Then Malone went toward the burning Buick.

He tried to drag the men out, but it wasn't any use. The first two, in the front seat, had the kind of holes in them people talked about throwing elephants through. Head and chest had been hit.

Malone couldn't get close enough to the fiercely blazing automobile to make even a try for the men in the back seat.

* * * *

He was sitting quietly on the edge of the rear seat when the Nevada Highway Patrol cars drove up next to them. Barbara Wilson had stopped screaming, but she was still sobbing on Malone's shoulder. "It's all right," he told her, feeling ineffectual.

"I never saw anybody killed before," she said.

"It's all right," Malone said. "Nothing's going to hurt you. I'll protect you."

He wondered if he meant it, and found, to his surprise, that he did. Barbara Wilson sniffled and looked up at him. "Mr. Malone—"

"Ken," he said.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Ken-I'm so afraid. I saw the hole in one of the men's heads, when you fired-it was—"

"Don't think about it," Malone said. To him, the job had been an unpleasant occurrence, but a job, that was all. He could see, though, how it might affect people who were new to it.

"You're so brave," she said.

Malone tightened his arm around the girl's shoulder. "Just depend on me," he said. "You'll be all right if you—"

The State Trooper walked up then, and looked at them. "Mr. Malone?" he said. He seemed to be taken slightly aback at the costuming.

"That's right," Malone said. He pulled out his ID card and the little golden badge. The State Patrolman

looked at them, and looked back at Malone.

"What's with the getup?" he said.

"FBI," Malone said, hoping his voice carried conviction. "Official business."

"In costume?"

"Never mind about the details," Malone snapped.

"He's an FBI agent, sir," Barbara said. "And what are you?" the Patrolman said. "Lady Jane Grey?"

"I'm a nurse," Barbara said. "A psychiatric nurse."

"For nuts?"

"For disturbed patients."

The Patrolman thought that over. "Hell, you've got the identity cards and stuff," he said at last. "Maybe you've got a reason to dress up. How would I know? I'm only a State Patrolman."

"Let's cut the monologue," Malone said savagely, "and get to business."

The Patrolman stared. Then he said: "All right, sir. Yes, sir. I'm Lieutenant Adams, Mr. Malone. Suppose you tell me what happened?"

Carefully and concisely, Malone told him the story of the Buick that had pulled up beside them, and what happened afterward.

Meanwhile, the other cops had been looking over the wreck. When Malone had finished his story, Lieutenant Adams flipped his notebook shut and looked over toward them. "I guess it's okay, sir," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, it's justifiable homicide. Self-defense. Any reason why they'd want to kill you?"

Malone thought about the Golden Palace. That might be a reason-but it might not. And why burden an innocent State Patrolman with the facts of FBI life?

"Official," he said. "Your chief will get the report."

The Patrolman nodded. "I'll have to take a deposition tomorrow, but—"

"I know," Malone said. "Thanks. Can we go on to our hotel now?"

"I guess," the Patrolman said. "Go ahead. We'll take care of the rest of this. You'll be getting a call later."

"Fine," Malone said. "Trace those hoods, and any connections they might have had. Get the information to me as soon as possible."

Lieutenant Adams nodded. "You won't have to leave the state, will you?" he asked. "I don't mean that you can't, exactly-hell, you're FBI. But it'd be easier—"

"Call Burris in Washington," Malone said. "He can get hold of me-and if the Governor wants to know where we are, or the State's Attorney, put them in touch with Burris too. Okay?"

"Okay," Lieutenant Adams said. "Sure." He blinked at Malone. "Listen," he said. "About those costumes—"

"We're trying to catch Henry VIII for the murder of Anne Boleyn," Malone said with a polite smile. "Okay?"

"I was only asking," Lieutenant Adams said. "Can't blame a man for asking, now, can you?"

Malone climbed into his front seat. "Call me later," he said. The car started. "Back to the hotel, Sir Thomas," Malone said, and the car roared off.

CHAPTER 7

Yucca Flats, Malone thought, certainly deserved its name. It was about as flat as land could get, and it contained millions upon millions of useless yuccas. Perhaps they were good for something, Malone thought, but they weren't good for him.

The place might, of course, have been called Cactus Flats, but the cacti were neither as big nor as impressive as the yuccas.

Or was that yucci?

Possibly, Malone mused, it was simply yucks.

And whatever it was, there were millions of it. Malone felt he couldn't stand the sight of another yucca. He was grateful for only one thing.

It wasn't summer. If the Elizabethans had been forced to drive in closed cars through the Nevada desert in the summertime, they might have started a cult of nudity, Malone felt. It was bad enough now, in what was supposed to be winter.

The sun was certainly bright enough, for one thing. It glared through the cloudless sky and glanced with blinding force off the road. Sir Thomas Boyd squinted at it through the rather incongruous sunglasses he was wearing, while Malone wondered idly if it was the sunglasses, or the rest of the world, that was an anachronism. But Sir Thomas kept his eyes grimly on the road as he gunned the powerful Lincoln toward the Yucca Flats Labs at eighty miles an hour.

Malone twisted himself around and faced the women in the back seat. Past them, through the rear window of the Lincoln, he could see the second car. It followed them gamely, carrying the newest addition to Sir Kenneth Malone's Collection of Bats.

"Bats?" Her Majesty said suddenly, but gently. "Shame on you, Sir Kenneth. These are poor, sick people. We must do our best to help them-not to think up silly names for them. For shame!"

"I suppose so," Malone said wearily. He sighed and, for the fifth time that day, he asked: "Does Your Majesty have any idea where our spy is now?"

"Well, really, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said with the slightest of hesitations, "it isn't easy, you know. Telepathy has certain laws, just like everything else. After all, even a game has laws. Being telepathic didn't help me to play poker-I still had to learn the rules. And telepathy has rules, too. A telepath can easily confuse another telepath by using some of those rules."

"Oh, fine," Malone said. "Well, have you got into contact with his mind yet?"

"Oh, yes," Her Majesty said happily. "And my goodness, he's certainly digging up a lot of information, isn't he?"

Malone moaned softly. "But who is he?" he asked after a second.

The Queen stared at the roof of the car in what looked like concentration. "He hasn't thought of his name yet," she said. "I mean, at least, if he has, he hasn't mentioned it to me. Really, Sir Kenneth, you have no idea how difficult all this is."

Malone swallowed with difficulty.

"Where is he, then," said. "Can you tell me that, at least? His location?"

Her Majesty looked positively desolated with sadness. "I can't be sure," she said. "I really can't be exactly sure just where he is. He does keep moving around, I know that. But you have to remember that he doesn't want me to find him. He certainly doesn't want to be found by the FBI-would you?"

"Your Majesty," Malone said, "I am the FBI."

"Yes," the Queen said, "but suppose you weren't? He's doing his best to hide himself, even from me. It's sort of a game he's playing."

"A game!"

Her Majesty looked contrite. "Believe me, Sir Kenneth, the minute I know exactly where he is, I'll tell you. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die-which I can't, of course, being immortal." Nevertheless, she made an X-mark over her left breast. "All right?"

"All right," Malone said, out of sheer necessity. "Okay. But don't waste any time telling me. Do it right away. We've got to find that spy and isolate him somehow."

"Please don't worry yourself, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "Your Queen is doing everything she can."

"I know that, Your Majesty," Malone said. "I'm sure of it." Privately, he wondered just how much even she could do. Then he realized-for perhaps the ten-thousandth time-that there was no such thing as wondering privately any more.

"That's quite right, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said sweetly. "And it's about time you got used to it."

"What's going on?" Boyd said. "More reading minds back there?"

"That's right, Sir Thomas," the Queen said.

"I've about gotten used to it," Boyd said almost cheerfully. "Pretty soon they'll come and take me away, but I don't mind at all." He whipped the car around a bend in the road savagely. "Pretty soon they'll put me with the other sane people and let the bats inherit the world. But I don't mind at all."

"Sir Thomas!" Her Majesty said in shocked tones.

"Please," Boyd said with a deceptive calmness. "Just Mr. Boyd. Not even Lieutenant Boyd, or Sergeant Boyd. Just Mr. Boyd. Or, if you prefer, Tom."

"Sir Thomas," Her Majesty said, "I really can't understand this sudden—"

"Then don't understand it," Boyd said. "All I know is everybody's nuts, and I'm sick and tired of it."

A pall of silence fell over the company.

"Look, Tom," Malone began at last.

"Don't you try smoothing me down," Boyd snapped.

Malone's eyebrows rose. "Okay," he said. "I won't smooth you down. I'll just tell you to shut up, to keep driving-and to show some respect to Her Majesty."

"I—" Boyd stopped. There was a second of silence.

"That's better," Her Majesty said with satisfaction.

Lady Barbara stretched in the back seat, next to Her Majesty. "This is certainly a long drive," she said. "Have we got much farther to go?"

"Not too far," Malone said. "We ought to be there soon."

"I-I'm sorry for the way I acted," Barbara said.

"What do you mean, the way you acted?"

"Crying like that," Barbara said with some hesitation. "Making an—absolute idiot of myself. When that other car-tried to get us."

"Don't worry about it," Malone said. "It was nothing."

"I just-made trouble for you," Barbara said.

Her Majesty touched the girl on the shoulder. "He's not thinking about the trouble you cause him," she said quietly.

"Of course I'm not," Malone told her. "But I—"

"My dear girl," Her Majesty said, "I believe that Sir Kenneth is, at least partly, in love with you."

Malone blinked. It was perfectly true-even if he hadn't quite known it himself until now. Telepaths, he was discovering, were occasionally handy things to have around.

"In ... love.... "Barbara said.

"And you, my dear—" Her Majesty began.

"Please, Your Majesty," Lady Barbara said. "No more. Not just now."

The Queen smiled, almost to herself. "Certainly, dear," she said.

The car sped on. In the distance, Malone could see the blot on the desert that indicated the broad expanse of Yucca Flats Labs. Just the fact that it could be seen, he knew, didn't mean an awful lot. Malone had been able to see it for the past fifteen minutes, and it didn't look as if they'd gained an inch on it. Desert distances are deceptive.

At long last, however, the main gate of the laboratories hove into view. Boyd made a left turn off the highway and drove a full seven miles along the restricted road, right up to the big gate that marked the entrance of the laboratories themselves. Once again, they were faced with the army of suspicious guards and security officers.

This time, suspicion was somewhat heightened by the dress of the visitors. Malone had to explain about six times that the costumes were part of an FBI arrangement, that he had not stolen his identity cards, that Boyd's cards were Boyd's, too, and in general that the four of them were not insane, not spies, and not jokesters out for a lark in the sunshine.

Malone had expected all of that. He went through the rigmarole wearily but without any sense of surprise. The one thing he hadn't been expecting was the man who was waiting for him on the other side of the gate.

When he'd finished identifying everybody for the fifth or sixth time, he began to climb back into the car. A familiar voice stopped him cold.

"Just a minute, Malone," Andrew J. Burriss said. He erupted from the guardhouse like an avenging angel, followed closely by a thin man, about five feet ten inches in height, with brush-cut brown hair, round horn-rimmed spectacles, large hands and a small Sir Francis Drake beard. Malone looked at the two figures blankly.

"Something wrong, Chief?" he said.

Burriss came toward the car. The thin gentleman followed him, walking with an odd bouncing step that must have been acquired, Malone thought, over years of treading on rubber eggs. "I don't know," Burriss said when he'd reached the door. "When I was in Washington, I seemed to know-but when I get out here in this desert, everything just goes haywire." He rubbed at his forehead.

Then he looked into the car. "Hello, Boyd," he said pleasantly.

"Hello, Chief," Boyd said.

Burriss blinked. "Boyd, you look like Henry VIII," he said with only the faintest trace of surprise.

"Doesn't he, though?" Her Majesty said from the rear seat. "I've noticed that resemblance myself."

Burriss gave her a tiny smile. "Oh," he said. "Hello, Your Majesty. I'm—"

"Andrew J. Burriss, Director of the FBI," the Queen finished for him. "Yes, I know. It's very nice to meet you at last. I've seen you on television, and over the video phone. You photograph badly, you know."

"I do?" Burriss said pleasantly. It was obvious that he was keeping himself under very tight control.

Malone felt remotely sorry for the man-but only remotely. Burriss might as well know, he thought, what they had all been going through the past several days.

Her Majesty was saying something about the honorable estate of knighthood, and the Queen's list. Malone began paying attention when she came to:"-and I hereby dub thee—" She stopped suddenly, turned and said: "Sir Kenneth, give me your weapon."

Malone hesitated for a long, long second. But Burriss' eye was on him, and he could interpret the look without much trouble. There was only one thing for him to do. He pulled out his .44, ejected the cartridges in his palm (and reminded himself to reload the gun as soon as he got it back), and handed the weapon to the Queen, butt foremost.

She took the butt of the revolver in her right hand, leaned out the window of the car, and said in a fine, distinct voice: "Kneel, Andrew."

Malone watched with wide, astonished eyes as Andrew J. Burriss, Director of the FBI, went to one knee in a low and solemn genuflection. Queen Elizabeth Thompson nodded her satisfaction.

She tapped Burriss gently on each shoulder with the muzzle of the gun. "I knight thee Sir Andrew," she said. She cleared her throat. "My, this desert air is dry.... Rise, Sir Andrew, and know that you are henceforth Knight Commander of the Queen's Own FBI."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Burriss said humbly.

He rose to his feet silently. The Queen withdrew into the car again and handed the gun back to Malone. He thumbed the cartridges into the chambers of the cylinder and listened dumbly.

"Your Majesty," Burriss said, "this is Dr. Harry Gamble, the head of Project Isle. Dr. Gamble, this is Her Majesty the Queen; Lady Barbara Wilson, her-uh-her lady-in-waiting; Sir Kenneth Malone; and King-I mean Sir Thomas Boyd." He gave the four a single bright impartial smile. Then he tore his eyes away from the others, and bent his gaze on Sir Kenneth Malone. "Come over here a minute, Malone," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "I want to talk to you."

Malone climbed out of the car and went around to meet Burriss. He felt just a little worried as he followed the Director away from the car. True, he had sent Burriss a long telegram the night before, in code. But he hadn't expected the man to show up in Yucca Flats. There didn't seem to be any reason for it.

And when there isn't any reason, Malone told himself sagely, it's a bad one.

"What's the trouble, Chief?" he asked.

Burriss sighed. "None so far," he said quietly. "I got a report from the Nevada State Patrol, and ran it through R&I. They identified the men you killed, all right-but it didn't do us any good. They're hired

hoods."

"Who hired them?" Malone said.

Burriss shrugged. "Somebody with money," he said. "Hell, men like that would kill their own grandmothers if the price were right-you know that. We can't trace them back any farther."

Malone nodded. That was, he had to admit, bad news. But then, when had he last had any good news?

"We're nowhere near our telepathic spy," Burriss said. "We haven't come any closer than we were when we started. Have you got anything? Anything at all, no matter how small?"

"Not that I know of, sir," Malone said.

"What about the little old lady-what's her name? Thompson. Anything from her?"

Malone hesitated. "She has a close fix on the spy, sir," he said slowly, "but she doesn't seem able to identify him right away."

"What else does she want?" Burriss said. "We've made her Queen and given her a full retinue in costume; we've let her play roulette and poker with Government money. Does she want to hold a mass execution? If she does, I can supply some Congressmen, Malone. I'm sure it could be arranged." He looked at the agent narrowly. "I might even be able to supply an FBI man or two," he added.

Malone swallowed hard. "I'm trying the best I can, sir," he said. "What about the others?"

Burriss looked even unhappier than usual. "Come along," he said. "I'll show you."

When they got back to the car, Dr. Gamble was talking spiritedly with Her Majesty about Roger Bacon. "Before my time, of course," the Queen was saying, "but I'm sure he was a most interesting man. Now when dear old Marlowe wrote his Faust, he and I had several long discussions about such matters. Alchemy, Doctor—"

Burriss interrupted with: "I beg your pardon, Your Majesty, but we must get on. Perhaps you'll be able to continue your-ah-audience later." He turned to Boyd. "Sir Thomas," he said with an effort, "drive directly to the Westinghouse buildings. Over that way." He pointed. "Dr. Gamble will ride with you, and the rest of us will follow in the second car. Let's move."

He stepped back as the project head got into the car, and watched it roar off. Then he and Malone went to the second car, another FBI Lincoln. Two agents were sitting in the back seat, with a still figure between them.

With a shock, Malone recognized William Logan and the agents he'd detailed to watch the telepath. Logan's face did not seem to have changed expression since Malone had seen it last, and he wondered wildly if perhaps it had to be dusted once a week.

He got in behind the wheel and Burriss slid in next to him.

"Westinghouse," Burriss said. "And let's get there in a hurry."

"Right," Malone said, and started the car.

"We just haven't had a single lead," Burris said. "I was hoping you'd come up with something. Your telegram detailed the fight, of course, and the rest of what's been happening-but I hoped there'd be something more."

"There isn't," Malone was forced to admit. "All we can do is try to persuade Her Majesty to tell us—"

"Oh, I know it isn't easy," Burris said. "But it seems to me...."

By the time they'd arrived at the administrative offices of Westinghouse's psionics research area, Malone found himself wishing that something would happen. Possibly, he thought, lightning might strike, or an earthquake swallow everything up. He was, suddenly, profoundly tired of the entire affair.

CHAPTER 8

Four days later, he was more than tired. He was exhausted. The six psychopaths-including Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I-had been housed in a converted dormitory in the Westinghouse area, together with four highly nervous and even more highly trained and investigated psychiatrists from St. Elizabeths in Washington. The Convention of Nuts, as Malone called it privately, was in full swing.

And it was every bit as strange as he'd thought it was going to be. Unfortunately, five of the six (Her Majesty being the only exception) were completely out of contact with the world. The psychiatrists referred to them in worried tones as "unavailable for therapy," and spent most of their time brooding over possible ways of bringing them back into the real world for a while, at least far enough so that they could be spoken with.

Malone stayed away from the five who were completely psychotic. The weird babblings of fifty-year-old Barry Miles disconcerted him. They sounded like little Charlie O'Neill's strange semi-connected jabber, but Westinghouse's Dr. O'Connor said that it seemed to represent another phenomenon entirely. William Logan's blank face was a memory of horror, but the constant tinkling giggles of Ardith Parker, the studied and concentrated way that Gordon Macklin wove meaningless patterns in the air with his waving fingers, and the rhythmless, melodyless humming that seemed to be all there was to the personality of Robert Cassidy were simply too much for Malone. Taken singly, each was frightening and remote; all together, they wove a picture of insanity that chilled him more than he wanted to admit.

When the seventh telepath was flown in from Honolulu, Malone didn't even bother to see her. He let the psychiatrists take over directly, and simply avoided their sessions.

Queen Elizabeth I, on the other hand, he found genuinely likeable.

According to the psych boys, she had been (as both Malone and Her Majesty had theorized) heavily frustrated by being the possessor of a talent which no one else recognized. Beyond that, the impact of other minds was disturbing; there was a slight loss of identity which seemed to be a major factor in every case of telepathic insanity. But the Queen had compensated for her frustrations in the easiest possible way; she had simply traded her identity for another one, and had rationalized a single, overruling delusion: that she was Queen Elizabeth I of England, still alive and wrongfully deprived of her throne.

"It's a beautiful rationalization," one of the psychiatrists said with more than a trace of admiration in his voice. "Complete and thoroughly consistent. She's just traded identities-and everything else she does-everything else-stems logically out of her delusional premise. Beautiful."

She may have been crazy, Malone realized. But she was a long way from stupid.

The project was in full swing. The only trouble was that they were no nearer finding the telepath than they had been three weeks before. With five completely blank human beings to work with, and the sixth Queen Elizabeth (Malone heard privately that the last telepath, the girl from Honolulu, was no better than the first five; she had apparently regressed into what one of the psychiatrists called a “non-identity childhood syndrome.” Malone didn't know what it meant, but it sounded terrible.)-with that crew, Malone could see why progress was their most difficult commodity.

Dr. Harry Gamble, the head of Project Isle, was losing poundage by the hour with worry. And, Malone reflected, he could ill afford it.

Burris, Malone and Boyd had set themselves up in a temporary office within the Westinghouse area. The Director had left his assistant in charge in Washington. Nothing, he said over and over again, was as important as the spy in Project Isle.

Apparently Boyd had come to believe that, too. At any rate, though he was still truculent, there were no more outbursts of rebellion.

But, on the fourth day:

"What do we do now?" Burris asked.

"Shoot ourselves," Boyd said promptly.

"Now, look here—" Malone began, but he was overruled.

"Boyd," Burris said levelly, "if I hear any more of that sort of pessimism, you're going to be an exception to the beard rule. One more crack out of you, and you can go out and buy yourself a razor."

Boyd put his hand over his chin protectively, and said nothing at all.

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "Aren't there any sane telepaths in the world?"

"We can't find any," Burris said. "We—"

There was a knock at the office door. "Who's there?" Burris called. "Dr. Gamble," said the man's surprisingly baritone voice.

Burris called: "Come in, Doctor," and the door opened. Dr. Gamble's lean face looked almost haggard.

"Mr. Burris," he said, extending his arms a trifle, "can't anything be done?" Malone had seen Gamble speaking before, and had wondered if it would be possible for the man to talk with his hands tied behind his back. Apparently it wouldn't be. "We feel that we are approaching a critical stage in Project Isle," the scientist said, enclosing one fist within the other hand. "If anything more gets out to the Soviets, we might as well publish our findings—" a wide, outflung gesture of both arms—"in the newspapers."

Burris stepped back. "We're doing the best we can, Dr. Gamble," he said. All things considered, his obvious try at radiating confidence was nearly successful. "After all," he went on, "we know a great deal more than we did four days ago. Miss Thompson has assured us that the spy is right here, within the

compound of Yucca Flats Labs. We've bottled everything up in this compound, and I'm confident that no information is at present getting through to the Soviet Government. Miss Thompson agrees with me."

"Miss Thompson?" Gamble said, one hand at his bearded chin.

"The Queen," Burris said.

Gamble nodded and two fingers touched his forehead. "Ah," he said. "Of course." He rubbed at the back of his neck. "But we can't keep everybody who's here now locked up forever. Sooner or later we'll have to let them—" His left hand described the gesture of a man tossing away a wad of paper—"go." His hands fell to his sides. "We're lost, unless we can find that spy."

"We'll find him," Burris said with a show of great confidence.

"But—"

"Give her time," Burris said. "Give her time. Remember her mental condition."

Boyd looked up. "Rome," he said in an absent fashion, "wasn't built in a daze."

Burris glared at him, but said nothing. Malone filled the conversational hole with what he thought would be nice, and hopeful, and untrue.

"We know he's someone on the reservation, so we'll catch him eventually," he said. "And as long as his information isn't getting into Soviet hands, we're safe." He glanced at his wristwatch.

Dr. Gamble said: "But—"

"My, my," Malone said. "Almost lunchtime. I have to go over and have lunch with Her Majesty. Maybe she's dug up something more."

"I hope so," Dr. Gamble said, apparently successfully deflected. "I do hope so."

"Well," Malone said, "pardon me." He shucked off his coat and trousers. Then he proceeded to put on the doublet and hose that hung in the little office closet. He shrugged into the fur-trimmed, slash-sleeved coat, adjusted the plumed hat to his satisfaction with great care, and gave Burris and the others a small bow. "I go to an audience with Her Majesty, gentlemen," he said in a grave, well-modulated voice. "I shall return anon."

He went out the door and closed it carefully behind him. When he had gone a few steps he allowed himself the luxury of a deep sigh.

Then he went outside and across the dusty street to the barracks where Her Majesty and the other telepaths were housed. No one paid any attention to him, and he rather missed the stares he'd become used to drawing. But by now, everybody was used to seeing Elizabethan clothing. Her Majesty had arrived at a new plateau.

She would now allow no one to have audience with her unless he was properly dressed. Even the psychiatrists-whom she had, with a careful sense of meiosis, appointed Physicians to the Royal House-had to wear the stuff.

Malone went over the whole case in his mind-for about the thousandth time, he told himself bitterly.

Who could the telepathic spy be? It was like looking for a needle in a rolling stone, he thought. Or something. He did remember clearly that a stitch in time saved nine, but he didn't know nine what, and suspected it had nothing to do with his present problem.

How about Dr. Harry Gamble, Malone thought. It seemed a little unlikely that the head of Project Isle would be spying on his own men-particularly since he already had all the information. But, on the other hand, he was just as probable a spy as anybody else.

Malone moved onward. Dr. Thomas O'Connor, the Westinghouse psionics man, was the next nominee. Before Malone had actually found Her Majesty, he had had a suspicion that O'Connor had cooked the whole thing up to throw the FBI off the trail and confuse everybody, and that he'd intended merely to have the FBI chase ghosts while the real spy did his work undetected.

But what if O'Connor were the spy himself-a telepath? What if he were so confident of his ability to throw the Queen off the track that he had allowed the FBI to find all the other telepaths? There was another argument for that: he'd had to report the findings of his machine no matter what it cost him; there were too many other men on his staff who knew about it.

O'Connor was a perfectly plausible spy, too. But he didn't seem very likely. The head of a government project is likely to be a much-investigated man. Could any tie-up with Russia-even a psionic one-stand up against that kind of investigation? It was possible. Anything, after all, was possible. You eliminated the impossible, and then whatever remained, however improbable....

Malone told himself morosely to shut up and think.

O'Connor, he told himself, might be the spy. It would be a pleasure, he realized, to go to the office of that superior scientist and arrest him. "I know your true name," he muttered. "It isn't O'Connor, it's Moriarty." He wondered if the Westinghouse man had ever done any work on the dynamics of an asteroid. Then he wondered what the dynamics of an asteroid were.

But if O'Connor were the spy, nothing made sense. Why would he have disclosed the fact that people were having their minds read in the first place?

Sadly, Malone gave up the idea. But, then, there were other ideas. The other psychiatrists, for instance....

The only trouble with them, Malone realized, was that there seemed to be neither motive nor anything else to connect them to the case. There was no evidence, none in any direction.

Why, there was just as much evidence that the spy was really Kenneth J. Malone, he told himself.

And then he stopped.

Maybe Tom Boyd had been thinking that way about him. Maybe Boyd suspected that he, Malone, was really the spy.

Certainly it worked in reverse. Boyd...

No, Malone told himself firmly. That was silly.

If he were going to consider Boyd, he realized, he might as well go whole hog and think about Andrew J. Burris.

And that really was ridiculous. Absolutely ridic....

Well, Queen Elizabeth had seemed pretty certain when she'd pointed him out in Dr. Dowson's office. And the fact that she'd apparently changed her mind didn't have to mean very much. After all, how much faith could you place in Her Majesty at the best of times? If she'd made a mistake about Burris in the first place, she could just as well have made a mistake in the second place. Or about the spy's being at Yucca Flats at all.

In which case, Malone thought sadly, they were right back where they'd started from.

Behind their own goal line.

One way or another, though, Her Majesty had made a mistake. She'd pointed Burris out as the spy, and then she'd said she'd been wrong. Either Burris was a spy, or else he wasn't. You couldn't have it both ways.

And if Burris really were the spy, Malone thought, then why had he started the investigation in the first place? You came back to the same question with Burris, he realized, that you had with Dr. O'Connor: it didn't make sense for a man to play one hand against the other. Maybe the right hand sometimes didn't know what the left hand was doing, but this was ridiculous.

So Burris wasn't the spy. And Her Majesty had made a mistake when she'd said....

"Wait a minute," Malone told himself suddenly.

Had she?

Maybe, after all, you could have it both ways. The thought occurred to him with a startling suddenness and he stood silent upon a peak in Yucca Flats, contemplating it. A second went by.

And then something Burris himself had said came back to him, something that—

"I'll be damned," he muttered.

He came to a dead stop in the middle of the street. In one sudden flash of insight, all the pieces of the case he'd been looking at for so long fell together and formed one consistent picture. The pattern was complete.

Malone blinked.

In that second, he knew exactly who the spy was.

A jeep honked raucously and swerved around him. The driver leaned out to curse and Malone waved at him, dimly recognizing a private eye he had once known, a middle-aged man named Archer. Wondering vaguely what Archer was doing this far East, and in a jeep at that, Malone watched the vehicle disappear down the street. There were more cars coming, but what difference did that make? Malone didn't care about cars. After all, he had the answer, the whole answer....

"I'll be damned," he said again, abruptly, and wheeled around to head back to the offices.

On the way, he stopped in at another small office, this one inhabited by the two FBI men from Las Vegas. He gave a series of quick orders, and got the satisfaction, as he left, of seeing one of the FBI men grabbing for a phone in a hurry.

It was good to be doing things again, important things.

Burriss, Boyd and Dr. Gamble were still talking as Malone entered.

"That," Burriss said, "was one hell of a quick lunch. What's Her Majesty doing now-running a diner?"

Malone ignored the bait, and drew himself to his full height. "Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "Her Majesty has asked that all of us attend her in audience. She has information of the utmost gravity to impart, and wishes this audience at once."

Dr. Gamble made a puzzled, circular gesture with one hand. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Is something—"

The hand dropped-"wrong?"

Burriss barely glanced at him. A startled expression came over his features. "Has she—" he began, and stopped, leaving his mouth open and the rest of the sentence unfinished.

Malone nodded gravely and drew in a breath. Elizabethan periods were hard on the lungs, he had begun to realize: you needed a lot of air before you embarked on a sentence. "I believe, gentlemen," he said, "that Her Majesty is about to reveal the identity of the spy who has been battening on Project Isle."

The silence lasted no more than three seconds. Dr. Gamble didn't even make a gesture during that time. Then Burriss spoke.

"Let's go," he snapped. He wheeled and headed for the door. The others promptly followed.

"Gentlemen!" Malone said, sounding, as far as he could tell, properly shocked and offended. "Your dress!"

"What?" Dr. Gamble said, throwing up both hands.

"Oh, no," Boyd chimed in. "Not now."

Burriss simply said: "You're quite right. Get dressed, Boyd-I mean, of course, Sir Thomas."

While they were dressing, Malone put in a call to Dr. O'Connor's office. The scientist was as frosty as ever.

"Yes, Mr. Malone?" The sound of that voice, Malone reflected, was enough to give anybody double revolving pneumonia with knobs on.

"Dr. O'Connor," he said, "Her Majesty wants you in her court in ten minutes-and in full court dress."

O'Connor merely sighed, like Boreas. "What is this," he asked, "more tomfoolery?"

"I really couldn't say," Malone told him coyly. "But I'd advise you to be there. It might interest you."

"Interest me?" O'Connor stormed. "I've got work to do here-important work. You simply do not realize, Mr. Malone—"

"Whatever I realize," Malone cut in, feeling brave, "I'm passing on orders from Her Majesty."

"That insane woman," O'Connor stated flatly, "is not going to order me about. Good Lord, do you know what you're saying?"

Malone nodded. "I certainly do," he said cheerfully. "If you'd rather, I can have the orders backed up by the United States Government. But that won't be necessary, will it?"

"The United States Government," O'Connor said, thawing perceptibly about the edges, "ought to allow a man to do his proper work, and not force him to go chasing off after the latest whims of some insane old lady."

"You will be there, now, won't you?" Malone asked. His own voice reminded him of something, and in a second he had it: the cooing, gentle persuasion of Dr. Andrew Blake of Rice Pavilion, who had locked Malone in a padded cell. It was the voice of a man talking to a mental case.

It sounded remarkably apt. Dr. O'Connor went slightly purple, but controlled himself magnificently. "I'll be there," he said.

"Good," Malone told him, and snapped the phone off.

Then he put in a second call to the psychiatrists from St. Elizabeths and told them the same thing. More used to the strange demands of neurotic and psychotic patients, they were readier to comply.

Everyone, Malone realized with satisfaction, was now assembling. Burris and the others were ready to go, sparkingly dressed and looking impatient. Malone put down the phone and took one great breath of relief.

Then, beaming, he led the others out.

* * * *

Ten minutes later, there were nine men in Elizabethan costume standing outside the room which had been designated as the Queen's Court. Dr. Gamble's costume did not quite fit him; his sleeve-ruffs were half way up to his elbows and his doublet had an unfortunate tendency to creep. The St. Elizabeths men, all four of them, looked just a little like moth-eaten versions of old silent pictures. Malone looked them over with a somewhat sardonic eye. Not only did he have the answer to the whole problem that had been plaguing them, but his costume was a stunning, perfect fit.

"Now, I want you men to let me handle this," Malone said. "I know just what I want to say, and I think I can get the information without too much trouble."

One of the psychiatrists spoke up. "I trust you won't disturb the patient, Mr. Malone," he said.

"Sir Kenneth," Malone snapped.

The psychiatrist looked both abashed and worried. "I'm sorry," he said doubtfully.

Malone nodded. "That's all right," he said. "I'll try not to disturb Her Majesty unduly."

The psychiatrists conferred. When they came out of the huddle one of them-Malone was never able to tell them apart-said: "Very well, we'll let you handle it. But we will be forced to interfere if we feel you're-ah-going too far."

Malone said: "That's fair enough, gentlemen. Let's go."

He opened the door.

It was a magnificent room. The whole place had been done over in plastic and synthetic fibers to look like something out of the Sixteenth Century. It was as garish, and as perfect, as a Hollywood movie set-which wasn't surprising, since two stage designers had been hired away from color-TV spectaculars to set it up. At the far end of the room, past the rich hangings and the flaming chandeliers, was a great throne, and on it Her Majesty was seated. Lady Barbara reclined on the steps at her feet.

Malone saw the expression on Her Majesty's face. He wanted to talk to Barbara-but there wasn't time. Later, there might be. Now, he collected his mind and drove one thought at the Queen, one single powerful thought:

Read me! You know by this time that I have the truth-but read deeper!

The expression on her face changed suddenly. She was smiling a sad, gentle little smile. Lady Barbara, who had looked up at the approach of Sir Kenneth and his entourage, relaxed again, but her eyes remained on Malone. "You may approach, my lords," said the Queen.

Sir Kenneth led the procession, with Sir Thomas and Sir Andrew close behind him. O'Connor and Gamble came next, and bringing up the rear were the four psychiatrists. They strode slowly along the red carpet that stretched from the door to the foot of the throne. They came to a halt a few feet from the steps leading up to the throne, and bowed in unison.

"You may explain, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said.

"Your Majesty understands the conditions?" Malone asked.

"Perfectly," said the Queen. "Proceed."

Now the expression on Barbara's face changed, to wonder and a kind of fright. Malone didn't look at her. Instead, he turned to Dr. O'Connor.

"Dr. O'Connor, what are your plans for the telepaths who have been brought here?" He shot the question out quickly, and O'Connor was caught off-balance.

"Well-ah-we would like their cooperation in further research which we-ah-plan to do into the actual mechanisms of telepathy. Provided, of course—" He coughed gently-"provided that they become-ah-accessible. Miss-I mean, of course, Her Majesty has already been a great deal of help." He gave Malone an odd look. It seemed to say: What's coming next?

Malone simply gave him a nod, and a “Thank you, Doctor,” and turned to Burris. He could feel Barbara's eyes on him, but he went on with his prepared questions. “Chief,” he said, “what about you? After we nail our spy, what happens-to Her Majesty, I mean? You don't intend to stop giving her the homage due her, do you?”

Burris stared, openmouthed. After a second he managed to say: “Why, no, of course not, Sir Kenneth. That is—” and he glanced over at the psychiatrists-“if the doctors think....”

There was another hurried consultation. The four psychiatrists came out of it with a somewhat shaky statement to the effect that treatments which had been proven to have some therapeutic value ought not to be discontinued, although of course there was always the chance that....

“Thank you, gentlemen,” Malone said smoothly. He could see that they were nervous, and no wonder; he could imagine how difficult it was for a psychiatrist to talk about a patient in her presence. But they'd already realized that it didn't make any difference; their thoughts were an open book, anyway.

Lady Barbara said: “Sir-I mean Ken-are you going to—”

“What's this all about?” Burris snapped.

“Just a minute, Sir Andrew,” Malone said. “I'd like to ask one of the doctors here-or all of them, for that matter-one more question.” He whirled and faced them. “I'm assuming that not one of these persons is legally responsible for his or her actions. Is that correct?”

Another hurried huddle. The psych boys were beginning to remind Malone of a semi-pro football team in rather unusual uniforms.

Finally one of them said: “You are correct. According to the latest statutes, all of these persons are legally insane-including Her Majesty.” He paused and gulped. “I except the FBI, of course-and ourselves.” Another pause. “And Dr. O'Connor and Dr. Gamble.”

“And,” said Lady Barbara, “me.” She smiled sweetly at them all.

“Ah,” the psychiatrist said. “Certainly. Of course.” He retired into his group with some confusion.

Malone was looking straight at the throne. Her Majesty's countenance was serene and unruffled.

Barbara said suddenly: “You don't mean-but she—” and closed her mouth. Malone shot her one quick look, and then turned to the Queen.

“Well, Your Majesty?” he said. “You have seen the thoughts of every man here. How do they appear to you?”

Her voice contained both tension and relief. “They are all good men, basically-and kind men,” she said. “And they believe us. That's the important thing, you know. Their belief in us.... Just as you said that first day we met. We've needed belief for so long ... for so long....” Her voice trailed off; it seemed to become lost in a constellation of thoughts. Barbara had turned to look up at Her Majesty.

Malone took a step forward, but Burris interrupted him. “How about the spy?” he said.

Then his eyes widened. Boyd, standing next to him, leaned suddenly forward. “That's why you

mentioned all that about legal immunity because of insanity,” he whispered. “Because—”

"No," Barbara said. "No. She couldn't-she's not—"

They were all looking at Her Majesty, now. She returned them stare for stare, her back stiff and straight and her white hair enhaloed in the room's light. "Sir Kenneth," she said-and her voice was only the least bit unsteady-"they all think I'm the spy."

Barbara stood up. "Listen," she said. "I didn't like Her Majesty at first-well, she was a patient, and that was all, and when she started putting on airs ... but since I've gotten to know her I do like her. I like her because she's good and kind herself, and because-because she wouldn't be a spy. She couldn't be. No matter what any of you think-even you-Sir Kenneth!"

There was a second of silence.

"Of course she's not," Malone said quietly. "She's no spy."

"Would I spy on my own subjects?" she said. "Use your reason!"

"You mean—" Burris began, and Boyd finished for him:

"-she isn't?"

"No," Malone snapped. "She isn't. Remember, you said it would take a telepath to catch a telepath?"

"Well—" Burris began.

"Well, Her Majesty remembered it," Malone said. "And acted on it."

Barbara remained standing. She went to the Queen and put an arm around the little old lady's shoulder. Her Majesty did not object. "I knew," she said. "You couldn't have been a spy."

"Listen, dear," the Queen said. "Your Kenneth has seen the truth of the matter. Listen to him."

"Her Majesty not only caught the spy," Malone said, "but she turned the spy right over to us."

He turned at once and went back down the long red carpet to the door. I really ought to get a sword, he thought, and didn't see Her Majesty smile. He opened the door with a great flourish and said quietly: "Bring him in, boys."

The FBI men from Las Vegas marched in. Between them was their prisoner, a boy with a vacuous face, clad in a straitjacket that seemed to make no difference at all to him. His mind was-somewhere else. But his body was trapped between the FBI agents: the body of William Logan.

"Impossible," one of the psychiatrists said.

Malone spun on his heel and led the way back to the throne. Logan and his guards followed closely.

"Your Majesty," Malone said. "May I present the prisoner?"

"Perfectly correct, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "Poor Willie is your spy. You won't be too hard on

him, will you?"

"I don't think so, Your Majesty," Malone said. "After all—"

"Now wait a minute," Burris exploded. "How the hell did you know any of this?"

Malone bowed to Her Majesty, and winked at Barbara. He turned to Burris. "Well," he said, "I had one piece of information none of the rest of you had. When we were in the Desert Edge Sanatorium, Dr. Dowson called you on the phone. Remember?"

"Sure I remember," Burris said. "So?"

"Well," Malone said, "Her Majesty said she knew just where the spy was. I asked her where—"

"Why didn't you tell me?" Burris screamed. "You knew all this time and you didn't tell me?"

"Hold on," Malone said. "I asked her where-and she said: 'He's right there.' And she was pointing right at your image on the screen."

Burris opened his mouth. Nothing came out. He closed it and tried again. At last he managed one word.

"Me?" he said.

"You," Malone said. "But that's what I realized later. She wasn't pointing at you. She was pointing at Logan, who was in the next room."

Barbara whispered: "Is that right, Your Majesty?"

"Certainly, dear," the Queen said calmly. "Would I lie to Sir Kenneth?"

Malone was still talking. "The thing that set me off this noon was something you said, Sir Andrew," he went on. "You said there weren't any sane telepaths-remember?"

Burris, incapable of speech, merely nodded.

"But according to Her Majesty," Malone said, "we had every telepath in the United States right here. She told me that-and I didn't even see it!"

"Don't blame yourself, Sir Kenneth," the Queen put in. "I did do my best to mislead you, you know."

"You sure did!" Malone said. "And later on, when we were driving here, she said the spy was 'moving around.' That's right; he was in the car behind us, going eighty miles an hour."

Barbara stared. Malone got a lot of satisfaction out of that stare. But there was still more ground to cover.

"Then," he said, "she told us he was here at Yucca Flats-after we brought him here! It had to be one of the other six telepaths."

The psychiatrist who'd muttered: "Impossible," was still muttering it. Malone ignored him.

"And when I remembered her pointing at you," Malone told Burriss, "and remembered that she'd only said: 'He's right there,' I knew it had to be Logan. You weren't there. You were only an image on a TV screen. Logan was there-in the room behind the phone."

Burriss had found his tongue. "All right," he said. "Okay. But what's all this about misleading us-and why didn't she tell us right away, anyhow?"

Malone turned to Her Majesty on the throne. "I think that the Queen had better explain that-if she will."

Queen Elizabeth Thompson nodded very slowly. "I-I only wanted you to respect me," she said. "To treat me properly." Her voice sounded uneven, and her eyes were glistening with unspilled tears. Lady Barbara tightened her arm about the Queen's shoulders once more.

"It's all right," she said. "We do-respect you."

The Queen smiled up at her.

Malone waited. After a second Her Majesty continued.

"I was afraid that as soon as you found poor Willie you'd send me back to the hospital," she said. "And Willie couldn't tell the Russian agents any more once he'd been taken away. So I thought I'd just-just let things stay the way they were as long as I could. That's-that's all."

Malone nodded. After a second he said: "You see that we couldn't possibly send you back now, don't you?"

"You know all the State Secrets, Your Majesty," Malone said. "We would rather that Dr. Harman in San Francisco didn't try to talk you out of them. Or anyone else."

The Queen smiled tremulously. "I know too much, do I?" she said. Then her grin faded. "Poor Dr. Harman," she said.

"Poor Dr. Harman?"

"You'll hear about him in a day or so," she said. "I-peeked inside his mind. He's very ill."

"Ill?" Lady Barbara asked.

"Oh, yes," the Queen said. The trace of a smile appeared on her face. "He thinks that all the patients in the hospital can see inside his mind."

"Oh, my," Lady Barbara said-and began to laugh. It was the nicest sound Malone had ever heard.

"Forget Harman," Burriss snapped. "What about this spy ring? How was Logan getting his information out?"

"I've already taken care of that," Malone said. "I had Desert Edge Sanatorium surrounded as soon as I knew what the score was." He looked at one of the agents holding Logan.

"They ought to be in the Las Vegas jail within half an hour," he said in confirmation.

"Dr. Dowson was in on it, wasn't he, Your Majesty?" Malone said.

"Certainly," the Queen said. Her eyes were suddenly very cold. "I hope he tries to escape. I hope he tries it."

Malone knew just how she felt.

One of the psychiatrists spoke up suddenly. "I don't understand it," he said. "Logan is completely catatonic. Even if he could read minds, how could he tell Dowson what he'd read? It doesn't make sense."

"In the first place," the Queen said patiently, "Willie isn't catatonic. He's just busy, that's all. He's only a boy, and-well, he doesn't much like being who he is. So he visits other people's minds, and that way he becomes them for a while. You see?"

"Vaguely," Malone said. "But how did Dowson get his information? I had everything worked out but that."

"I know you did," the Queen said, "and I'm proud of you. I intend to award you with the Order of the Bath for this day's work."

Unaccountably, Malone's chest swelled with pride.

"As for Dr. Dowson," the Queen said, "that traitor-hurt Willie. If he's hurt enough, he'll come back." Her eyes weren't hard any more. "He didn't want to be a spy, really," she said, "but he's just a boy, and it must have sounded rather exciting. He knew that if he told Dowson everything he'd found out, they'd let him go-go away again."

There was a long silence.

"Well," Malone said, "that about wraps it up. Any questions?"

He looked around at the men, but before any of them could speak up Her Majesty rose.

"I'm sure there are questions," she said, "but I'm really very tired. My lords, you are excused." She extended a hand. "Come, Lady Barbara," she said. "I think I really may need that nap, now."

* * * *

Malone put the cufflinks in his shirt with great care. They were great stones, and Malone thought that they gave his costume that necessary Elizabethan flair.

Not that he was wearing the costumes of the Queen's Court now. Instead, he was dressed in a tailor-proud suit of dark blue, a white-on-white shirt and no tie. He selected one of a gorgeous peacock pattern from his closet rack.

Boyd yawned at him from the bed in the room they were sharing. "Stepping out?" he said.

"I am," Malone said with restraint. He whipped the tie round his neck and drew it under the collar.

"Anybody I know?"

"I am meeting Lady Barbara, if you wish to know," Malone said.

"My God," Boyd said. "Come down. Relax. Anyhow, I've got a question for you. There was one little thing Her Everlovin' Majesty didn't explain."

"Yes?" said Malone.

"Well, about those hoods who tried to gun us down," Boyd said. "Who hired 'em? And why?"

"Dowson," Malone said. "He wanted to kill us off, and then kidnap Logan from the hotel room. But we foiled his plan-by killing his hoods. By the time he could work up something else, we were on our way to Yucca Flats."

"Great," Boyd said. "And how did you find out this startling piece of information? There haven't been any reports in from Las Vegas, have there?"

"No," Malone said.

"Okay," Boyd said. "I give up, Mastermind."

Malone wished Boyd would stop using that nickname. The fact was-as he, and apparently nobody else, was willing to recognize-that he wasn't anything like a really terrific FBI agent. Even Barbara thought he was something special.

He wasn't, he knew. He was just lucky.

"Her Majesty informed me," Malone said.

"Her—" Boyd stood with his mouth dropped open, like a fish waiting for some bait. "You mean she knew?"

"Well," Malone said, "she did know the guys in the Buick weren't the best in the business-and she knew all about the specially-built FBI Lincoln. She got that from our minds." He knotted his tie with an air of great aplomb, and went slowly to the door. "And she knew we were a good team. She got that from our minds, too."

"But," Boyd said. After a second he said: "But," again, and followed it with: "Why didn't she tell us?"

Malone opened the door.

"Her Majesty wished to see the Queen's Own FBI in action," said Sir Kenneth Malone.

BOOK 2: The Impossibles

To John J.,
without whose accident in 1945 this series would not have been possible.

CHAPTER 1

The sidewalk was as soft as a good bed. Malone lay curled on it, thinking about nothing at all. He was drifting off into a wonderful dream, and he didn't want to interrupt it. There was this girl, a beautiful girl, more wonderful than anything he had ever imagined, with big blue eyes and long blonde hair and a figure that made the average pin-up girl look like a man. And she had her soft white hand on his arm, and she was looking, up at him with trust and devotion and even adoration in her eyes, and her voice was the softest possible whisper of innocence and promise.

"I'd love to go up to your apartment with you, Mr. Malone," she said.

Malone smiled back at her, gently but with complete confidence. "Call me Ken," he said, noticing that he was seven feet tall and superbly muscled. He put his free hand on the girl's warm, soft shoulder and she wriggled with delight.

"All right-Ken," she said. "You know, I've never met anyone like you before. I mean, you're so wonderful and everything."

Malone chuckled modestly, realizing, in passing, how full and rich his voice had become. He felt a weight pressing over his heart, and knew that it was his wallet, stuffed to bursting with thousand-dollar bills.

But was this a time to think of money?

No, Malone told himself. This was the time for adventure, for romance, for love. He looked down at the girl and put his arm around her waist. She snuggled closer.

He led her easily down the long wide street to his car at the end of the block. It stood in godlike solitude, a beautiful red Cadillac capable of going a hundred and ten miles an hour in any gear, equipped with fully automatic steering and braking, and with a stereophonic radio, a hi-fi and a 3-D set installed in both front and back seats. It was a 1972 job, but he meant to trade it in on something even better when the 1973 models came out. In the meantime, he decided, it would do.

He handed the girl in, went round to the other side and slid in under the wheel. There was soft music playing somewhere, and a magnificent sunset appeared ahead of them as Malone pushed a button on the dashboard and the red Cadillac started off down the wide, empty, wonderfully paved street into the sunset, while he ... The red Cadillac?

The sidewalk became a little harder, and, Malone suddenly realized that he was lying on it. Something terrible had happened; he knew that right away. He opened his eyes to look for the girl, but the sunset had become much brighter; his head began to pound with the slow regularity of a dead-march, and he closed his eyes again in a hurry.

The sidewalk swayed a little, but he managed to keep his balance on it somehow; and after a couple of minutes it was quiet again. His head hurt. Maybe that was the terrible thing that had happened, but Malone wasn't quite sure. As a matter of fact, he wasn't very sure about anything, and he started to ask himself questions to make certain he was all there.

He didn't feel all there. He felt as if several of his parts had been replaced with second-or even third-hand experimental models, and something had happened to the experiment. It was even hard to think of any questions, but after a while he managed to come up with a few.

What is your name?

Kenneth Malone.

Where do you live?

Washington, D. C.

What is your work?

I work for the FBI.

Then what the hell are you doing on a sidewalk in New York in broad daylight?

He tried to find an answer to that, but there didn't seem to be any, no matter where he looked. The only thing he could think of was the red Cadillac.

And if the red Cadillac had anything to do with anything, Malone didn't know about it.

Very slowly and carefully, he opened his eyes again, one at a time. He discovered that the light was not coming from the gorgeous Hollywood sunset he had dreamed up. As a matter of fact, sunset was several hours in the past, and it never looked very pretty in New York anyhow. It was the middle of the night, and Malone was lying under a convenient street lamp.

He closed his eyes again and waited patiently for his head to go away.

A few minutes passed. It was obvious that his head had settled down for a long stay, and no matter how bad it felt, Malone told himself, it was his head, after all. He felt a certain responsibility for it. And he couldn't just leave it lying around somewhere with its eyes closed.

He opened the head's eyes once more, and this time he kept them open. For a long time he stared at the post of the street lamp, considering it, and he finally decided that it looked sturdy enough to support a hundred and sixty-five pounds of FBI man, even with the head added in. He grabbed for the post with both hands and started to pull himself upright, noticing vaguely that his legs had somehow managed to get underneath him.

As soon as he was standing, he wished he'd stayed on the nice horizontal sidewalk. His head was spinning dizzily, and his mind was being sucked down into the whirlpool. He held on to the post grimly and tried to stay conscious.

A long time, possibly two or three seconds, passed. Malone hadn't moved at all when the two cops came along.

One of them was a big man with a brassy voice and a face that looked as if it had been overbaked in a waffle iron. He came up behind Malone and tapped him on the shoulder, but Malone barely felt the touch. Then the cop bellowed into Malone's ear: "What's the matter, buddy?"

Malone appreciated the man's sympathy. It was good to know that you had friends. But he wished, remotely, that the cop and his friend, a shorter and thinner version of the beat patrolman, would go away and leave him in peace. Maybe he could lie down on the sidewalk again and get a couple of hundred years' rest.

Who could tell? "Mallri," he said.

"You're all right?" the big cop said. "That's fine. That's great. So why don't you go home and sleep it off?"

"Sleep?" Malone said. "Home?"

"Wherever you live, buddy," the big cop said. "Come on. Can't stand around on the sidewalk all night."

Malone shook his head, and decided at once never to do it again. He had some kind of rare disease, he realized. His brain was loose, and the inside of his skull was covered with sandpaper. Every time his head moved, the brain jounced against some of the sandpaper.

But the policemen thought he was drunk. That wasn't right. He couldn't let the police get the wrong impression of FBI agents. Now the men would go around telling people that the FBI was always drunk and disorderly.

"Not drunk," he said clearly.

"Sure," the big cop said. "You're fine. Maybe just one too many, huh?"

"No," Malone said. The effort exhausted him, and he had to catch his breath before he could say anything else. But the cops waited patiently. At last he said, "Somebody slugged me."

"Slugged?" the big cop said.

"Right." Malone remembered just in time not to nod his head.

"How about a description, buddy?" the big cop said.

"Didn't see him," Malone said. He let go of the post with one hand, keeping a precarious grip with the other. He stared at his watch. The hands danced back and forth, but he focused on them after a while. It was 1:05. "Happened just-a few minutes ago," he said. "Maybe you can catch him."

The big cop said, "Nobody around here. The place is deserted-except for you, buddy." He paused and then added: "Let's see some identification, huh? Or did he take your wallet?"

Malone thought about getting the wallet, and decided against it. The motions required would be a little tricky, and he wasn't sure he could manage them without letting go of the post entirely. At last he decided to let the cop get his wallet. "Inside coat pocket," he said.

The other policeman blinked and looked up. His face was a studied blank. "Hey, buddy," he said. "You know you got blood on your head?"

"Be damned," the big cop said. "Sam's right. You're bleeding, mister."

"Good," Malone said.

The big cop said, "Huh?"

"I thought maybe my skull was going to explode from high blood pressure," Malone said. It was

beginning to be a little easier to talk. "But as long as there's a slow leak, I guess I'm out of danger."

"Get his wallet," Sam said. "I'll watch him."

A hand went into Malone's jacket pocket. It tickled a little bit, but Malone didn't think of objecting. Naturally enough, the hand and Malone's wallet did not make an instantaneous connection. When the hand touched the bulky object strapped near Malone's armpit, it stopped, frozen, and then cautiously snaked the object out.

"What's that, Bill?" Sam said.

Bill looked up with the object in his hand. He seemed a little dazed. "It's a gun," he said.

"My God," Sam said. "The guy's heeled! Watch him! Don't let him get away!"

Malone considered getting away, and decided that he couldn't move. "It's okay," he said.

"Okay, hell," Sam said. "It's a .44 Magnum. What are you doing with a gun, Mac?" He was no longer polite and friendly. "Why [are] you carrying a gun?" he said.

"I'm not carrying it," Malone said tiredly. "Bill is. Your pal."

Bill backed away from Malone, putting the Magnum in his pocket and keeping the FBI agent covered with his own Police Positive. At the same time, he fished out the personal radio every patrolman carried in his uniform, and began calling for a prowler car in a low, somewhat nervous voice.

Sam said, "My God. A gun. He could of shot everybody."

"Get his wallet," Bill said. "He can't hurt you now. I disarmed him."

Malone began to feel slightly dangerous. Maybe he was a famous gangster. He wasn't sure. Maybe all this about being an FBI agent was just a figment of his imagination. Blows on the head did funny things. "I'll drill everybody full of holes," he said in a harsh, underworld sort of voice, but it didn't sound very convincing. Sam approached him gently and fished out his wallet with great care, as if Malone were a ticking bomb ready to go off any second.

There was a little silence. Then Sam said, "Give him his gun back, Bill," in a hushed and respectful tone.

"Give him back his gun?" the big cop said. "You gone nuts, Sam?"

Sam shook his head slowly. "Nope," he said. "But we made a terrible mistake. Know who this guy is?"

"He's heeled," Bill said. "That's all I want to know." He put the radio away and gave all his attention to Malone.

"He's FBI," Sam said. "The wallet says so. Badge and everything. And not only that, Bill. He's Kenneth J. Malone."

Well, Malone thought with relief, that settled that. He wasn't a gangster after all. He was just the FBI agent he had always known and loved. Maybe now the cops would do-something about his head and take him away for burial.

"Malone?" Bill said. "You mean the guy who's here about all those red Cadillacs?"

"Sure," Sam said. "So give him his gun back." He looked at Malone. "Listen, Mr. Malone," he said. "We're sorry. We're sorry as hell."

"That's all right," Malone said absently. He moved his head slowly and looked around. His suspicions were confirmed. There wasn't a red Cadillac anywhere in sight, and from the looks of the street there never had been. "It's gone," he said, but the cops weren't listening.

"We better get you to a hospital," Bill said. "As soon as the prowler car gets here, we'll take you right on down to St. Vincent's. Can you tell us what happened? Or is it classified?"

Malone wondered what could be classified about a blow on the head, and decided not to think about it. "I can tell you," he said, "if you'll answer one question for me."

"Sure, Mr. Malone," Bill said. "We'll be glad to help."

"Anything at all," Sam said.

Malone gave them what he hoped was a gracious and condescending smile. "All right, then," he said. "Where the hell am I?"

"In New York," Sam said.

"I know that," Malone said tiredly. "Anywhere in particular, or just sort of all over New York?"

"Ninth Street," Bill said hurriedly. "Near the Village. Is that where you were when they slugged you?"

"I guess so," Malone said. "Sure." He nodded, and immediately remembered that he shouldn't have. He closed his eyes until the pain had softened to agony, and then opened them again. "I was getting pretty tired of sitting around waiting for something to break on this case," he said, "and I couldn't sleep, so I went out for a walk. I ended up in Greenwich Village—which is a hell of a place for a self-respecting man to end up."

"I know just what you mean," Sam said sympathetically. "Bohemians, they call themselves. Crazy people."

"Not the people," Malone said. "The streets. I got sort of lost." Chicago, he reflected, was a long way from the easiest city in the world to get around in. And he supposed you could even get confused in Washington if you tried hard enough. But he knew those cities. He could find his way around in them. Greenwich Village was different.

It was harder to navigate in than the trackless forests of the Amazon. The Village had tracks, all right—thousands of tracks. Only none of them led anywhere in particular.

"Anyhow," Malone said, "I saw this red Cadillac."

The cops looked around hurriedly and then looked back at Malone. Bill started to say, "But there isn't any—"

"I know," Malone said. "It's gone now. That's the trouble."

"You mean somebody got in and drove it away?" Sam said.

"For all I know," Malone said, "it sprouted wings and flew away." He paused. "When I saw it, though-when I saw it, I decided to go over and have a look. Just in case."

"Sure," Bill said. "Makes sense." He stared at his partner as if defying him to prove it didn't make sense. Malone didn't really care.

"There wasn't anybody else on the street," he said, "so I walked over and tried the door. That's all. I didn't even open the car or anything. And I'll swear there was nobody behind me."

"Well," Sam said, "the street was empty when we got here."

"But a guy could have driven off in that red Cadillac before we got here," Bill said.

"Sure," Malone said. "But where did he come from? I figured maybe somebody dropped something by mistake-a safe or something. Because there wasn't anybody behind me."

"There had to be," Bill said.

"Well," Malone said, "there wasn't."

There was a little silence.

"What happened then?" Sam said. "After you tried the door handle, I mean."

"Then?" Malone said. "Then I went out like a light."

A pair of headlights rounded the nearby corner. Bill looked up. "That's the prowler car," he announced, and went over to meet it.

The driver was a solidly built little man with the face of a Pekingese. His partner, a tall man who looked as if he'd have been much more comfortable in a ten-gallon Stetson instead of the regulation blue cap, leaned out at Bill, Sam, and Malone.

"What's the trouble here?" he said in a harsh, high voice.

"No trouble," Bill said, and went over to the car. He began talking to the two cops inside in a low, urgent voice. Meanwhile, Sam got his arm around Malone and began pulling him away from the lamp post.

Malone was a little unwilling to let go, at first. But Sam was stronger than he looked. He convoyed the FBI agent carefully to the rear door of the prowler car, opened it and levered Malone gently to a seat inside, just as Bill said, "So with the cut and all, we figured he ought to go over to St. Vincent's. You people were already on the way, so we didn't bother with ambulances."

The driver snorted. "Next time you want taxi service," he said, "you just call us up. What do you think, a prowler car's an easy life?"

"Easier than doing a beat," Bill said mournfully. "And anyway," he added in a low, penetrating whisper, "the guy's FBI."

"So the FBI's got all kinds of equipment," the driver said. "The latest. Why don't he whistle up a helicopter or a jet?" Then, apparently deciding that further invective would get him nowhere, he settled back in his seat, said, "Aah, forget it," and started the car with a small but perceptible jerk.

Malone decided not to get into the argument. He was tired, and it was late. He rested his head on the back seat and tried to relax, but all he could do was think about red Cadillacs.

He wished he had never even heard of red Cadillacs.

CHAPTER 2

And it had all started so simply, too. Malone remembered very clearly the first time he had had any indication that red Cadillacs were anything unusual, or special. Before that, he'd viewed them all with slightly wistful eyes: red, blue, green, gray, white, or even black Cadillacs were all the same to him. They spelled luxury and wealth and display, and a lot of other nice things.

Now, he wasn't at all sure what they spelled. Except that it was definitely uncomfortable, and highly baffling.

He'd walked into the offices of Andrew J. Burris, Director of the FBI, just one week ago. It was a beautiful office, pine-paneled and spacious, and it boasted an enormous polished desk. And behind the desk sat Burris himself, looking both tired and somehow a little kindly.

"You sent for me, Chief?" Malone said.

"That's right." Burris nodded. "Malone, you've been working too hard lately."

Now, Malone thought, it was coming. The dismissal he'd always feared. At last Burris had found out that he wasn't the bright, intelligent, fearless, and alert FBI agent he was supposed to be. Burris had discovered that he was nothing more or less than lucky, and that all the "fine jobs" he was supposed to have done were only the result of luck.

Oh, well, Malone thought. Not being an FBI agent wouldn't be so bad. He could always find another job.

Only at the moment he couldn't think of one he liked.

He decided to make one last plea. "I haven't been working so hard, Chief," he said. "Not too hard, anyhow. I'm in great shape. I—"

"I've taken advantage of you, Malone, that's what I've done," Burris said, just as if Malone hadn't spoken at all. "Just because you're the best agent I've got, that's no reason for me to hand you all the tough ones."

"Just because I'm what?" Malone said, feeling slightly faint.

"I've given you the tough ones because you could handle them," Burris said. "But that's no reason to

keep loading jobs on you. After that job you did on the Gorelik kidnaping, and the way you wrapped up the Transom counterfeit ring—well, Malone, I think you need a little relaxation."

"Relaxation?" Malone said, feeling just a little bit pleased. Of course, he didn't deserve any of the praise he was getting, he knew. He'd just happened to walk in on the Gorelik kidnapers because his telephone had been out of order. And the Transom ring hadn't been just his job. After all, if other agents hadn't managed to trace the counterfeit bills back to a common area in Cincinnati, he'd never have been able to complete his part of the assignment. But it was nice to be praised, anyhow. Malone felt a twinge of guilt, and told himself sternly to relax and enjoy himself.

"That's what I said," Burris told him. "Relaxation."

"Well," Malone said, "I certainly would like a vacation, that's for sure. I'd like to snooze for a couple of weeks, or maybe go up to Cape Cod for a while. There's a lot of nice scenery up around there. It's restful, sort of, and I could just—"

He stopped. Burris was frowning, and when Andrew J. Burris frowned it was a good idea to look attentive, interested, and alert. "Now, Malone," Burris said sadly, "I wasn't exactly thinking about a vacation. You're not scheduled for one until August, you know."

"Oh, I know, Chief," Malone said. "But I thought—"

"Much as I'd like to," Burris said, "I just can't make an exception; you know that, Malone. I've got to go pretty much by the schedule."

"Yes, sir," Malone said, feeling just a shade disappointed.

"But I do think you deserve a rest," Burris said.

"Well, if I—"

"Here's what I'm going to do," Burris said, and paused. Malone felt a little unsure as to exactly what his chief was talking about, but by now he knew better than to ask a lot of questions. Sooner or later, Burris would probably explain himself. And if he didn't, then there was no use worrying about it. That was just the way Burris acted.

"Suppose I gave you a chance to take it easy for a while," Burris said. "You could catch up on your sleep, see some shows, have a couple of drinks during the evening, take girls out for dinner—you know. Something like that. How would you like it?"

"Well..." Malone said cautiously.

"Good," Burris said. "I knew you would."

Malone opened his mouth, thought briefly and closed it again. After all, it did sound sort of promising, and if there was a catch in it he'd find out about it soon enough.

"It's really just a routine case," Burris said in an offhand tone. "Nothing to it."

"Oh," Malone said.

"There's this red Cadillac," Burriss said. "It was stolen from a party in Connecticut, out near Danbury, and it showed up in New York City. Now, the car's crossed a state line."

"That puts it in our jurisdiction," Malone said, feeling obvious.

"Right," Burriss said. "Right on the nose."

"But the New York office—"

"Naturally, they're in charge of everything," Burriss said. "But I'm sending you out as sort of a special observer. Just keep your eyes open, and nose around and let me know what's happening."

"Keep my eyes and nose what?" Malone said.

"Open," Burriss said. "And let me know about it."

Malone tried to picture himself with his eyes and nose open, and decided he didn't look very attractive that way. Well, it was only a figure of speech or something. He didn't have to think about it.

It really made a very ugly picture.

"But why a special observer?" he said after a second. Burriss could read the reports from the New York office, and probably get more facts than any single agent could find out just wandering around a strange city. It sounded as if there were something, Malone told himself, just a tiny shade rotten in Denmark. It sounded as if there were going to be something in the nice easy assignment he was getting that would make him wish he'd gone lion hunting in Darkest Africa instead.

And then again, maybe he was wrong. He stood at ease and waited to find out.

"Well," Burriss said, "it is just a routine case. Just like I said. But there seems to be something a little bit odd about it."

"I see," Malone said with a sinking feeling.

"Here's what happened," Burriss said hurriedly, as if he were afraid Malone was going to change his mind and refuse the assignment. "This red Cadillac I told you about was reported stolen from Danbury. Three days later, it turned up in New York City—parked smack across the street from a precinct police station. Of course it took them a while to wake up, but one of the officers happened to notice the routine report on stolen cars in the area, and he decided to go across the street and check the license number on the car. Then something funny happened."

"Something funny?" Malone asked. He doubted that, whatever it was, it was going to make him laugh. But he kept his face a careful, receptive blank.

"That's right," Burriss said. "Now, if you're going to understand what happened, you've got to get the whole picture."

"Sure," Malone said.

"Only that isn't what I mean," Burriss added suddenly.

Malone blinked. "What isn't what you mean?" he said.

"Understanding what happened," Burris said. "That's the trouble. You won't understand what happened. I don't understand it, and neither does anybody else. So what do you think about it?"

"Think about what?" Malone said.

"About what I've been telling you," Burris snapped. "This car."

Malone took a deep breath. "Well," he said, "this officer went over to check the license plate. It seems like the right thing to do. It's just what I'd have done myself."

"Sure you would," Burris said. "Anybody would. But listen to me."

"All right, Chief," Malone said.

"It was just after dawn-early in the morning," Malone wondered briefly if there were parts of the world where dawn came, say, late in the afternoon, or during the evening sometime, but he said nothing. "The street was deserted," Burris went on. "But it was pretty light out, and the witnesses are willing to swear that there was nobody on that street for a block in either direction. Except them, of course."

"Except who?" Malone said.

"Except the witnesses," Burris said patiently. "Four cops, police officers who were standing on the front steps of the precinct station, talking. They were waiting to go on duty, or anyhow that's what the report said. It's lucky they were there, for whatever reason; they're the only witnesses we've got."

Burris stopped. Malone waited a few seconds and then said, as calmly as he could, "Witnesses to what?"

"To this whole business with Sergeant Jukovsky," Burris said.

The sudden introduction of a completely new name confused Malone for an instant, but he recovered gamely. "Sergeant Jukovsky was the man who investigated the car," he said.

"That's right," Burris said. "Except that he didn't."

Malone sighed.

"Those four officers-the witnesses-they weren't paying much attention to what looked like the routine investigation of a parked car," Burris said. "But here's their testimony. They were standing around talking when this Sergeant Jukovsky came out of the station, spoke to them in passing, and went on across the street. He didn't seem very worried or alarmed about anything."

"Good," Malone said involuntarily. "I mean, go on, Chief," he added.

"Ah," Burris said. "All right. Well. According to Jukovsky, he took a look at the plate and found the numbers checked the listing he had for a stolen Connecticut car. Then he walked around to take a look inside the car. It was empty. Get that, Malone. The car was empty."

"Well," Malone said, "it was parked. I suppose parked cars are usually empty. What's special about this

one?"

"Wait and see," Burris said ominously. "Jukovsky swears the car was empty. He tried the doors, and they were all locked but one, the front door on the curb side, the driver's door. So he opened it, and leaned over to have a look at the odometer to check the mileage. And something clobbered him on the back of the head."

"One of the other cops," Malone said.

"One of the-who?" Burris said. "No. Not the cops. Not at all."

"Then something fell on him," Malone said. "Okay. Then whatever fell on him ought to be—"

"Malone," Burris said.

"Yes, Chief?"

"Jukovsky woke up on the sidewalk with the other cops all around him. There was nothing on that sidewalk but Jukovsky. Nothing could have fallen on him; it hadn't landed anywhere, if you see what I mean."

"Sure," Malone said. "But—"

"Whatever it was," Burris said, "they didn't find it. But that isn't the peculiar thing."

"No?"

"No," Burris said slowly. "Now—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "They looked on the sidewalk and around there. But did they think to search the car?"

"They didn't get a chance," Burris said. "Anyhow, not then. Not until they got around to picking up the pieces of the car uptown at 125th Street."

Malone closed his eyes. "Where was this precinct?" he said.

"Midtown," Burris said. "In the forties."

"And the pieces of the car were eighty blocks away when they searched it?" Malone said.

Burris nodded.

"All right," Malone said pleasantly. "I give up."

"Well, that's what I'm trying to tell you," Burris said. "According to the witnesses, after Jukovsky fell out of the car, the motor started and the car drove off uptown."

"Oh," Malone said. He thought about that for a minute and decided at last to hazard one little question. It sounded silly-but then, what didn't? "The car just drove off all by itself?" he said.

Burriss seemed abashed. "Well, Malone," he said carefully, "that's where the conflicting stories of the eyewitnesses don't agree. You see, two of the cops say there was nobody in the car. Nobody at all. Of any kind. Small or large."

"And the other two?" Malone said.

"The other two swear they saw somebody at the wheel," Burriss said, "but they won't say whether it was a man, a woman, a small child, or an anthropoid ape. And they haven't the faintest idea where he, she, or it came from."

"Great," Malone said. He felt a little tired. This trip was beginning to sound less and less like a vacation.

"Those two cops swear there was something-or somebody-driving the car," Burriss said. "And that isn't all."

"It isn't?" Malone said.

Burriss shook his head. "A couple of the cops jumped into a squad car and started following the red Cadillac. One of these cops saw somebody in the car when it left the curb. The other one didn't. Got that?"

"I've got it," Malone said, "but I don't exactly know what to do with it."

"Just hold on to it," Burriss said, "and listen to this. The cops were about two blocks behind at the start, and they couldn't close the gap right away. The Cadillac headed west and climbed up the ramp of the West Side Highway, heading north, out toward Westchester. I'd give a lot to know where they were going, too."

"But they crashed," Malone said, remembering that the pieces were at 125th Street. "So—"

"They didn't crash right away," Burriss said. "The prowler car started gaining on the Cadillac slowly. And-now, get this, Malone-both the cops swear there was somebody in the driver's seat now."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "One of these cops didn't see anybody at all in the driver's seat when the car started off."

"Right," Burriss said.

"But on the West Side Highway, he did see a driver," Malone said. He thought for a minute. "Hell, it could happen. They took off so fast he could have been confused, or something."

"There's another explanation," Burriss said.

"Sure," Malone said cheerfully. "We're all crazy. The whole world is crazy."

"Not that one," Burriss said. "I'll tell you when I finish with this thing about the car itself. There isn't much description of whoever or whatever was driving that car on the West Side Highway, by the way. In case you were thinking of asking."

Malone, who hadn't been thinking of asking anything, tried to look clever. Burriss regarded him owlishly for a second, and then went on:

"The car was hitting it up at about a hundred and ten by this time, and accelerating all the time. But the souped-up squad car was coming on fast, too, and it was quite a chase. Luckily, there weren't many cars on the road. Somebody could have been killed, Malone."

"Like the driver of the Cadillac," Malone ventured.

Burriss looked pained. "Not exactly," he said. "Because the car hit the 125th Street exit like a bomb. It swerved right, just as though it were going to take the exit and head off somewhere, but it was going much too fast by that time. There just wasn't any way to maneuver. The Cadillac hit the embankment, flipped over the edge, and smashed. It caught fire almost at once. Of course the prowl car braked fast and went down the exit after it. But there wasn't anything to do."

"That's what I said," Malone said. "The driver of the Cadillac was killed. In a fire like that—"

"Don't jump to conclusions, Malone," Burriss said. "Wait. When the prowl car boys got to the scene, there was no sign of anybody in the car. Nobody at all."

"In the heat of those flames—" Malone began.

"Not enough heat, and not enough time," Burriss said. "A human body couldn't have been destroyed in just a few minutes, not that completely. Some of the car's metal was melted, sure; but there would have been traces of anybody who'd been in the car. Nice, big, easily seen traces. And there weren't any. No corpse, no remains, no nothing."

Malone let that stew in his mind for a few seconds. "But the cops said—"

"Whatever the cops said," Burriss snapped, "there was nobody at all in that Cadillac when it went off the embankment."

"Now, wait a minute," Malone said. "Here's a car with a driver who appears and disappears practically at will. Sometimes he's there and sometimes he's not there."

"Ah," Burriss said. "That's why I have another explanation."

Malone shifted his feet. Maybe there was another explanation. But, he told himself, it would have to be a good one.

"Nobody expects a car to drive itself down a highway," Burriss said.

"That's right," Malone said. "That's why it's all impossible."

"So," Burriss said, "it would be a natural hallucination-or illusion, anyhow-for somebody to imagine he did see a driver when there wasn't any."

"Okay," Malone said. "There wasn't any driver. So the car couldn't have gone anywhere. So the New York police force is lying to us. It's a good explanation, but it—"

"They aren't lying," Burriss said. "Why should they? I'm thinking of something else." He stopped, his eyes bright as he leaned across the desk toward Malone.

"Do I get three guesses?" Malone said.

Burris ignored him. "Frankly," he said, "I've got a hunch that the whole thing was done with remote control. Somewhere in that car was a very cleverly concealed device that was capable of running the Cadillac from a distance."

It did sound plausible, Malone thought. "Did the prowl car boys find any traces of it when they examined the wreckage?" he said.

"Not a thing," Burris said. "But, after all, it could have been melted. The fire did destroy a lot of the Cadillac, and there's just no telling. But I'd give long odds that there must have been some kind of robot device in that car. It's the only answer, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," Malone said.

"Malone," Burns said, his voice filled with Devotion To One's Country In The Face of Great Obstacles, "Malone, I want you to find that device!"

"In the wreck?" Malone said.

Burris sighed and leaned back. "No," he said. "Of course not. Not in the wreck. But the other red Cadillacs—some of them, anyhow—ought to have—"

"What red Cadillacs?" Malone said.

"The other ones that have been stolen. From Connecticut, mostly. One from New Jersey, out near Passaic."

"Have any of the others been moving around without drivers?" Malone said.

"Well," Burris said, "there's been no report of it. But who can tell?" He gestured with both arms. "Anything is possible, Malone."

"Sure," Malone said.

"Now," Burris said, "all of the stolen cars are red 1972 Cadillacs. There's got to be some reason for that. I think they're covering up another car like the one that got smashed: a remote-controlled Cadillac. Or even a self-guiding, automatic, robot-controlled Cadillac."

"They?" Malone said. "Who?"

"Whoever is stealing the cars," Burris said patiently.

"Oh," Malone said. "Sure. But—"

"So get up to New York," Burris said, "keep your eyes open, and nose around. Got it?"

"I have now," Malone said.

"And when that Cadillac is found, Malone, we want to take a look at it. Okay?"

"Yes, sir," Malone said.

* * * *

Of course there were written reports, too. Burriss had handed Malone a sheaf of them-copies of the New York police reports to Burriss himself-and Malone, wanting some time to look through them, had taken a train to New York instead of a plane. Besides, the new planes still made him slightly nervous, though he could ride one when he had to. If jet engines had been good enough for the last generation, he thought, they were certainly good enough for him.

But avoidance of the new planes was all the good the train trip did him. The reports contained thousands of words, none of which was either new or, apparently, significant to Malone. Burriss, he considered, had given him everything necessary for the job.

Except, of course, a way to make sense out of the whole thing. He considered robot-controlled Cadillacs. What good were they? They might make it easier for the average driver, of course-but that was no reason to cover up for them, hitting policemen over the head and smashing cars and driving a hundred and ten miles an hour on the West Side Highway.

All the same, it was the only explanation Malone had, and he cherished it deeply. He put the papers back in his brief case when the train pulled into Perm Station, handed his suitcases to a redcap and punched the buttons for the waiting room. Now, he thought as he strolled slowly along behind the robot, there was an invention that made sense. And nobody had to get killed for it, or hit over the head or smashed up, had they?

So what was all this nonsense about robot-controlled red Cadillacs?

Driving these unwelcome reflections from his mind, he paused to light a cigarette. He had barely taken the first puff when a familiar voice said, "Hey, buddy, hold the light, will you?"

Malone looked up, blinked and grinned happily. "Boyd!" he said. "What are you doing here? I haven't seen you since—"

"Sure haven't," Boyd said. "I've been out West on a couple of cases. Must be a year since we worked together."

"Just about," Malone said. "But what are you doing in New York? Vacationing?"

"Not exactly," Boyd said. "The chief called it sort of a vacation, but—"

"Oh," Malone said. "You're working with me."

Boyd nodded. "The chief sent me up. When I got back from the West, he suddenly decided you might need a good assistant, so I took the plane down, and got here ahead of you."

"Great," Malone said. "But I want to warn you about the vacation—"

"Never mind," Boyd said; just a shade sadly. "I know. It isn't." He seemed deep in thought, as if he were deciding whether or not to get rid of Anne Boleyn. It was, Malone thought, an unusually apt simile. Boyd, six feet tall and weighing about two hundred and twenty-five pounds, had a large square face and a broad-beamed figure that might have made him a dead ringer for Henry VIII of England even without his Henry-like fringe of beard and his mustache. With them-thanks to the recent FBI rule that agents

could wear "facial hair, at the discretion of the director or such board as he may appoint"-the resemblance to the Tudor monarch was uncanny.

But, like his famous double, Boyd didn't stay sad for long. "I thought I'd meet you at the station," he said, cheering up, "and maybe talk over old times for a while, on the way to the hotel, anyhow. So long as there wasn't anything else to do."

"Sure," Malone said. "It's good to see you again. And when did you get pulled out of the Frisco office?"

Boyd grimaced. "You know," he said, "I had a good thing going for me out there. Agent-in-Charge of the entire office. But right after that job we did together-the Queen Elizabeth affair-Burriss decided I was too good a man to waste my fragrance on the desert air. Or whatever it is. So he recalled me, assigned me from the home office, and I've been on one case after another ever since."

"You're a home-office agent now?" Malone said.

"I'm a Roving Reporter," Boyd said, and struck a pose. "I'm a General Trouble-shooter and a Mr. Fix-It. Just like you, Hero."

"Thanks," Malone said. "How about the local office here? Seen the boys yet?"

Boyd shook his head. "Not yet," he said. "I was waiting for you to show up. But I did manage hotel rooms-a couple of rooms with a connecting bath over at the Hotel New Yorker. Nice place. You'll like it, Ken."

"I'll love it," Malone said. "Especially that connecting bath. It would have been terrible to have an unconnecting bath. Sort of distracting."

"Okay," Boyd said. "Okay. You know what I mean." He stared down at Malone's hand. "You know you've still got your lighter on?" he added.

Malone looked down at it and shut it off. "You asked me to hold it," he said.

"I didn't mean indefinitely," Boyd said. "Anyhow, how about grabbing a cab and heading on down to the hotel to get your stuff away, before we check in at 69th Street?"

"Good idea," Malone said. "And besides, I could do with a clean shirt. Not to mention a bath."

"Trains get worse and worse," Boyd said absently.

Malone punched the redcap's buttons again, and he and Boyd followed it through the crowded station to the taxi stand. The robot piled the suitcases into the cab, and somehow Malone and Boyd found room for themselves.

"Hotel New Yorker," Boyd said grandly.

The driver swung around to stare at them, blinked, and finally said, "Okay, Mac. You said it." He started with a terrific grinding of gears, drove out of the Penn Station arch and went two blocks.

"Here you are, Mac," he said, stopping the cab.

Malone stared at Boyd with a reproachful expression.

"So how was I to know?" Boyd said.

"I didn't look. If I'd known it was so close we could've walked."

"And saved half a buck," Malone said. "But don't let it bother you-this is expense-account money."

"That's right," Boyd said. He beamed and tipped the driver heavily. The cab drove off and Malone hailed the New Yorker doorman, who equipped them with a robot bellhop and sent them upstairs to their rooms.

Three-quarters of an hour later, Boyd and Malone were in the offices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, on East 69th Street. There they picked up a lot of nice, new, shiny facts. It was unfortunate, if not particularly surprising, that the facts did not seem to make any sense.

In the first place, only red 1972 Cadillacs seemed to be involved. Anybody who owned such a car was likely to find it missing at any time; there had been a lot of thefts reported, including some that hadn't had time to get into Burris' reports. New Jersey now claimed two victims, and New York had three of its own.

And all the cars weren't turning up in New York, by any means. Some of the New York cars had turned up in New Jersey. Some had turned up in Connecticut-including one of the New Jersey cars. So far, there had been neither thefts nor discoveries in Pennsylvania, but Malone couldn't see why.

There was absolutely no pattern that he, Boyd, or anyone else could find. The list of thefts and recoveries had been fed into an electronic calculator, which had neatly regurgitated them without being in the least helpful. It had remarked that the square of seven was forty-nine, but this was traced to a defect in the mechanism.

Whoever was borrowing the red Caddies exhibited a peculiar combination of burglarious genius and what looked to Malone like outright idiocy. This was plainly impossible.

Unfortunately, it had happened.

Locking the car doors didn't do a bit of good. The thief, or thieves, got in without so much as scratching the lock. This obviously proved that the criminal was either an extremely good lock-pick or else knew where to get duplicate keys.

However, the ignition was invariably shorted across.

This proved neatly that the criminal was not a very good lock-pick, and did not know where to get duplicate keys.

Query: Why work so hard on the doors, and not work at all on the ignition?

That was the first place. The second place was just what had been bothering Malone all along. There didn't seem to be any purpose to the car thefts. They hadn't been sold, or used as getaway cars. True, teenage delinquents sometimes stole cars just to use them joy-riding, or as some sort of prank.

But a car or two every night? How many joy-rides can one gang take? Malone thought. And how long

does it take to get tired of the same prank?

And why, Malone asked himself wearily for what was beginning to feel like the ten thousandth time, why only red Cadillacs?

Burris, he told himself, must have been right all along. The red Cadillacs were only a smoke screen for something else. Perhaps it was the robot car, perhaps not; but whatever it was, Burris' general answer was the only one that made any sense at all.

That should have been a comforting thought, Malone reflected. Somehow, though, it wasn't.

After they'd finished with the files and personnel at 69th Street, Malone and Boyd started downtown on what turned out to be a sort of unguided tour of the New York Police Department. They spoke to some of the eyewitnesses, and ended up in Centre Street asking a lot of reasonably useless questions in the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. In general, they spent nearly six hours on the Affair of the Self-Propelled Cadillac, picking up a whole bundle of facts. Some of the facts they had already known. Some were new, but unhelpful.

Somehow, nobody felt much like going out for a night on the town. Instead both agents climbed wearily into bed, thinking morose and disillusioned thoughts.

And, after that, a week passed. It was filled with ennui.

Only one new thing became clear. In spite of the almost identical modus operandi used in all the car thefts, they were obviously the work of a gang rather than a single person. This required the assumption that there was not one insane man at work, but a crew of them, all identically unbalanced.

"But the jobs are just too scattered to be the work of one man," Malone said. "To steal a car in Connecticut and drive it to the Bronx, and then steal another car in Westfield, New Jersey, fifteen minutes later takes more than talent. It takes an outright for-sure magician."

This conclusion, while interesting, was not really helpful. The fact was that Malone needed more clues-or, anyhow, more facts-before he could do anything at all. And there just weren't any new facts around. He spent the week wandering morosely from one place to another sometimes accompanied by Thomas Boyd and sometimes all alone. Time, he knew, was ticking by at its usual rate. But there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

He did try to relax and have some fun, as Burris had suggested. But he didn't seem to be able to get his mind off the case.

Boyd, after the first little while, had no such trouble. He entered the social life of the city with a whoop of joy and disappeared from sight. That was fine for Boyd, Malone reflected, but it did leave Malone himself just a little bit at loose ends.

Not that he begrudged Boyd his fun. It was nice that one of them was enjoying himself, anyway.

It was just that Malone was beginning to get fidgety. He needed to be doing something-even if it was only taking a walk.

So he took a walk and ended up, to his own surprise, downtown near Greenwich Village.

And then he'd been bopped on the head.

CHAPTER 3

The patrol car pulled up in front of St. Vincent's Hospital, and one of the cops helped Malone into the emergency receiving room. He didn't feel as bad as he had a few minutes before. The motion of the car hadn't helped any, but his head seemed to be knitting a little, and his legs were a little steadier. True, he didn't feel one hundred per cent healthy, but he was beginning to think he might live, after all. And while the doctor was bandaging his head, a spirit of new life began to fill the FBI agent.

He was no longer morose and undirected. He had a purpose in life, and the purpose filled him with cold determination. He was going to find the robot-operated car-or whatever it turned out to be.

The doctor, Malone noticed, was whistling Greensleeves under his breath as he worked. That, he supposed, was the influence of the Bohemian folk-singers of Greenwich Village. But he put the noise resolutely out of his mind and concentrated on the red Cadillac.

It was one thing to think about a robot car miles away, doing something or other to somebody you'd never heard of before. That was just theoretical, a case for solution, nothing but an ordinary job.

But when the car stepped up and bopped Malone himself on the head, it became a personal matter. Now Malone had more than a job to contend with. Now he was thinking about revenge.

By God, he told himself, no car in the world-not even a Cadillac-can get away with beaming Kenneth J. Malone!

Malone was not quite certain that he agreed with Burris' idea of a self-operating car, but at least it was something to work on. A car that could reach out, crown an investigator, and then drive off humming something innocent under its breath was certainly a unique and dangerous machine within the meaning of the act. Of course, there were problems attendant on this view of things. For one thing, Malone couldn't quite see how the car could have beamed him when he was ten feet away from it. But that was, he told himself uncomfortably, a minor point. He could deal with it when he felt a little better.

The important thing was the car itself. Malone jerked a little under the doctor's calm hands, and swore subvocally.

"Hold still," the doctor said. "Don't go wiggling your head around that way. Just wait quietly until the dermijel sets."

Obediently, Malone froze. There was a crick in his neck, but he decided he could stand it. "My head still hurts," he said accusingly.

"Sure it still hurts," the doctor agreed.

"But you—"

"What did you expect?" the doctor said. "Even an FBI agent isn't immune to blackjacks, you know." He resumed his work on Malone's skull.

"Blackjacks?" Malone said. "What blackjacks?"

"The ones that hit you," the doctor said. "Or the one, anyhow."

Malone blinked. Somehow, though he could manage a fuzzy picture of a car reaching out to hit him, the introduction of a blackjack into this imaginative effort confused things a little. But he resolutely ignored it.

"The bruise is just the right size and shape," the doctor said. "And that cut on your head comes from the seams on the leather casing."

"You're sure?" Malone said doubtfully. It did seem as if a car had a lot more dangerous weapons around, without resorting to blackjacks. If it had really wanted to damage him, why hadn't it hit him with the engine block?

"I'm sure," the doctor said. "I've worked in Emergency in this hospital long enough to recognize a blackjack wound."

That was a disturbing idea, in a way. It gave a new color to Malone's reflection on Greenwich Villagers. Maybe things had changed since he'd heard about them. Maybe the blackjack had supplanted the guitar.

But that wasn't the important thing.

The fact that it had been a blackjack that had hit him was important. It was vital, as a matter of fact. Malone knew that perfectly well. It was a key fact in the case he was investigating.

The only trouble was that he didn't see what, if anything it meant.

The doctor stepped back and regarded Malone's head with something like pride. "There," he said. "You'll be all right now."

"A concussion?"

"Sure," the doctor said. "But it isn't serious. Just take these pills—one every two hours until they're gone—and you'll be rid of any effects within twenty-four hours." He went to a cabinet, fiddled around for a minute, and came back with a small bottle containing six orange pills. They looked very large and threatening.

"Fine," Malone said doubtfully.

"You'll be all right," the doctor said, giving Malone a cheerful, confident grin. "Nothing at all to worry about." He loaded a hypojet and blasted something through the skin of Malone's upper arm. Malone swallowed hard. He knew perfectly well that he hadn't felt a thing but he couldn't quite make himself believe it.

"That'll take care of you for tonight," the doctor said. "Get some sleep and start in on the pills when you wake up, okay?"

"Okay," Malone said. It was going to make waking up something less than a pleasure, but he wanted to get well, didn't he?

Of course he did. If that Cadillac thought it was going to beat him...

"You can stand up now," the doctor said.

"Okay," Malone said, trying it. "Thanks, Doctor. I—"

There was a knock at the door. The doctor jerked his head around.

"Who's that?" he said.

"Me," a bass voice said, unhelpfully.

The emergency-room door opened a crack and a face peered in. It took Malone a second to recognize Bill, the waffle-faced cop who had picked him up next to the lamp post three years or so before. "Long time no see," Malone said at random.

"What?" Bill said, and opened the door wider. He came in and closed it behind him. "It's okay, Doc," he said to the attendant. "I'm a cop."

"Been hurt?" the doctor said.

Bill shook his head. "Not recently," he said. "I came to see this guy." He looked at Malone. "They told me you were still here," he said.

"Who's they?" Malone said.

"Outside," Bill said. "The attendants out there. They said you were still getting stitched up."

"And quite right, too," Malone said solemnly.

"Oh," Bill said. "Sure." He fished in his pockets. "You dropped your notebook, though, and I came to give it back to you." He located the object he was hunting for and brought it out with the triumphant gesture of a man displaying the head of a dragon he had slain. "Here," he said, waving the book.

"Notebook?" Malone said. He stared at it. It was a small looseleaf book bound in cheap black plastic.

"We found it in the gutter," Bill said.

Malone took a tentative step forward and managed not to fall. He stepped back again and looked at Bill scornfully. "I wasn't even in the gutter," he said. "There are limits."

"Sure," Bill said. "But the notebook was, so I brought it along to you. I thought you might need it or something." He handed it over to Malone with a flourish.

It wasn't Malone's notebook. In the first place, he had never owned a notebook that looked anything like that, and in the second place he hadn't had any notebooks on him when he went for his walk. Mine not to question why, Malone told himself with a shrug, and flipped the book open.

At once he saw why the cop had mistaken it for his.

It had his name in it.

On the very first page were two names, written out in a careful, semieducated scrawl:

Mr. Kenneth J. Malone, FBI

Lt. Peter Lynch, NYPD

The rest of the page was blank. Malone wondered who Lieutenant Lynch was, and made a mental note to find out. Then he wondered what his name was doing in somebody else's notebook. Maybe, he thought, it was a list of people to slug, and the car had made it up. But he hadn't heard of anybody named Lynch being hit on the head by a marauding automobile, and he couldn't quite picture a Cadillac jotting things down in a notebook for future reference. Besides, he had an idea that a Cadillac's handwriting would be more formal, and prettier.

He turned the page. On the next leaf there were more names, eight of them. The first one was written in red pencil and the others were in ordinary black. Malone stared at them:

Mike F.

Ramon O.

Mario G.

Silvo E.

Alvarez A.

Felipe la B.

Juan de los S.

Ray del E.

All the names except Mike F. sounded Spanish, or possibly Puerto Rican. Malone wondered who they were. Juvenile delinquents? Other people to slug? Police officers?

Maybe they were all the names of Spanish-speaking Cadillacs.

He blinked and rubbed at his forehead with one hand. His head still hurt, and that was probably why he was getting such strange ideas. It was obvious that, whatever the notebook was, it hadn't been written by an automobile.

He turned the page again.

Here there was a carefully detailed drawing of a car. Malone recognized it as a 1972 Cadillac without any effort at all.

And it had been carefully colored in with red pencil.

Wow, Malone asked himself, What the hell does that mean?

He couldn't find an answer. He turned the page, hoping for some more facts that might make some sense out of what he had been seeing, but there was nothing more. All the rest of the pages in the notebook

were blank.

He looked up at the cop and the doctor with a bland, blank face. "Thanks a lot," he told Bill. "I thought I'd lost this book. I appreciate it."

"Oh, that's okay, Mr. Malone," Bill said. "Glad to do it."

"You don't know what this means to me," Malone said truthfully.

"No trouble at all," Bill said. "Any time." He gave Malone a big smile and turned back to the door. "But I got to get back to my beat," he said. "Listen, I'll see you. And if I can be any help—"

"Sure," Malone said. "I'll let you know. And thanks again."

"Welcome," Bill said, and opened the door. He strode out with the air of a man who has just been decorated with the Silver Star, the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Malone tried a few more steps and discovered that he could walk without falling down. He thanked the doctor again.

"Perfectly all right," the doctor said. "Nothing to it. Why, you ought to see some of the cases we get here. There was a guy here the other night with both his legs all mashed up by a—"

"I'll bet," Malone said hurriedly. "Well, I've got to be on my way. Just send the bill to FBI headquarters on 69th Street." He closed the door on the doctor's enthusiastic "Yes, sir!" and went on down the hallway and out into the street. At Seventh Avenue and Greenwich Avenue he flagged a cab.

It was a hell of a place to be, Malone thought as the cab drove away. Where but in Greenwich Village did avenues intersect each other without so much as a by-your-leave?

"Hotel New Yorker," he said, giving the whole thing up as a bad job. He put his hat on his head and adjusted it painfully to the proper angle.

And that, he thought, made another little problem. The car had not only hit him on the head, it had removed his hat before doing so, and then replaced it. It had only fallen off when he'd started to get up against the lamp post.

A nice quiet vacation, Malone thought bitterly.

He fumed in silence all the way to the hotel, through the lobby, up in the elevator, and to the door of his room. Then he remembered the notebook.

That was important evidence. He decided to tell Boyd about it right away.

He went into the bathroom and tapped gently on the door to Boyd's connecting room. The door swung open.

Boyd, apparently, was still out painting the town—Malone considered the word red and dropped the whole phrase with a sigh. At any rate, his partner was nowhere in the room.

"The hell with it," Malone announced loudly to no one in particular. He went back into his own room,

closed the door, and got wearily ready for bed.

* * * *

Dawn came, and then daylight, and then a lot more daylight. It was streaming in through the windows with careless abandon, filling the room with a lot of bright sunshine and the muggy heat of the city. From the street below, the cheerful noises of traffic and pedestrians floated up and filled Malone's ears.

He got up, turned over in bed, and tried to go back to sleep.

But sleep wouldn't come. After a long time he gave up, and swung himself over the edge of the bed. Standing up was a delicate job, but he managed it, feeling rather proud of himself in a dim, semiconscious sort of way.

He went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and then opened the connecting door to Boyd's room softly.

Boyd was home. He lay in a great tangle of bedclothes, snoring hideously and making little motions with his hands and arms like a beached whale. Malone padded over to him and dug him fiercely in the ribs.

"Come on," he said. "Wake up, Tommy-boy."

Boyd's eyes did not open. In a voice as hollow as a zombie's, he said, "My head hurts."

"Can't feel any worse than mine," Malone said cheerily. This, he reflected, was not quite true. Considering everything it had been through recently, his head felt remarkably like its old carefree self. "You'll feel better once you're awake."

"No, I won't," Boyd said simply. He jammed his head under a pillow and began to snore again. It was an awesome sound, like a man strangling to death in chicken fat. Malone sighed and poked at random among the bedclothes.

Boyd swore distantly, and Malone poked him again.

"The sun is up," Malone said, "and all the little pedestrians are chirping. It is time to rise."

Boyd said, "Gah," and withdrew his head from the pillow. Gently, as if he were afraid he were going to fall apart, he rose to a sitting position. When he had arrived at it, he opened his eyes.

"Now," Malone said. "Isn't that better?"

Boyd closed his eyes again. "No," he said.

"Come on," Malone said. "We've got to be up and moving."

"I'm up," Boyd said. His eyes flickered open. "But I can't move," he added. "We had quite a time last night."

"We?" Malone said.

"Me, and a couple of girls, and another guy. Just people I met." Boyd started to stand up and thought better of it. "Just having a good time, that's, all."

Malone thought of reading his partner a lecture on the Evils of Drink, and decided against it. Boyd might remember it, and use it against him sometime. Then he realized what had to be done. He went back into his own room, dialed for room service, and ordered a couple of pots of strong black coffee.

By the time a good deal of that was awash in Boyd's intestinal system, he was almost capable of rational, connected conversation. He filled himself to the eyebrows with aspirins and other remedies, and actually succeeded in getting dressed. He seemed quite proud of this feat.

"Okay," Malone said. "Now we have to go downstairs."

"You mean outside?" Boyd said. "Into all that noise?" He winced.

"Bite the bullet," Malone said cheerfully. "Keep a stiff upper lip."

"Nonsense," Boyd said, hunting for his coat with a doleful air. "Have you ever seen anybody with a loose upper lip?"

Malone, busy with his own coat, didn't bother with a reply. He managed somehow to get Boyd downstairs and bundled into a cab. They headed for 69th Street. There he made several phone calls. The first, of course, was to Burris in Washington. After that he got the New York Police Commissioner on the wire and, finding that he needed still more authority, he called the mayor and then, by long-distance to Albany, the governor.

But by noon he had everything straightened out. He had a plan fully worked out in his mind, and he had the authority to go ahead with it. Now, he could make his final call.

"They're completely trustworthy," Burris had told him. "Not only that, but they have a clearance for this kind of special work—we've needed them before."

"Good," Malone said.

"Not only that," Burris told him. "They're damned good men. Maybe among the best in their field."

So Malone made his last call, to the firm of Leibowitz and Hardin, Electronic Engineers.

Then he beckoned to Boyd.

"I don't see what I've been sitting around here for, all this time," his partner complained. "I could have been home sleeping until you needed me."

"I need you now," Malone said. "I want you to take over part of this plan."

Boyd nodded sourly. "Oh, all right," he said.

"Here's what I want," Malone said. "Every red 1972 Cadillac in the area is to be picked up for inspection. I don't care why—make up a reason. A general traffic check. Anything you please. You can work that end of it out with the commissioner; he knows about it and he's willing to go along."

"Great," Boyd said. "Do you have any idea how many cars there are in a city this size?"

"Well, we don't want all of them," Malone said. "Only red 1972 Cadillacs."

"It's still a lot," Boyd said.

"If there were only three," Malone said, "we wouldn't have any problems."

"And wouldn't that be nice?" Boyd said.

"Sure," Malone said, "but it isn't true. Anyhow, I want every one of those cars checked for any oddity, no matter how small. If there's an inch-long scratch on one fender, I want to know about it. If you've got to take the cars apart, then do that."

"Me?" Boyd said. "All by myself?"

"My God, no," Malone said. "Use your head. There'll be a team working with you. Let me explain it. Every nut, every bolt, every inch of those cars has to be examined thoroughly-got it?"

"I've got it," Boyd said, "but I'm damned if I like it. After all, Malone—"

Malone ignored him. "The governor of New York's promised his cooperation," he said, "and he said he'd get in touch with the governors of New Jersey and Connecticut and get cooperation from that angle. So we'll have both state and local police working with us."

"That's a help," Boyd said. "Well make such a happy team of workmen. Singing as we pull the cars apart through the long day and night and-listen, Malone, when do you want reports on this?"

"Yesterday," Malone said.

Boyd's eyebrows raised, then lowered. "Great," he said dully.

"I don't care how you get the cars," Malone said. "If you've got to, condemn 'em. But get every last one of them. And bring them over to Leibowitz and Hardin for a complete checkup. I'll give you the address."

"Thanks," Boyd said.

"Not at all," Malone said. "Glad to be of help. And don't worry; I'll have other work to do." He paused, and then went on, "I talked to Dr. Isaac Leibowitz-he's the head of the firm out there-and he says—"

"Wait a minute," Boyd said. "What?"

"You mean I don't have to take the cars apart myself? You mean this Leibowitz and Hardin, or whatever it is, will do it for me?"

"Of course," Malone said wearily. "You're not an auto technician or an electronics man. You're an agent of the FBI."

"I was beginning to wonder," Boyd said. "After all."

"Anyhow," Malone said doggedly, "I talked to Leibowitz, and he says he can give a car a complete check in about six hours, normally."

"Six hours?" Boyd stared. "That's going to take forever," he said.

"Well, he can set up a kind of assembly-line process and turn out a car every fifteen minutes. Any better?"

Boyd nodded.

"Good," Malone said. "There can't be so many 1972 red Cadillacs in the area that we can't get through them all at that speed." He thought a minute and then added, "By the way, you might check with the Cadillac dealers around town, and find out just how many have been sold to people living in the area."

"And while I'm doing all that," Boyd said, "what are you going to be doing?"

Malone looked at him and sighed. "I'll worry about that," he said. "Just get started."

"Suppose Leibowitz can't find anything?" Boyd said.

"If Leibowitz can't find it, it's not there," Malone said. "He can find electronic devices anywhere in any car made, he says-even if they're printed circuits hidden under the paint job."

"Pretty good," Boyd said. "But suppose he doesn't?"

"Then they aren't there," Malone said, "and we'll have to think of something else." He considered that. It sounded fine. Only he wished he knew what else there was to think of.

Well, that was just pessimism. Leibowitz would find something, and the case would be over, and he could go back to Washington and rest. In August he was going to have his vacation anyway, and August wasn't very far away.

Malone put a smile carefully on his face and told Boyd, "Get going." He slammed his hat on his head.

Wincing, he took it off and replaced it gently. The bottle of pills was still in his pocket, but he wasn't due for another one just yet.

He had time to go over to the precinct station in the West Eighties first. He headed outside to get another taxi.

CHAPTER 4

The door didn't say anything at all except Lt. P. Lynch. Malone looked at it for a couple of seconds. He'd asked the desk sergeant for Lynch, shown his credentials and been directed up a set of stairs and around a hall. But he still didn't know what Lynch did, who he was, or what his name was doing in the little black notebook.

Well, he told himself, there was only one way to find out.

He opened the door.

The room was small and dark. It had a single desk in it, and three chairs, and a hatrack. There wasn't any coat or hat on the hatrack, and there was nobody in the chairs. In a fourth chair, behind the desk, sat

a huskily built man. He had steel-gray hair, a hard jaw and, Malone noticed with surprise, a faint twinkle in his eye.

"Lieutenant Lynch?" Malone said.

"Right," Lynch said. "What's the trouble?"

"I'm Kenneth J. Malone, FBI." He reached for his wallet and found it. He flipped it open for Lynch, who stared at it for what seemed a long, long time, and then burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" Malone asked. Lynch laughed some more.

"Oh, come on," Malone said bitterly. "After all, there's no reason to treat an FBI agent like some kind of a—"

"FBI agent?" Lynch said. "Listen, buster, this is the funniest gag I've seen since I came on the force. Really a hell of a funny thing. Who told you to pull it? Jablonski downstairs? Or one of the boys on the beat? I know those beat patrolmen, always on the lookout for a new joke.. But this tops 'em all. This is the—"

"You're a disgrace to the Irish," Malone said tartly.

"A what?" Lynch said. "I'm not Irish."

"You talk like an Irishman," Malone said.

"I know it," Lynch said, and shrugged. "Around some precincts, you sort of pick it up. When all the other cops are-hey, listen. How'd we get to talking about me?"

"I said you were a disgrace to the Irish," Malone said.

"I was a-what?"

"Disgrace." Malone looked carefully at Lynch. In a fight, he considered, he might get in a lucky punch that would kill Malone. Otherwise, Malone didn't have a thing to worry about except a few months of hospitalization.

Lynch looked as if he were about to get mad, and then he looked down at Malone's wallet again and started to laugh.

"For God's sake," Malone said. "What's so damned funny?"

He grabbed the wallet and turned it toward him. At once, of course, he realized what had happened. He hadn't flipped it open to his badge at all. He'd flipped it open, instead, to a card in the card case:

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS THAT Sir Kenneth Malone, Knight, is hereby formally installed with the title of KNIGHT OF THE BATH and this card shall signify his right to that title and his high and respected position as officer in and of THE QUEEN'S OWN FBI

In a very small voice, Malone said, "There's been a terrible mistake."

"Mistake?" Lynch said.

Malone flipped the wallet open to his FBI shield. Lynch gave it a good long examination, peering at it from every angle and holding it up to the light two or three times. He even wet his thumb and rubbed the badge with it. At last he looked up.

"I guess you are the FBI," he said. "But what's with the gag?"

"It isn't a gag," Malone said. "It's just—" He thought of the little old lady in Yucca Flats, the little old lady who had been the prime mover in the last case he and Boyd had worked on together. Without the little old lady, the case might never have been solved; she was an authentic telepath, about the best that had ever been found.

But with her, Boyd and Malone had had enough troubles. Besides being a telepath, she was quite thoroughly insane. She had one fixed delusion: she believed she was Queen Elizabeth I.

She was still at Yucca Flats, along with the other telepaths Malone's investigation had turned up. And she still believed, quite calmly, that she was Good Queen Bess. Malone had been knighted by her during the course of the investigation. This new honor had come to him through the mail; apparently she had decided to ennoble some of her friends still further.

Malone made a mental note to ask Boyd if he'd received one. After all, there couldn't be too many Knights of the Bath. There was no sense in letting everybody in.

Then he realized that he was beginning to believe everything again. There had been times, working with the little old lady, when he had been firmly convinced that he was, in fact, the swaggering, ruthless swordsman, Sir Kenneth Malone. And even now...

"Well?" Lynch said.

"It's too long a story," Malone said. "And besides, it's not what I came here about."

Lynch shrugged again. "Okay," he said. "Tell it your way."

"First," Malone said, "what's your job?"

"Me? Precinct Lieutenant."

"Of this precinct?"

Lynch stared. "What else?" he said.

"Who knows?" Malone said. He found the black notebook and passed it across to Lynch. "I'm on this red Cadillac business, you know," he said by way of introduction.

"I've been hearing about it," Lynch said. He picked up the notebook without opening it and held it like a ticking bomb. "And I mean hearing about it," he said. "We haven't had any trouble at all in this precinct."

"I know," Malone said. "I've read the reports."

"Listen, not a single red Cadillac has been stolen from here, or been reported found here. We run a tight

precinct here, and let me tell you—"

"I'm sure you do a fine job," Malone said hastily. "But I want you to look at the notebook. The first page."

Lynch opened his mouth, closed it, and then flipped the notebook cover. He stared at the first page for a few seconds. "What's this?" he said at last. "Another gag?"

"No gag, Lieutenant," Malone said.

"It's your name and mine," Lynch said. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Malone shrugged. "Search me," he said. "The notebook was found only a couple of feet away from another car theft, last night." That was the simplest way he could think of to put it. "So I asked the Commissioner who Peter Lynch was, and he told me it was you."

"And, by God, it is," Lynch said, staring at the notebook. He seemed to be expecting it to rise and strike him.

Malone said, "Have you got any idea who'd be writing about you and me?"

Lynch shook his head. "If I had any ideas I'd feel a lot better," he said.

He wet his finger and turned the notebook page carefully over. When he saw the list of names on the second page he stopped again, and stared. This time he whistled under his breath.

Very cautiously, Malone said, "Something?"

"I'll be damned," Lynch said feelingly.

"What's wrong?" Malone said.

The police lieutenant looked up. "I don't know if it's wrong or what," he said. "It gives me sort of the willies. I know every one of these kids."

Malone took out a pill and swallowed it in a hurry. He felt exactly as if he had been given another concussion, absolutely free and without any obligations. His mouth opened but nothing came out for a long time. At last he managed to say, "Kids?"

"That's right," Lynch said. "What did you think?"

Malone shrugged helplessly.

"Every single one of them," Lynch said. "Right from around here."

There was a little silence.

"Who are they?" Malone said carefully.

"They're some kind of kid gang—a social club, or something like that. This first kid—Miguel Fueyo's his full name—is the leader. They call themselves the Silent Spooks."

"The what?" It seemed to Malone that the name was just a little fancy, even for a kid gang.

"The Silent Spooks," Lynch said. "I can't help it. But here they are, every one of them: Fueyo, Ramon Otravez, Mario Grito, Silvo Envoz, Alvarez Altapor, Felipe la Barba, Juan de los Santos, and Ray del Este. Right down the line." He looked up from the notebook with a blank expression on his face. "All of them kids from this neighborhood. The Silent Spooks."

"They know you?" Malone said.

"Sure they do," Lynch said. "They all know me. But do they know you?"

Malone thought. "They could have heard of me," he said at last, trying to be as modest as possible.

"I guess," Lynch said grudgingly. "How old are they?" Malone said.

"Fourteen to seventeen," Lynch said. "Somewhere in there. You know how these kid things run."

"The Silent Spooks," Malone said meditatively. It was a nice name, in a way; you just had to get used to it for a while. When he had been a kid, he'd belonged to a group that called itself the East Division Street Kids. There just wasn't much romance in a name like that. Now the Silent Spooks...

With a wrench, he brought his mind back to the subject at hand. "Do they get into much trouble?" he said.

"Well, no," Lynch said reluctantly. "As a matter of fact, they don't. For a bunch like that, around here, they're pretty well behaved, as far as that goes."

"What do you mean?" Malone said.

Lynch's face took on a delicately unconcerned appearance. "I don't know," he said. "They just don't get into neighborhood trouble. Maybe a scrap now and then—nothing big, though. Or maybe one of them cuts a class at school or argues with his teacher. But there's nothing unusual, and damn little of anything." He frowned.

Malone said, "Something's got to be wrong. What is it?"

"Well," Lynch said, "they do seem to have a hell of a lot of money to spend."

Malone sat down in a chair across the desk, and leaned eagerly toward Lynch. "Money?" he said.

"Money," Lynch said. "New clothes. Cigarettes. Malone, three of them are even supporting their parents. Old Jose Otravez-Ramon's old man—quit his job a couple of months ago, and hasn't worked since. Spends all his time in bars, and never runs out of dough—and don't tell me you can do that on unemployment insurance. Or social security payments."

"Okay," Malone said. "I won't tell you."

"And there's others. All the others, in fact. Mike Fueyo's sister dresses fit to kill, like a high-fashion model. And the Grito kid—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "From what you tell me, this isn't just a little extra money. These kids must be rolling in the stuff. Up to their ears in dough."

"Listen," Lynch said sadly, "Those kids spend more than I do. Hell, they do better than that—they spend more than I earn." He looked remotely sorry for himself, but not for long. "Every one of those kids spends like a drunken sailor, tossing his money away on all sorts of things."

"Like an expense account," Malone said idly. Lynch looked up. "Sorry," Malone said. "I was thinking about something else."

"I'll bet you were," Lynch said with unconcealed envy.

"No," Malone said. "Really. Listen, I'll check with Internal Revenue on that money. But have you got a list of the kids' addresses?"

"I can get one," Lynch said, and went to the door.

It closed behind him. Malone sat waiting alone for a few minutes, and then Lynch came back. "List'll be here in a minute," he said. He sat down behind his desk and reached for the notebook again. When he turned to the third page his expression changed to one of surprise.

"Be damned," he said. "There does seem to be a connection, doesn't there?" He held up the picture of the red Cadillac for Malone to see.

"Sure does," Malone said. "That's why I want those addresses. If there is a connection, I sure as hell want to find out about it."

Ten minutes later, Malone was walking out of the precinct station with the list of addresses in his pocket. He was heading for his Great Adventure, but he didn't know it. All he was thinking about was the red Cadillacs, and the eight teenagers.

"I'm going to get to the bottom of this if it takes me all summer," he said, muttering to himself.

"That's the spirit," he told himself. "Never say die."

Then, realizing he had just said it, he frowned. Perhaps it hadn't really counted. But then again...

He was on his way down the steps when he hit the girl.

The mutual collision was not catastrophic. On the other hand, it was not exactly minor. It fell somewhere between the two, as an unclassifiable phenomenon of undoubted potency. Malone said, "Oog," with some fervor as the girl collided with his chest and rebounded like a handball striking a wall. Something was happening to her, but Malone had no time to spare to notice just what. He was falling through space, touching a concrete step once in a while, but not long enough to make any real acquaintance with it. It seemed to take him a long time to touch bottom, and when he had, he wondered if touch was quite the word.

Bottom certainly was. He had fallen backward and landed directly on his glutei maximi, obeying the law regarding equal and opposite reaction and several other laws involving falling bodies.

His first thought was that he was now neatly balanced. His tail had received the same treatment as his

head. He wondered if a person could get concussion of the tail bones, and had reached no definite conclusion when, unexpectedly, his eyes focused again.

He was looking at a girl. That was all he saw at first. She had apparently fallen just as he had, bounced once and sat down rather hard. She was now lying flat on her back, making a sound like “rrr” between her teeth.

Malone discovered that he was sitting undignifiedly on the steps. He opened his mouth to say something objectionable, took another look at the girl, and shut it with a snap. This was no ordinary girl.

He smiled at her. She shook her head and sat up, still going “rrr.” Then she stopped and said instead, “What do you think—”

“I’m sorry,” Malone said in what he hoped was a charming, debonair, and apologetic voice. It was quite a lot to get into one voice, but he tried his very hardest. “I just didn’t see—”

“You didn’t?” the girl said. She took a long, slow look at him, shook her head again, and then pulled her skirt down carefully. “If you didn’t, you must be blind,” she said.

Malone noticed with hope that there was no anger in her voice. The last thing in the world he wanted was to get this girl angry at him.

“Oh, no,” Malone said. “I’m not blind. Not blind at all.” He smiled at her and stood up. His tail throbbed a little, but it didn’t seem to be anything really serious. “I’m just polite,” he said, and smiled again. His face was beginning to get a little tired, but he retained his last smile as he went over to her, extended a hand and pulled her to her feet.

She was something special. Her hair was long and dark, and fell in soft waves to her shoulders. The shoulders were something all by themselves, but Malone postponed consideration of them for a minute to take a look at her face.

It was heart-shaped and rather thin. She had large brown liquid eyes that could look, Malone imagined, appealing, loving, worshipping-or, like a minute ago, downright furious. Below these features she had a straight lovely nose and a pair of lips which Malone immediately classified as kissable.

Her figure, including the shoulders, was on the slim side, but she was very definitely all there. Malone couldn’t think of any parts the Creator had left out, and if there were any he didn’t want to hear about them. In an instant, Malone knew that he had met the only great love of his life.

Again.

His mind was whirling, and for a second he didn’t know what to do. And then he remembered the Queen’s Own FBI. Phrases flowered forth in his mind as if it were a garden packed corner to corner with the most exquisite varieties of blooming idiots.

“My deepest apologies, my dear,” Sir Kenneth Malone said gallantly, even managing a small display bow for the occasion. “May I be of any assistance?”

The girl smiled up at him as she came to her feet. The smile was radiant and beautiful and almost loving. Malone felt as if he couldn’t stand it. Tingles of the most wonderful kind ran through him, reached his toes and then back the other way, meeting a whole new set going forward.

"You're very nice," the girl said, and the tingles became positive waves of sensation. "Actually, it was all my fault. Please don't apologize, Mr.—" She paused expectantly.

"Me?" Malone said, his gallantry deserting him for the second. But it returned full force before he expected it. "I'm Malone," he said. "Kenneth Joseph Malone." He had always liked the middle name he had inherited from his father, but he never had much opportunity to use it. He made the most of it now, rolling it out with all sorts of subsidiary flourishes. As a matter of fact, he barely restrained himself from putting a "Sir" before his name. The girl's brown eyes widened just a trifle. Malone felt as if he could have fallen into them and drowned. "Oh, my," she said. "You must be a detective." And then, like the merest afterthought, "My name's Dorothy."

Dorothy. It was a beautiful name. It made Malone feel all choked up inside. He blinked at the girl and tried to look manly and wonderful. It was an effort, but he nearly carried it off.

After a second or two he realized that she had asked him a question. He didn't want to disillusion her in any way, and, after all, an FBI agent was a kind of detective, but he thought it was only fair that she should know the whole truth about him right from the start.

"Not exactly a detective," he said.

"Not exactly?" she said, looking puzzled. She looked positively glorious when puzzled, Malone decided at once.

"That is," he said carefully, "I do detect, but not for the city of New York."

"Oh," she said. "A private eye. Is that right?"

"Well," Malone said, "no." She looked even more puzzled.

Malone hastened to explain before he got to the point where conversation was impossible.

"Federal Bureau of Investigation," he said. After a second he thought of a clarification and added, "FBI."

"Oh," the girl said. "Oh."

"But you can call me Ken," Malone said.

"All right-Ken," she said. "And you call me Dorothy."

"Sure," he said. He tried it out. "Dorothy." It felt swell.

"Well," she said after a second.

"Oh," Malone said. "Were you looking for a detective? Because if I can help in any way—"

"Not exactly," Dorothy said. "Just a little routine business. I'll go on in and—"

Malone suddenly found himself talking without having any idea why he'd started, or what he was going to say. At first he said, "Urr," as if the machine were warming up, and this stopped Dorothy and caused her to give him a rather sharp, baffled stare. Then he found some words and used them hurriedly, before

they got away.

"Dorothy," he said, "would you like to take in a show this evening? I think I can get tickets to-well, I guess I could get tickets to almost anything, if I really tried." His expression attempted to leave no doubt that he would really try.

Dorothy appeared to consider for a moment. "Well," she said at last, "how about The Hot Seat?"

Malone felt just the way he had several years before when he had bluffed his way into a gigantic pot during a Washington poker game, with only a pair of fours to work with. At the last moment, his bluff had been called. It had, he realized, been called again. The Hot Seat had set some sort of record, not only for Broadway longevity, but for audience frenzy. Getting tickets for it was about the same kind of proposition as buying grass on the moon, and getting them with absolutely no prior notice would require all the wire-pulling Malone could manage. He thought about The Hot Seat and wished Dorothy had picked something easy, like arranging for her to meet the Senate.

But he swallowed bravely. "I'll do my best," he said. "Got any second choice?"

"Sure," she said, and laughed. "Pick any one you want. I haven't seen them all, and the ones I have seen are worth seeing again."

"Oh," Malone said.

"I really didn't expect you to get tickets for The Hot Seat," she said.

"Nothing," Malone said, "is impossible." He grinned at her. "Meanwhile, where can I pick you up? Your home?"

Dorothy frowned and shook her head. "No," she said. "You see, I'm living with an aunt, and I-well, never mind." She thought for a minute. "I know," she said. "Topp's."

"What?" Malone said.

"Topp's," Dorothy said. "On Forty-second Street, just east of Broadway? It's a restaurant."

"I don't exactly know where it is," Malone said, "but if it's there, I'll find it." He looked gallant and determined. "We can get something to eat there before the show-whatever the show turns out to be."

"Fine," Dorothy said.

"How about making it at six?" Malone said.

She nodded. "Six it is," she said. "Now bye-bye." She touched her forefinger to her lips, and brushed Malone's cheek with the kissed finger.

By the time the new set of tingles had begun to evaporate, she had gone into the police station. Malone heaved a great sigh of passion, and held down a strong impulse to follow her and protect her. He wasn't quite sure what he was going to protect her from, but he felt certain that that would come to him when the time arrived.

Nevertheless, he had work to do, unpleasant as the idea had suddenly begun to seem. He pulled the list

of addresses out of his pocket and looked at the first one.

Mike Fueyo.

Mike was the leader of the Silent Spooks, according to Lieutenant Lynch. Logically, therefore, he would be the first one to talk to. Malone tried to think of some good questions, but the best one he could come up with was: "Well, what about all those red Cadillacs?"

Somehow he doubted that this would provide a satisfactory reply.

He checked the address again and started firmly down the street, trying to think of some better questions along the way.

* * * *

The building was just off Amsterdam Avenue, in the eighties. It had been a shining new development once, but it was beginning to slide downhill now. The metal on the window frames was beginning to look worn, and the brickwork hadn't been cleaned in a long time. Where chain fences had once protected lonely blades of grass, children, mothers, and baby carriages held sway now, and the grass was gone.

Instead, the building was pretty well surrounded by a moat of sick-looking brown dirt.

Malone went into the first building and checked the name against the mailboxes there, trying to ignore the combined smells of sour milk, red pepper, and here and there a whiff of unwashed humanity.

It was on the tenth floor: Fueyo, J. That, he supposed, would be Mike's widowed mother; Lynch had told him that much about the boy and his family. He found the elevator, which was covered with scribbles ranging from JANEY LOVES MIGUEL to startling obscenities, and rode it upstairs.

Apartment 1004 looked like every other apartment in the building, at least from the outside. Malone pressed the button and waited a second to hear the faint buzzing at the other side of the door. After a minute, he pressed it again.

The door swung open very suddenly, and Malone stepped back.

A short, wrinkled, dark-eyed woman in a print housedress was eying him with deep suspicion. "My daughter is not home," she announced at once.

"I'm not looking for your daughter," Malone said. "I'd like to talk to Mike."

"Mike?" Her expression grew even more suspicious. "You want to talk to Mike?"

"That's right," Malone said.

"Ah," the woman said. "You one of those hoodlum friends he has. I'm right? You can talk to Mike when I am dead and have no control over him. For now, you can just—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. He pulled out his wallet and flipped it open to show his badge, being very careful that he made the right flip this time. He didn't know exactly how this woman would react to the Queen's Own FBI, but he didn't especially want to find out.

She looked down at the badge without taking the wallet from him. "Hah," she said. "You're cop, eh?" Her eyes left the wallet and examined Malone from head to foot. It was perfectly plain that they didn't

like what they saw. "Cop," she said again, as if to herself. It sounded like a curse.

Malone said, "Well, I—"

"You want to ask me stupid questions," she said. "That is what you want to do. I'm right?"

"I only—"

"I know nothing," she said. "Nothing of any kind." She closed her mouth and stood regarding him as if he were a particularly repulsive statue. Malone looked past her into the living room beyond the door. It was faded now, but it had once been bright and colorful. There was an old rug on the floor, and tables were everywhere. The one bright thing about the room was the assortment of flowers; there were flowers everywhere, in vases, in pots, and even in window boxes. There was also a lot of crockery statuary, mostly faded, chipped, or worn in some way. The room looked to Malone as if its last inhabitant had died ten years before; only the flowers had been renewed. Everything else had not only the appearance of age, but the look of having been cast up as a high-water mark by the sea, which had receded and left only the tangled wreckage.

The woman cleared her throat, and Malone's gaze came back to her. "I can tell you nothing," she said.

"I don't want to talk to you," Malone said again. "I want to talk to Mike."

Her eyes were very cold. "You from the police, and you want to talk to Mike. You make a joke. Only I don't think the joke is very funny."

"Joke?" Malone said. "You mean Mike's not here?"

Her gaze never wavered. "You know he is not," she said. "Ten minutes ago the policemen were taking him away to the police station. How then could he be here?"

"Ten minutes ago?" Malone blinked. Ten minutes ago he had been looking for this apartment. Probably it hadn't taken Lynch's men ten minutes to find it; they weren't strangers in New York. "He was arrested?" Malone said.

"I said so, didn't I?" the woman said. "You must be crazy or else something." Her eyes were still cold points, but Malone suddenly saw a glow behind them, the glow of tears. Mike was her son. She did not seem surprised that the police had taken him away, but she was determined to protect him. He was her son.

Malone's voice was very gentle. "Why did they arrest him?" he said.

The woman shrugged, a single sharp gesture. "You ask me this?" she said.

"I'm not a cop," Malone said. "I'm from the FBI. I don't know anything about why the cops might have arrested Mike."

"FBI?" the woman said.

"It's all right," Malone said, with all the assurance he could muster. "I only want to talk to him."

"Ah," the woman said. Tears were plain in her eyes now, glittering on the surface. "Why they take him

away, I do not know. My Mike do nothing. Nothing."

"But didn't they say anything about—"

"They say?" the woman cried. "They say only they have orders from this Lieutenant Lynch. He is lieutenant at police station."

"I know," Malone said gently.

"Lieutenant Lynch wants to ask Mike questions, so police come, take him away." Her English was beginning to lose ground as the tears came closer, as she slowly lost control.

"Lynch asked for him?" Malone said. He frowned. Whatever that meant, he wanted to be there himself. And perhaps he could help the old woman in some way. Anyhow, he would try. She stared up at him stonily. "Look, Mrs. Fueyo," he said. "I'm going down there to talk to Mike right now. And if he hasn't done anything, I'll see that he gets right on home to you. Right away."

Her expression changed a trifle. She did not actually soften, but Malone could feel the gratitude lurking behind her eyes as if it were afraid to come out. She nodded gravely and said nothing at all. He stepped away, and she closed the door without a sound.

He stood staring at the door for a few seconds. Then he turned and punched the elevator button savagely.

There wasn't any time to lose.

He walked back to the precinct station. Knowing the way, it took him about five minutes instead of the fifteen it had taken him to find the Fueyo residence. But he still felt as if time were passing much too fast.

He ran up the steps and passed right by the desk sergeant, who apparently recognized him; he said nothing as Malone charged up the stairs and around the hall to Lynch's office.

It was empty.

Malone stared at it and started down the hall again without knowing where he was heading. Halfway to the stairs he met a patrolman.

"Where's Lynch?" he asked.

"The lieutenant?" the patrolman said.

Malone fumed. "Who else?" he said. "Where is he?"

"Got some kid back in the tank, or somewhere," the patrolman said. "Asking him a couple of questions, that's all." He added, "Hey, listen, buddy, what do you want to see the lieutenant for? I mean, you can't just go charging in to—"

Malone was down the stairs before he'd finished. He went, up to the desk.

The desk sergeant looked down. "What's it this time?" he said. "A track meet?"

"I'm in a hurry," Malone said. "Where are the cells? I want to see Lieutenant Lynch."

The desk sergeant nodded. "Okay," he said. "But the lieutenant ain't in any of the cells. He's back in Interrogation with some kid."

"Take me there," Malone said.

"I'll show you, anyway," the sergeant said. "Can't leave the desk on duty." He cleared his throat and gave Malone a set of directions that took him around to the back of the station. He was repeating the directions when Malone left.

There was a door at the end of a corridor at the back of the station. It was a plain wooden door with the numeral 1 stenciled on it. Malone opened it and looked inside.

He was staring into a rather small, rather plain little room. There were absolutely no bright beam lights burning, and there didn't seem to be any rubber hoses around anywhere. There were only four chairs.

Seated in three of the chairs were Lieutenant Lynch and two other police officers. In the fourth chair, facing them, was a young boy.

He didn't look like a tough kid. He had wavy black hair, brown eyes, and what Malone thought looked like a generally friendly appearance. He was slight and wiry, not over five feet five or six. And he wore an expression that was neither too eager nor hostile. It wasn't just blank, either; Malone finally pinned it down as receptive.

He had the strangest impression that he had seen the boy somewhere before. But he couldn't remember when or where.

Lieutenant Lynch was talking.

"...all we want, Mike, is a little information. We thought you'd be able to help us, if you wanted to. Now, how about it?"

"Sure," Mike Fueyo said. His voice was a little high, but it was well controlled and responsive. "Sure, Lieutenant. I'll help if I can, but I just don't dig what you're giving me. It doesn't make sense." Lynch stirred a little impatiently, and his voice began to carry a new bite. "I'm talking about Cadillacs," he said. "Red Cadillacs, 1972 models."

"It's a nice car," Mike said.

"What do you know about them?" Lynch said.

"Know about them?" Mike said. "I know they're nice cars. That's about it. What else am I going to know, Lieutenant? Maybe you think I own one of these big red 1972 Caddies. Maybe you think I got that kind of money. Well, listen, Lieutenant. I'd like to help you out, but I'm just not—"

"The Cadillacs," Lynch said, "were—"

"Just a minute, Lieutenant," Malone said. Dead silence fell with great suddenness. Lynch and all the others looked around at Malone, who smiled apologetically. "I don't want to disturb anything," he said. "But I would like to talk to Mike here for a little while."

"Oh," Lynch said sourly. "Sure. Sure."

"I'd like to ask him a couple of questions," Malone said. "Alone."

"Alone." Lynch said. "Oh." But there was nothing for him to do, Malone knew, except bow to the inevitable. "Of course," he said. "Go right ahead."

"You can stand outside the door," Malone said. "He won't get away. And you'd better hold this." Malone, knowing perfectly well that staying armed and alone in a room with a suspect was something you just did not do, unstrapped his .44 Magnum and handed it to the lieutenant.

He left reluctantly with his men. The door closed.

Malone could understand Lynch's attitude. If Malone solved the case, Lynch would not get any credit. Otherwise, it might go down in his personal record. And of course the NYPD would rather wrap the case up themselves; the FBI was treated as a necessary interference. Unfortunately, Malone thought, Lynch had had absolutely no choice. He sighed gently, and turned his attention to Mike Fueyo, who was still sitting in his chair.

"Now, Mike—" he began, and was interrupted.

The door opened. Lieutenant Lynch said, "If you need us, Malone, just yell."

"You'll hear me," Malone promised. The door shut.

He turned back to the boy. "Now, Mike," he began again. "My name is Malone, and I'm with the FBI in Washington. I'd like to ask you a few—"

"Gee, Mr. Malone," Mike broke in eagerly. "I'm glad you're here. I'm really glad about that."

Malone said, "Well, I—"

"These cops here have been giving me a pretty rough deal, you know?" Mike said.

"I'm sure they—" Malone began.

"But I've been looking for you," Mike went on. "See, I wanted to say something to you. Something real important."

Malone leaned forward expectantly. At last he was going to get some information—perhaps the information that would break the whole case wide open. He said, "Yes?"

"Well," Mike began, and stopped.

"You don't have to be afraid of me, Mike," Malone said. "Just tell me whatever's on your mind."

"Sure," Mike said. "It's this."

He took a deep breath. Malone clenched his fists. Now it was coming. Now he would hear the all-important fact. He waited.

Mike stuck out his tongue and blew the longest, loudest, brassiest, and juiciest Bronx cheer that Malone had ever heard.

Then, almost instantly, the room was empty except for Malone himself.

Mike was gone.

There wasn't any place to hide, and there hadn't been any time to hide in. Malone looked around wildly, but he had no doubts at all.

Mike Fueyo had vanished, utterly and instantaneously. He'd gone out like a light.

CHAPTER 5

Thirty seconds passed.

During that time, Malone did nothing at all. He just sat there, while a confused montage of pictures tumbled through his head. Sometimes he saw double exposures, and sometimes a couple of pictures overlapped, but it didn't seem to make any difference, because none of the pictures meant anything anyhow.

The reason for that was obvious. He was no longer sane. He had cracked up. At a crucial moment his brain had failed him, and now people would have to come in and cart him away and put him in a strait jacket. It was perfectly obvious to Malone that he was no longer capable of dealing with everyday life. The blow on the head had probably taken final effect, and it had been more serious than the doctor had imagined.

He had always distrusted doctors anyhow.

And now he was suffering from a delayed reaction. He wasn't living in the real world any more. He had gone off to dreamland, where people disappeared when you looked at them. There was no hope for him any more.

It was a nice theory, and it was even comforting in a way. There was only one thing wrong with it.

The room around him didn't look dreamlike at all. It was perfectly solid and real, and it looked just the way it had looked before Mike Fueyo had—well, Malone amended, before whatever had happened had happened. It was a perfectly complete little room, and it had four chairs in it. Malone was sitting in one of the chairs and all the others were empty.

There was absolutely nothing else in the room.

With some regret, Malone abandoned the theory that he had gone mad. This left him with no ideas at all. Because if he hadn't become insane, then what had happened?

After another second or two, some ideas began to filter through the daze. Perhaps he'd just blacked out for a minute and the kid had gone out the door. That was possible, wasn't it?

Sure it was. And maybe he had just not seen the kid go. His eyes had failed for a second or two. That could certainly happen after a blow on the head. Malone tried to remember where the sight centers of the

brain were. Maybe whoever had hit him had disturbed them, and he'd had a sudden blackout.

Come to think of it, that made pretty good sense. He had blacked out, and Mike had just walked out the door. It had to be the door, of course—the windows were out of the question, since there weren't any windows. And six-inch-wide air-conditioner ducts do not provide reasonable space for an exit, not if you happen to be a human being.

That, Malone told himself, was settled—and a good thing, too. He had begun to worry about it. But now he knew just what had happened, and he felt relieved. He got up from his chair, walked over to the door and opened it.

Lieutenant Lynch nearly fell into the room. He'd obviously had his ear pressed tightly to the door and hadn't expected it to open. The other two cops stood behind him, just about filling the hallway with their broad shoulders.

"Well, well," Malone said.

Lynch recovered his balance and glared at the FBI agent. He said nothing.

"Where is he?" Malone said. "Where is he?" Lynch repeated, and blinked. "Where's who?"

Malone shook his head impatiently. "Fueyo," he said. "The kid. Where did he—"

Lynch's expression was the same as that on the faces of the other two cops: complete and utter bafflement. Malone stopped and stared. It was suddenly very obvious that the lovely theory he had worked out for Mike's disappearance wasn't true in the least. If Mike Fueyo had come out the door, then these cops would know about it. But they obviously knew nothing at all about it.

Therefore, he hadn't come out through the door.

Malone took a deep breath.

"What are you talking about?" Lynch said. "Isn't the kid in there with you? What's happened?"

There was only one thing to do and, straight-faced, Malone went ahead and did it. "Of course not," he snapped, trying to sound impatient and official. "I released him."

"You what?"

"Released him," Malone said. He stepped out into the hall and closed the door of the interrogation room firmly behind him. "I got all the information I needed, so I let him go."

"Thanks," Lynch said bitterly. "After all, I was the one who—"

"You called him in for questioning, didn't you, Lieutenant?" Malone said.

"Yes, I did, and I—"

"Well," Malone said, "I questioned him."

There was a little silence. Then Lynch asked, in a strangled voice, "What did he say?"

"Sorry," Malone said at once. "That's classified information." He pushed his way into the corridor, trying to look as if he had fifteen other jobs to accomplish within the next hour. Being an FBI agent was going to help a little, but he still had to look good in order to carry it off.

"But—"

"Thanks for your co-operation, Lieutenant," Malone said. "You've all been very helpful." He smiled at them in what he hoped was a superior manner. "So long," he said, and started walking.

"Wait!" Lynch said. He flung open the door of the interrogation room. There was no doubt that it was empty. "Wait! Malone!"

Malone turned slowly, trying to look calm and in control of the situation. "Yes?" he said.

Lynch looked at him with puzzled, pleading eyes. "Malone, how did you release him? We were right here. He didn't come through the door. There isn't any other exit. So how did you get him out?"

There was only one answer to that, and Malone gave it with a quiet, assured air. "I'm terribly sorry, Lieutenant," he said, "but that's classified information, too." He gave the cops a little wave and walked slowly down the corridor. When he reached the stairs he began to speed up and he was out of the precinct station and into a taxicab before any of the cops could have realized what had happened.

He took a deep breath, feeling as if it were the first he'd had in several days. "Breathe air," he told himself. "It's good for you." Not that New York had any real air in it. It was mostly carbon fumes and the like. But it was the nearest thing to air that Malone could find at the moment, and he determined to go right on breathing it until something better and cleaner showed up.

But that wasn't important now. As the cab tooted along down Broadway toward 69th Street, Malone closed his eyes and began going over the whole thing in his mind.

Mike Fueyo had vanished.

Of that, Malone told himself, there was no shadow of doubt. No probable, possible shadow of doubt.

No possible doubt (as a matter of fact) whatever.

Dismissing the Grand Inquisitor with a negligent wave of his hand, he concentrated on the main question. It was a good question. Malone could have sat and pondered it admiringly for a long time.

As a matter of fact, that was all he could think of to do, as the cab turned up 70th Street and headed east. He certainly didn't have any answers for it.

But it was a lovely question:

Where does that leave Kenneth J. Malone?

And, possibly even more important: Where was Miguel Fueyo?

It was obvious that he'd vanished on purpose. And it hadn't just been something he'd recently discovered. He had known all along that he could pull the trick; if he hadn't known that, he wouldn't have

done what he had done beforehand. No seventeen-year-old boy, no matter what he was, would give the FBI the raspberry unless he was pretty sure he could get away with it.

Malone remembered the raspberry and winced slightly. The cab driver called back, "Anything wrong, buddy?"

"Everything," Malone said. "But don't worry about it."

The cab driver shrugged and turned back to the wheel. Malone went back to Mike Fueyo.

The kid could make himself vanish at will.

Invisibility?

Malone thought about that for a while. The fact that it was impossible didn't decide him against it. Everything was impossible; that much was clear. But he didn't think Mike Fueyo had just become invisible. No. There had been the sense of presence actually leaving the room. If Mike had become invisible and stayed, Malone was sure he wouldn't have felt the boy leave.

Mike had not just become invisible. (And what do I mean, "just"? Malone asked himself unhappily.) He had gone-elsewhere.

This brought him back full circle to his original question. Where was the boy now? But he ignored it for a minute or two as another, even more difficult query presented itself.

Never mind where, Malone told himself. How?

Something was bothering him. Malone realized that it had been bothering him for a long time. At last he managed to locate it and hold it up to the light for inspection.

Dr. O'Connor, the psionics expert at Westinghouse, had mentioned something during Malone's last conversation with him. Dr. O'Connor, who'd invented a telepathy detector, had been discussing further reaches in his field.

"After all," he'd said, "if thoughts can bridge any distance whatever, regardless of other barriers, there is no reason why matter could not do likewise."

"But it doesn't," Malone had said. "Or at least it hasn't so far."

"There's no way to be sure of that," Dr. O'Connor had said sternly. "After all, we have no reports of it-but that means little. Our search has only begun."

"Oh," Malone had said. "Sure."

"Matter, controlled by thought, might bridge distances instantaneously," Dr. O'Connor had said.

And he'd referred to something, some word...

Teleportation.

That was it. Malone sat back. All you had to do, he reflected, was to think yourself somewhere else,

and-bing!-you were there. If Malone had been able to do it, it would not only have saved him a lot of time and trouble, but also such things as cab fare and train fare and ... oh, a lot of different things.

But he couldn't. And Dr. O'Connor hadn't found anyone else who could, either. As far as Malone knew, nobody could teleport.

Except Mike Fueyo.

The cab stopped in front of FBI headquarters. "You some kind of secret agent?" the cabbie said. "Like on 3-D?"

"Of course not," Malone said pleasantly. "I'm a foreign spy."

"Oh," the cabbie said. "Sure." He took his money with a somewhat puzzled air, while Malone crossed the sidewalk and went into the building.

Everyone was active. Malone pushed his way through arguing knots of men until he reached the small office which he and Boyd had been assigned. He had already decided not to tell Boyd about the disappearing boy. That would only confuse him, and matters were confused enough as they stood. Malone had no proof; he had only his word and the word of a few baffled policemen, all of whom were probably thoroughly confused by now.

Boyd had a job to do, and Malone had decided to let him go on doing it. That, as a matter of fact, was what he was doing when Malone entered the room.

He was sitting at his desk, talking on the telephone. Malone couldn't see the face on the screen, but Boyd was scowling at it fiercely. "Sure," he said. "So some guy makes a fuss. That's what you're there for."

"But he wants to sue the city," a voice said tinnily. "Or somebody, anyhow."

"Let him sue," Boyd said. "We've got authority. Just get that car."

"Look," the voice said. "I—"

"I don't care now," Boyd snapped. "Get it. Then hand it over to the pickup squad and say, 'Mr. Malone wants this car immediately.' They'll know what to do. Got that?"

"Sure, Mr. Boyd," the voice said. "But I don't—"

"Never mind," Boyd said. "Go ahead and get the job done. The United States of America is depending on you." With one last scowl, he hung up and swung around to face Malone. "You gave me a great job," he said. "I really love it, you know that?"

"It's got to be done," Malone said in a noncommittal voice. "How's it going so far?"

Boyd closed his eyes for a second. "Twenty-three red 1972 Cadillacs to date-which isn't bad, I suppose," he said. "And six calls like the one you just heard. All from agents with problems. What am I supposed to do when a guy catches a couple necking in a 1972 red Cadillac?"

"At this time of day?" Malone said.

"New York," Boyd said, and shrugged. "Things are funny here."

Malone nodded. "What did you do about them?" he said.

"Told the agent to take the car and give 'em a pass to a movie," Boyd said.

"Good," Malone said. "Keep that sort of thing in the dark where it belongs." For some reason, this reminded him of Dorothy. He still had to get tickets for a show. But that could wait. "How about the assembly line?" he said.

"Disassembly," Boyd said. "Leibowitz has started it going. He borrowed the use of a big auto repair shop out in Jersey City, and they'll be doing a faster job than we thought." He paused. "But it's been a wonderful day," he said. "One to remember as long as I live. Possibly even until tomorrow. And how have you been doing?"

"Well," Malone said, "I'm not absolutely sure yet."

"That's a nice helpful answer," Boyd said. "In the best traditions of the FBI."

"I can't help it," Malone said. "It's true."

"Well, what the hell have you been doing?" Boyd said. "Drinking? Helling around? Living it up while I sit here and talk to people about Cadillacs?"

"Not exactly," Malone said. "I've been—well, doing more or less what Burris told me to do. Nosing around. Keeping my eyes open. I think—"

The phone chimed. Boyd flipped up the mike and eyed the screen balefully. "Federal Bureau of Investigation," he said crisply. "Who the hell are you?"

A voice on the other end said, "What?" before the image on the screen cleared.

"Federal Bureau of Investigation," Boyd said in a perfectly innocent voice. "Boyd speaking."

"Oh," a voice said. It was a very calm, quiet voice. "Hello, Boyd."

The image cleared. Boyd was facing the picture of a man in his middle thirties, a brown-haired man with large, gentle brown eyes and an expression that somehow managed to look both sad and confident.

"Hello, Dr. Leibowitz," Boyd said.

"Is Mr. Malone in?" Leibowitz said. "I really wanted to talk to him."

"Sure," Boyd said. "Just a second."

He motioned to Malone, who came around and sat at Boyd's desk as Boyd got up. He nodded to Leibowitz, and the electronics engineer nodded back.

"How's everything coming, Dr. Leibowitz?" Malone said.

Leibowitz shrugged meaningfully. "All right," he said. "I called you to tell you about that, by the way."

We've managed to cut the per-car time down somewhat."

"That's wonderful," Malone said.

"It's now down to about four hours per car, and that means we may be able to do even better than running one off the line every fifteen minutes. At the moment, fifteen minutes is about standard, though, with sixteen cars in the line."

"Sure," Malone said. "But anything you can do to speed it up—"

"I understand," Leibowitz said. "Of course I'll do anything that I can for you. I have got a small preliminary report, by the way."

"Yes?"

"The first car has just been run off the assembly line," Leibowitz said. "And I'm afraid, Mr. Malone, that there's nothing odd about it at all."

"Well," Malone said, "we can't expect to hit the jackpot with our first try."

"Certainly not," Leibowitz said. "But the second should be off soon. And then the rest. I'm keeping my eye on every one, of course."

"Fine," Malone said, and meant it. Leibowitz was the kind of man who inspired instant and complete trust. Malone was perfectly sure he'd do the job he had started to do. Then an idea struck him. "Has the first car been reassembled yet?" he asked.

"Of course," Leibowitz said. "We took that step into account in our timing. What would you like done with it-and with the other ones, as they come off?"

"Unless you can find something odd about a car, just return it to its owner," Malone said. "Or pass the problem on to the squad men; they'll take care of it." He paused. "If you do find something odd—"

"I'll call you at once, of course," Leibowitz said.

"Good," Malone said. "Incidentally, I did want to ask you something. I don't want you to think I'm doubting your work, or anything like that. Believe me."

"I'm sure you're not," Leibowitz said.

"But," Malone said, "why does it take so long? I'd think it would be fairly easy to spot a robotic or a semi-robotic brain capable of controlling a car."

"It might have been, once," Leibowitz said. "But these days the problems are rather special. Oh, I don't mean we can't do it—we can and we will. But with subminiaturization, Mr. Malone, and semipsionic circuits, a pretty good brain can be hidden beneath a coat of paint."

For no reason at all, Malone suddenly thought of Dorothy again. "A coat of paint?" he said in a disturbed tone.

"Certainly," Leibowitz said, and smiled at him. It was a warm smile that had little or nothing to do with

the problem they were talking about. But Malone liked it. It made him feel as if Leibowitz liked him, and approved of him. He grinned back.

"But a coat of paint isn't very much," Malone said.

"It doesn't have to be very much," Leibowitz said. "Not these days. I've often told Emily-that's my wife, Mr. Malone-that I could hide a TV circuit under her lipstick. Not that there would be any use in it; but the techniques are there. Mr. Malone. And if your conjecture is correct, someone is using them."

"Oh," Malone said. "Sure. But you can find the circuits, if they're there?"

Leibowitz nodded slowly. "We can, Mr. Malone," he said. "They betray themselves. A microcircuit need not be more than a few microns thick, you see-as far as the conductors and insulators are concerned, at any rate. But the regulators-transistors and such-have to be as big as a pinhead."

"Enormous, huh?" Malone said.

"Well," Leibowitz said, and chuckled, "quite large enough to locate without trouble, at any rate. They're very hard to conceal. And the leads from the brain to the power controls are even easier to find-comparatively speaking, of course."

"Of course," Malone said.

"All the brain does, you see," Leibowitz said, "is control the mechanism that steers the car. But it takes real power to steer-a great deal more than it does to compute the steering."

"I see," Malone, who didn't, said desperately. "In other words, unless something radically new has been developed, you can find the circuits."

"Right," Leibowitz said, grinning. "It would have to be something very new indeed, Mr. Malone. We're up on most of the latest developments here; we've got to be. But I don't want you giving me the credit for this."

"No?" Malone said.

"Oh, no," Leibowitz said. "All I do is work out the general application to theory, as far as actual detection is concerned. It's my partner, Mr. Hardin, who takes care of all the engineering details."

Malone said, "Well, so long as one of you—"

"Sal's a real crackerjack," Leibowitz said enthusiastically. "He had an intuitive feel about these things. It's really amazing to watch him go to work."

"It must be," Malone said politely.

"Oh, it really is," Leibowitz said. "And it's because of Sal that I can make the guarantee I do make: that if there are any unusual circuits in those cars, we can find them."

"Thanks," Malone said. "I'm sure you'll do the job. And we need that information. Don't bother to send along a detailed report, though, unless you find something out of the ordinary."

"Of course, Mr. Malone," Leibowitz said. "I wouldn't have bothered you except for the production speed-up here."

"I understand," Malone said. "It's perfectly all right. I'll be hearing from you, then?"

"Certainly, Mr. Malone," Leibowitz said.

Malone cut the circuit at once and started to turn away, but he never got the chance. It started to chime again at once.

"Federal Bureau of Investigation," Malone said as he flipped up the receiver. He wanted badly to copy Boyd's salutation, but he found that he just didn't have the gall to do it, and said sadly instead, "Malone speaking."

There was no immediate answer from the other party. Instead, the screen slowly cleared, showing Malone the picture of a woman he recognized instantly.

It was Juanita Fueyo, Mike's mother.

Malone stared at her. It seemed to him as if a couple of hours passed while he tried to find his voice. Of course, she'd looked up the FBI number in the phone book, and found him that way. But she was about the last person on earth from whom he'd expected a call.

"Oh, Mr. Malone," she said, "thank you so much. You got my Mike back from the police."

Malone gulped. "I did?" he said. "Well, I—"

"But, Mr. Malone, you must help me again. Because now my Mike says he must not stay at home! He is leaving, he is leaving right away!"

"Leaving?" Malone said.

He thought of a thousand things to do. He could send a squad of men to arrest Mike. And Mike could disappear while they were trying to get hold of him. He could go down himself-and be greeted, if he knew Mike Fueyo, with another giant economy-size raspberry. He could try to plead with Mike on the phone.

And what good would that do? So, instead, he just sat and stared while Mrs. Fueyo went right on.

"He says he will send me money, but money is nothing compared to my own boy, my own Mike. He says he must go away, Mr. Malone, but I know you can stop him. I know it!"

"Sure," Malone said. "But I—"

"Oh, I knew that you would," Mrs. Fueyo shrieked. She almost came through the screen at him. "You are a great man, Mr. Malone. I will say many prayers for you. Every day I will pray for you in all your work. I will never stop praying for you because you help me." Her voice and face changed abruptly.

"Excuse me now," she said. "I must go back to work."

"Well," Malone said, "if I—"

Then she turned back and beamed at him again. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Malone. Thank you with the thanks of a mother. Bring my boy back to me."

And the image faded and died.

Boyd tapped Malone on the shoulder. "I didn't know you were involved in an advice column for the lovelorn," he said.

"I'm not," Malone said sourly.

Boyd sighed. "I'll bite," he said. "Who was that?"

Malone thought of several possible answers and finally chose one. "That," he said, "was my mother-in-law. She worries about me every time I go out on a job with you."

"Very funny," Boyd said. "I am screaming with laughter."

"Just get back to work, Tommy-boy," Malone said, "and leave everything to me."

He hoped he sounded more confident than he felt. Lighting a cigarette-and wishing he were alone in his own room, so that he could smoke a cigar and not have to worry about looking dashing and alert-Malone strolled out of the office with a final wave to Boyd. He was thinking about Mike Fueyo, and he stopped his chain of reasoning just long enough to look in at the office of the Agent-in-Charge, and ask him to pry loose two tickets for The Hot Seat for that night.

"My God," the agent said. He was a tall thin man who looked as if he suffered from chronic stomach trouble. "You must be crazy. Are they all like that in Washington?"

"No," Malone said cheerfully. "Some of them are pretty normal. There's this one man-Napoleon, we call him-who keeps insisting that he should have won the battle of Waterloo. But otherwise he's perfectly fine."

He flicked his cigarette in the air and left, grinning. Five steps away the grin disappeared and a frown took its place.

CHAPTER 6

He walked along 69th Street to Park Avenue without noticing where he was going. Luckily, the streets weren't really crowded, and Malone only had to apologize twice, once for stepping on a man's toe and once for absently toeing a woman's dog. When he reached the corner he headed downtown, humming Kathleen Mavourneen under his breath and trying to figure out his next move.

He needed more than one move. He needed a whole series of moves. This was not the usual kind of case. Burris had called it a vacation and, in one way, Malone supposed, Burris was perfectly right. For once there was no question about who had committed the crimes. It was obvious by now that Mike Fueyo and his Silent Spooks had been stealing the Cadillacs.

It was even obvious that Mike-or someone with Mike's talent-had bopped him on the head, and taken the red Cadillac he had been examining. And the same gang probably accounted for the Sergeant Jukovsky affair, too.

Or at least it was reasonable to assume that they did, Malone thought. He could see how it had worked. One of the Silent Spooks was a lot smaller than a grown man, and the two cops who hadn't seen anyone in the parked car just hadn't been able to catch sight of the undersized driver. Of course, there had been someone in the car when it had been driving along the West Side Highway. Someone who had teleported himself right out of the car when it had gone over the embankment.

That, of course, meant that there would be no secret machines found in the red Cadillacs Leibowitz and Hardin were examining now. But Malone had already decided to let that phase of things go on. First of all, it was always possible that he was wrong, and that some such machine really did exist. Second, even if they didn't find a machine, they might find something else. Almost anything, he thought, might turn up.

And third, it kept Boyd decently busy, and out of Malone's hair.

That had been an easy solution. And, Malone thought, the problem of who had been taking the red Cadillacs looked just as easy now, if his answers were right. And he was reasonably sure of that.

Unfortunately, he was now left with a new and unusual question: How do you catch a teleport?

Malone looked up, jarred to a stop by a man built like a brown bear, with a chunky body and an oval, slightly sloping head and face. He had very short brown hair shot through with gray, and gave Malone a small inquisitive stare and looked away without a word.

Malone mumbled, "Sorry," and looked up at the street sign. He was at 47th Street and Park Avenue. He jerked a hand up to his face, and managed to hook the chunky man by the suit. It fell away, exposing the initials S.M. carefully worked into his shirt. Second Mistake, Malone thought wildly, muttered, "Sorry," again and turned west, feeling fairly grateful to the unfortunate bystander.

He had reminded Malone of one thing. If he wanted to get even a part of his plan past the drawing-board stage, he had to make a call in a hurry.

He found a phone booth in a bar called the Ad Lib, at Madison Avenue. Sternly telling himself that he was stopping there to make a phone call, a business phone call, and not to have a drink, he marched right past the friendly bartender and went into the phone booth, where he made a call to New York Police Commissioner John Henry Fernack.

Fernack's face was that of an old man, but there was no telling how old. The early seventies was one guess, Malone imagined; the late fifties might be another. He looked tough, as if he had spent all of his life trying to persuade other people that he was young enough for the handball tournament. When he saw Malone, his eyebrows lifted slightly, but he didn't say anything.

"Commissioner," Malone said, "I called to ask you to do me a favor."

There was caution hidden in the calm and quiet voice. "Well," Fernack said, "what is it, Malone?"

"Can you have all the robberies for a given period run through the computer?" Malone said. "I need some dope."

"Depends on the given period," Fernack said. "I can't do it for 1774."

"What would I need data on robberies in 1774 for?" Malone said, honestly interested.

"I never question the FBI," Fernack said soberly. "But what dates do you want?"

"The past year, maybe the past year and a half."

"And what data?"

"I want every reported crime that hasn't been solved," Malone said, "and which seems to have been committed by some impossible means. A safe that was robbed without being opened, for instance—that's the kind of thing I mean."

"Every unsolved crime?" Fernack said. "Now, hold your horses, Malone. I'm not at all sure that—"

"Don't worry about a thing, Commissioner," Malone said. "This is confidential."

"You know how I'd feel about this if word ever got out to—"

"I said confidential, John Henry," Malone said, trying to sound friendly and trustworthy. "After all, every place has unsolved crimes. Even the FBI isn't absolutely perfect."

"Oh," Fernack said. "Sure. But confidential, Malone."

"You have my word," Malone said sincerely.

Fernack said, "Well—"

"How fast can you get me the dope?" Malone said.

"I don't exactly know," Fernack said. "The last time anything even remotely like this was run through-departmental survey, but you wouldn't be interested—it took something like eight hours."

"Fine," Malone said. "Eight hours, then. I'll look everything over and if we need a second run-through it won't take too long. I'll let you know as soon as I can about that." He grinned into the phone.

Fernack cleared his throat and asked delicately, "Mind telling me what all this is for?"

Malone offered up a little prayer before answering, and when he did answer it was in his softest and friendliest tones. "I'd rather not say just now, John Henry."

"But, Malone—" Fernack's voice sounded a little strained, and his jaw set just a trifle—"if you—"

Malone knew perfectly well how Fernack reacted when he didn't get a bit of information he wanted. And this was no time to set off any fireworks in the commissioner's office. "Look, John Henry," he said gently, "I'll tell you as soon as I can. Honest. But this is classified information; it's not my fault."

Fernack said, "But—" and apparently realized that argument was not going to do him any good. "All right, Malone," he said at last. "I'll have it for you as soon as possible."

"Great," Malone said. "Then I'll see you later."

"Sure," Fernack said. He paused, as if he were about to open the controversy just once more. But all he

said was "So long, Malone."

Malone breathed a great sigh of relief and flipped the phone off. He stepped out of the booth feeling so proud of himself that he could barely walk. Not only had he managed to calm down Commissioner Fernack, he had also walked right past a bar on the way to the phone. He had performed several acts, he felt, above and beyond the call of duty, and he told himself that he deserved a reward.

Happily, the reward was convenient to hand. He went to the bar and beckoned the bartender over to him. "Bourbon and soda," he said. "And a medal, if possible."

"A what?" the bartender said.

"A medal," Malone said. "For conduct beyond reproach."

The bartender nodded sadly. "Maybe you just ought to go home, Mac," he said. "Sleep it off for a while."

New Yorkers, Malone decided as the bartender went off to get his drink, had no sense of humor. Back in Chicago-where he'd been more or less weaned on gin, and discovered that, unlike his father, he didn't much care for the stuff-and even in Washington, people didn't go around accusing you of drunkenness just because you made some harmless little pleasantries.

Oh, well. Malone drank his drink and went out into the afternoon sunlight.

He considered the itinerary of the magical Miguel Fueyo. He had gone straight home from the police station, apparently, and had then told his mother that he was going to leave home. But he had promised to send her money.

Of course, money was easy for Mike to get. With a shudder, Malone thought he was beginning to realize just how easy. Houdini had once boasted that no bank vault could hold him. In Mike Fueyo's case, that was just doubly true. The vault could neither hold him out nor keep him in.

But he was going to leave home.

Malone said, "Hmm," to himself, cleared his throat and tried it again. By now he was at the corner of the block, where he nearly collided with a workman who was busily stowing away a gigantic ladder, a pot of paint, and a brush. Malone looked at the street sign, where the words Avenue of the Americas had been painted out, and Sixth Avenue hand-lettered in.

"They finally give in," the painter told him. "But do you think they buy new signs? Nah. Cheap. That's all they are. Cheap as pretzels." He gave Malone a friendly push with one end of the ladder and disappeared into the crowd.

Malone didn't have the faintest idea of what he was talking about. And how cheap could a pretzel be, anyhow? Malone didn't remember ever having seen an especially tight-fisted one.

New York, he decided for the fifteenth time, was a strange place.

He walked downtown for a block, still thinking about Mike Fueyo, and absently turned west again. Between Sixth and Seventh, he had another attack of brilliance and began looking for another phone booth.

He found one in a Mexican bar named the Xochitl, across the street from the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin. It was a coincidence that he had landed in another bar, he told himself hopefully, but he didn't quite believe it. To prove it to himself, he headed straight for the phone booths again and put in his call, ignoring the blandishments of several rows of sparkling bottles which he passed on the way.

He dialed the number of Lieutenant Lynch's precinct, and then found himself connected with a new desk sergeant.

"I'm Malone," he said. "I want to talk to Lynch."

"Glad to know you, Malone," the desk sergeant said pleasantly. "Only Lieutenant Lynch doesn't want to subscribe to the Irish Echo!"

"Damn it," Malone said, "I'm the FBI." He showed his badge.

The desk sergeant took a good long look at it. "Maybe you are, and maybe you aren't," he said at last.

"Does the lieutenant know you?"

"We were kids together," Malone said. "We're brothers. Siamese twins. Put him on the phone."

"Wait a minute," said the desk sergeant. "I'll check."

The screen went blank for two agonizing minutes before it cleared again to show Lynch's face.

"Hello, Mr. Malone," Lynch said formally. "Have you found some new little trick to show up poor stupid policemen? Like, say, making yourself vanish?"

"I'll make the whole damn police force vanish," Malone said, "in a couple of minutes. I called to ask a favor."

"Anything," Lynch said. "Anything within my poor power. Whatever I have is yours. Whither thou goest—"

"Knock it off," Malone said, and then grinned. After all, there was no sense in making an enemy out of Lynch.

Lynch blinked, took a deep breath, and said in an entirely different voice, "Okay, Malone. What's the favor?"

"Do you still have that list of Silent Spooks?" Malone said.

"Sure I do," Lynch said. "Why? I gave you a copy of it."

"I can't do this job," Malone said. "You'll have to."

"Yes, sir," Lynch said, and saluted.

"Just listen," Malone said. "I want you to check up on every kid on that list."

"And what are we supposed to do when we find them?" Lynch said.

"That's the trouble," Malone said. "You won't."

"And why not?"

"I'll lay you ten to one," Malone said, "that every one of them has skipped out. Left home. Without giving a forwarding address."

Lynch nodded slowly. "Ten to one?" he said. "Want to make that a money bet? Or does the FBI frown on gambling?"

"Ten dollars to your one," Malone said. "Okay?"

"Made," Lynch said. "You've got the bet—just for the hell of it, understand."

"Oh, sure," Malone said.

"And where can I call you to collect?"

Malone shook his head. "You can't," he said. "I'll call you."

"I will wait with anxiety," Lynch said. "But it had better be before eight. I get off then."

"If I can make it," Malone said.

"If you can't," Lynch said, "call me at home." He gave Malone the number, and then added, "Whatever information I get, I can keep for my own use this time, can't I?"

"Hell," Malone said, "you've already got all the information you're going to get. I just gave it to you."

"That," Lynch said, "we'll see."

"I'll call to collect my money," Malone said.

"Well talk about it later," Lynch said. "Farewell, old pal."

"Flights of angels," Malone said, "sing thee to thy rest."

Malone replaced the microphone and headed for the door. Halfway there, however, he stopped. He hadn't had any tequila in a long time, and he thought he owed it to himself. He felt he had come out ahead in his exchange with Lynch, and another medal was in order.

Only a small one, though. He told himself that he would order one tequila and quit. Besides, he had to meet Dorothy.

He sat down on one of the tall bar stools. The bartender bustled over and eyed him speculatively.

"Tequila con limon," he said negligently.

"Ah," the bartender said. "Si, señor."

Malone waited with ill-concealed impatience. At last it arrived, Malone took the small glass of tequila in his right hand, with the slice of lemon held firmly between the index and middle fingers of the same hand, the rind facing in toward the glass. On the web between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he had sprinkled a little salt. Moving adroitly and with dispatch, he downed the tequila, licked off the salt, and bit his teeth into the lemon slice.

It felt better than good; it felt wonderful. He hadn't had such a good time in years.

He had three more before he left the Xochitl.

Then, noticing the time, he moved in a hurry and got out of the bar before temptation overcame him and he started ordering still more. It was nearly six o'clock, and he had to meet Dorothy at Topp's.

He hoped he could find it.

He headed downtown toward 42 Street, turned right and, sure enough, there was a big red sign. It said Topp's. Malone beamed his approval at it. It was just where it ought to be, and he was grateful.

He pushed open the glass door of the place and went in.

The maître d'hôtel was a chunky man with a pleasant face, a receding hairline and, some distance back on his head, dark curly hair. He beamed at Malone as if the FBI agent were a long-lost brother. "Table for one, sir?" he said.

"No," Malone said, peering into the place. It was much bigger than he had expected. "No," he said again. "I guess I'll just have a drink at the bar."

The maître d' smiled and bowed him to a bar stool. Malone sat down and looked the place over again. His first glance had shown him that Dorothy wasn't there yet, but he saw no harm in making sure. Always be careful of your facts, he admonished himself a little fuzzily.

There were a lot of women in the place, but they were all with escorts. Some of them had two escorts, and Malone wondered about them. Were they drunk, or was he? It was obvious that someone was seeing double, but Malone wasn't quite sure who.

He stared at his face in the bar mirror for a few seconds, and ordered a bourbon and soda when a bartender came over and occluded the image. The bartender went away and Malone went on studying himself.

He wasn't bad looking for an FBI agent. He was taller than his father, anyway, and less heavily built. That was one good thing. As a matter of fact, Malone told himself, he was really a pretty good-looking guy.

So why did women keep him waiting?

He heard her voice before he saw her. But she wasn't talking to him.

"Hello, Milty," she said. "How's everything?"

Malone turned around to get a look at Milty. He turned out to be the maître d'. What did he have that

Malone didn't have? the agent asked himself sourly. Obviously Dorothy was captivated by his charm. Well, that showed him what city girls were like. Butterflies. Social butterflies. Flitting hither and yon with the wind, now attracted to this man, now to that. Once, Malone told himself sadly, he had known this beautiful woman. Now she belonged to someone else.

He felt a little bit sad about it, but he told himself to buck up and learn to live with his tragedy. He drank some more of his bourbon and soda, and then she noticed him.

He heard her say, "Oh. Excuse me, Milty. There's my man." She came over and sat down next to him.

He wanted to ignore her, just to teach her a lesson. But he had already turned around and smiled at her, and she smiled back.

"Hi," she said. "Did you get the tickets?"

Tickets.

Malone knew there was something he'd forgotten, and now he knew what it was. "Oh," he said. "Sure. Just a second. I've got to check up."

"Check up?"

"Friend of mine," Malone improvised hurriedly. "Bringing them." He gave Dorothy a big smile and climbed down off the bar stool. He managed to find a phone booth, and dialed FBI headquarters on 69th Street and blessed several saints when he found that the A-in-C was still there.

"Tickets," Malone said.

The Agent-in-Charge blinked at him. "What tickets?" he said.

"The Hot Seat tickets," Malone said. "Did you get 'em?"

"I got 'em," the Agent-in-Charge said sourly. "Had to chase all over town and pull more wires than there are on a grand piano. But they turned up, brother. Two seats. Do you know what a job like that entails?"

"I'm grateful," Malone said. "I'm hysterical with gratitude."

"I'd rather track down a gang of fingerless second-story men than go through that again," the Agent-in-Charge said. He looked as if his stomach trouble had suddenly gotten a great deal worse. Malone thought that the A-in-C was considering calling a doctor, and would probably decide to make it the undertaker instead, and save the price of a call.

"I can't express my gratitude," Malone told him. "Where are they? Where do I pick them up?"

"Box office," the A-in-C said sourly. "I tell you, everybody in Washington must be nuts. The things I have to go through—"

"Thanks," Malone said. "Thanks a lot. Thanks a million. If there's ever anything I can do for you, let me know and I'll do it." He hung up and went back to the bar, walking very carefully.

"Well?" Dorothy said. "Where do we go tonight? Joe's hot-dog stand? Or a revival of The Wild Duck in

a loft on Bleecker Street?"

There was pride in Malone's manner as he stood there on his feet. There was just a touch of hauteur as he said, "We'll see Hot Seat."

And he was repaid for all of the Agent-in-Charge's efforts. Dorothy's eyes went wide with appreciation and awe. "My goodness," she said. "A man of his word-and what a tough word, too! Mr. Malone, I congratulate you."

"Nothing," Malone said. "A mere absolute nothing."

"Nothing, the man says," Dorothy muttered. "My goodness. And modest, too. Tell me, how do you do, Mr. Malone?"

"Me?" Malone said. "Very well, so far." He finished his drink. "And you?"

"I work at it," she said cryptically.

"May I have another drink?"

Malone gave her a grin. "Another?" he said. "Have two. Have a dozen."

"And what," she said, "would I do with a dozen drinks? Don't answer. I think I can guess. But let's just take them one at a time, okay?" She signaled to the bartender. "Wally, I'll have a martini. And Mr. Malone will have whatever it is he has, I imagine."

"Bourbon and soda," Malone said, and gave the bartender a grin too, just to make sure he didn't feel left out. The sun was shining (although it was evening outside), and the birds were singing (although, Malone reflected, catching a bird on 42nd Street and Broadway might take a bit of doing), and all was well with the world.

There was only a tiny, nagging, disturbing thought in his mind. It had to do with Mike Fueyo and the Silent Spooks, and a lot of red Cadillacs. But he pushed it resolutely away. It had nothing to do with the evening he was about to spend. Nothing at all.

After all, this was supposed to be a vacation, wasn't it?

"Well, Mr. Malone," Dorothy said, when the drinks had arrived.

"Very well indeed," Malone said, raising his. "And just call me Ken. Didn't I tell you that once before?"

"You did," she said. "And I asked you to call me Dorothy. Not Dotty. Try and remember that."

"I will remember it," Malone said, "just as long as ever I live. You don't look the least bit dotty, anyhow. Which is probably more than anybody could say for me." He started to look at himself in the bar mirror again, and decided not to. "By the way," he added, as a sudden thought struck him. "Dotty what?"

"Now," she said. "There you go doing it."

"Doing what?"

"Calling me that name."

"Oh," Malone said. "Make it Dorothy. Dorothy what?" He blinked. "I mean, I know you've got a last name. Dorothy Something. Only it probably isn't Something. What is it?"

"Francis," she said obligingly. "Dorothy Francis. My middle name is Something, in case you ever want to call me by my middle name. Just yell, 'Hey, Something,' and I'll come a-running. Unless I have something else to do. In which case everything will be very simple: I won't come."

"Ah," Malone said doubtfully. "And what do—"

"What do I do?" she said. "A standard question. Number two of a series. I do modeling. Photographic modeling. And that's not all; I also do commercials on 3-D. If I look familiar to you, it's probably because you've seen me on 3-D. Do I look familiar to you?"

"I never watch 3-D," Malone said, crestfallen.

"Fine," Dorothy said unexpectedly. "You have excellent taste."

"Well," Malone said, "it's just that I never seem to get the time—"

"Don't apologize for it," Dorothy said. "I have to appear on it, but I don't have to like it. And now that I've answered your questions, how about answering some of mine."

"Gladly," Malone said. "The inmost secrets of the FBI are yours for the asking."

"Hmm," Dorothy said slowly. "What do you do as an FBI agent, anyhow? Dig up spies?"

"Oh, no," Malone said. "We've got enough trouble with the live ones. We don't go around digging anybody up. Believe me." He paused, feeling dimly that the conversation was beginning to get out of control. "Have I told you that you are the most beautiful woman I've ever met?" he said at last.

"No," Dorothy said. "Not yet, anyway. But I was expecting it."

"You were?" Malone said, disappointed.

"Certainly," Dorothy said. "You've been drinking. As a matter of fact, you've managed to get quite a head start."

Malone hung his head guiltily. "True," he said in a low voice. "Too true. Much too true."

Dorothy nodded, downed her drink and waved to the bartender. "Wally, bring me a double this time."

"A double?"

"Sure," Dorothy said. "I've got to do some fast catching-up on Mr. Malone here."

"Call me Ken," Malone muttered.

"Don't be silly," Dorothy told him. "Wally hardly knows you. He'll call you Mr. Malone and like it."

The bartender went away, and Malone sat on his stool and thought busily for a minute. At last he said, "If you really want to catch up with me..."

"Yes?" Dorothy said.

"Better have a triple," Malone muttered.

Dorothy's eyebrows rose slightly.

"Because I intend to have another one," Malone added. "And even then you'll be just a little behind."

"That sounds sort of sad, in a way," Dorothy said. "Just a little behind. Tell me, is that a compliment or an insult?"

"Both," Malone said instantly. "And an observation, too."

Dorothy nodded. "I can see why you're a Federal cop," she said.

"Really?" Malone said. "I didn't know it showed. Why?"

"You're good at observing," she said. "Like this morning, for instance."

"Ah," Malone said. He searched in his mind for a quotation and found it. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee," he said triumphantly.

"Sounds sort of grisly," Dorothy said.

Malone shrugged. "I can't help it," he said. "That's what it says."

"Well?" Dorothy said. "Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Pluck your eye out and cast it from you?"

"Didn't have to," Malone said. "Mine eye did not offend me." He blinked and added, "Far from it."

"I guess we'll just have to leave it unplucked," Dorothy said sadly. "It didn't offend me, either."

"Good," Malone said, and the bartender brought drinks.

Malone picked his up and held it in the air. "I propose a toast," he said.

Dorothy picked up her glass. "A toast?"

"An old German toast, as a matter of fact," Malone said.

He fell silent. After a few seconds Dorothy said, "Well? Go ahead."

"Zwieback!" Malone said, bowed carefully to Dorothy and drained his glass with a flourish.

CHAPTER 7

It started a million years ago.

In that distant past, a handful of photons deep in the interior of Sol began their random journey to the photosphere. They had been born as ultrahard gamma radiation, and they were positively bursting with energy, attempting to push their respective ways through the dense nucleonic gas that had been their womb. Within millimicroseconds, they had been swallowed up by the various particles surrounding them-swallowed, and emitted again, as the particles met in violent collision.

And then the process was repeated. After a thousand thousand years, and billions on billions of such repetitions, the handful of photons reached the relatively cool photosphere of the sun. But the long battle had taken some of the drive out of them; over the past million years, even the strongest had become only hard ultraviolet, and the weakest just sputtered out in the form of long radio waves.

But now, at last, they were free! And in the first flush of this newfound freedom, they flung themselves over ninety-three million miles of space, traveling at one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, and making the entire trip in less than eight and one-half minutes.

They struck the earth's ionosphere, and their numbers diminished. The hard ultraviolet was gobbled up by ozone; much of the blue was scattered through the atmosphere. The remainder bore steadily onward.

Down through the air they came, only slightly weakened this time. They hit the glass of a window in the Hotel New Yorker, losing more of their members in the plunge.

And, a few feet from the glass, they ended their million-year epic by illuminating a face.

The face responded to them with something less than pleasure. It was clear that the face did not like being illuminated. The light was very bright, much too bright. It seemed to be searing its way through the face's closed eyelids, right past the optic nerves into the brain-pan itself. The face twisted in a sudden spasm, as if its brain were shriveling with heat. Its owner thoughtfully turned over, and the face sought the seclusion and comparative darkness of a pillow.

Unfortunately, the motion brought the face's owner to complete wakefulness. He did not want to be awake, but he had very little choice in the matter. Even though his face was no longer being illuminated, he could feel other rays of sunlight eating at the back of his head. He put the pillow over his head and felt more comfortable for a space, but this slight relief passed, too.

He thought about mausoleums. Mausoleums were nice, cool, dark places where there was never any sun or heat, and never any reason to wake up. Maybe, he told himself cunningly, if he went to sleep again he would wake up dead, in a mausoleum. That, he thought, would be nice.

Death was nice and pleasant. Unfortunately, he realized, he was not dead. And there was absolutely no chance of his ever getting back to sleep. He finally rolled over again, being very careful to avoid any more poisonous sunlight. Getting up was an even more difficult process, but Malone knew it had to be managed. Somehow he got his feet firmly planted on the floor and sat up.

It had been a remarkable feat, he told himself. He deserved a medal.

That reminded him of the night before. He had been thinking quite a lot about the medals he deserved for

various feats. He had even awarded some of them to himself, in the shape of liquid decoctions.

He remembered all that quite well. There were a lot of cloudy things in his mind, but from all the testimony he could gather, he imagined that he'd had quite a time the night before. Quite a wonderful time, as a matter of fact.

Not that that reflection did anything for him now. As he opened his eyes, one at a time, he thought of Boyd. Once, long ago, ages and ages ago, he had had to wake Boyd up, and he recalled how rough he had been about it. That had been unforgivable.

He made a mental note to apologize to Boyd the next time he saw him-if he could ever see again. Now, he knew how Boyd had felt. And it was terrible.

Still sitting on the bed, he told himself that, in spite of everything, he was lucky. To judge by his vague memories, he'd had quite a time the night before, and if the hangover was payment for it, then he was willing to accept the payment. Almost. Because it had really been a terrific time. The only nagging thought in his mind was that there had been something vital he'd forgotten.

"Tickets," he said aloud, and was surprised that his voice was audible. As a matter of fact, it was too audible; the noise made him wince slightly. He shifted his position very quietly.

And he hadn't forgotten the tickets. No. He distinctly remembered going to see The Hot Seat, and finding seats, and actually sitting through the show with Dorothy at his side. He couldn't honestly say that he remembered much of the show itself, but that couldn't be the important thing he'd forgotten. By no means.

He had heard that it was a good show, though. Sometime, he reminded himself, he would have to get tickets and actually see it.

He checked through the evening. Drinks. Dinner ... he had had dinner, hadn't he? Yes, he had. He recalled a broiled sea bass looking up at him with mournful eyes. He couldn't have dreamed anything like that.

And then the theater, and after that some more drinks ... and so on, and so on, and so on, right to his arrival back in his hotel room, at four-thirty in the morning, on a bright, boiled cloud.

He even remembered arguing with Dorothy about taking her home. She'd won that round by ducking into a subway entrance, and he had turned around after she'd left him and headed for home. Had he taken a taxi?

Yes, Malone decided, he had. He even remembered that.

Then what had he forgotten?

He had met Dorothy, he told himself, starting all over again in an effort to locate the gaps, at six o'clock, right after phoning...

"My God!" Malone said, and winced. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock in the morning. He had completely forgotten to call Fernack and Lynch.

Hangover or no hangover, Malone told himself grimly, there was work to be done. Somehow, he

managed to get to his feet and start moving.

He checked Boyd's room after a while. But his partner wasn't home. Probably at work already, Malone thought, while I lie here useless and helpless. He thought of the Sermon on the Evils of Alcohol, and decided he'd better read it to himself instead of delivering it to Boyd.

But he didn't waste any time with it. By ten-fifteen he was showered and shaved, his teeth were brushed, and he was dressed. He felt, he estimated, about fifteen hundred per cent better. That was still lousy, but it wasn't quite as bad as it had been. He could move around and talk and even think a little, if he was careful about it. Before he left, he took a look at himself in the mirror.

Well, he told himself, that was nice.

It hardly showed at all. He looked tired, to be sure, but that was almost normal. The eyes weren't bloodshot red, and didn't seem to bug out at all, although Malone would have sworn that they were bleeding all over his face. His head was its normal size, as near as he remembered; it was not swollen visibly, or pulsing like a jellyfish at every move.

He looked even better than he felt.

He started for the door, and then stopped himself. There was no need to go out so early; he could start work right in his own hotel room and not even have to worry about the streets of New York, the cars or the pedestrians for a while.

He thought wistfully about a hair of the hound, decided against it with great firmness, and sat down to the phone.

He dialed a number, and the face of Commissioner Fernack appeared almost at once. Malone forced himself to smile cheerfully, reasonably sure that he was going to crack something as he did it. "Hello, John Henry," he said in what he hoped was a good imitation of a happy, carefree voice. "And how are you this lovely morning?"

"Me?" Fernack said sourly. "I'm in great shape. Tiptop. Dancing in the goddamn daisies. Malone, how did you—"

"Any news for me?" Malone said.

Fernack waited a long time before he answered, and when he did his voice was dangerously soft and calm. "Malone," he said, "when you asked for this survey, just what kind of news did you expect to get?"

"A godawful lot of impossible crimes," Malone said frankly. "How did I do, John Henry?"

"You did damn well," Fernack said. "Too damn well. Listen, Malone, how could you know about anything like this?"

Malone blinked. "Well," he said, "we have our sources. Confidential. Top secret. I'm sure you understand, Commissioner." Hurriedly, he added, "What does the breakdown look like?"

"It looks like hell," Fernack said. "About eight months ago, according to the computer, there was a terrific upswing in certain kinds of crime. And since then it's been pretty steady, right at the top of the swing. Hasn't moved down hardly at all."

"Great," Malone said.

Fernack stared. "What?" he said.

"I mean—" Malone stopped, thought of an answer and tried it. "I mean, that checks out my guess. My information. Sources."

Fernack seemed to weigh risks in his mind. "Malone, I know you're FBI," he said at last. "But this sounds pretty fishy to me. Pretty strange."

"You have no idea how strange," Malone said truthfully.

"I'm beginning to," Fernack said. "And if I ever find out that you had anything to do with this—"

"Me?"

"And don't look innocent," Fernack said. "It doesn't succeed in looking anything but horrible. You remind me of a convicted murderer trying to steal thirty cents from the prison chaplain."

"What would I have to do with all these crimes?" Malone said. "And what kind of crimes were they, anyway?"

"What you'd have to do with them," Fernack said, "is an unanswered question. And so long as it remains unanswered, Malone, you're safe. But when I come up with enough facts to answer it—"

"Don't be silly. Commissioner," Malone said. "How about those crimes? What kind were they?"

"Burglaries," Fernack said. "And I have a hunch you know that well enough. Most of them were just burglaries—locked barrooms, for instance, early in the morning. There's never any sign of tampering with the locks, no sign of breaking and entering, no sign of any alarms being tampered with in any way. But the money's gone from the cash register, and all of the liquor is gone too."

Malone stared. "All the liquor?" he said in a dazed voice.

"Well," Fernack said, "all of it that's in plain sight, anyway. Except for the open bottles. Disappeared. Gone. Without a trace. And most of the time the extra stock's gone too, from the basement or wherever they happen to keep it."

"That's a lot of liquor," Malone said.

"A hell of a lot," Fernack said. "Some of the bars have gone broke, not being insured against the losses."

The thought of thousands of bottles of liquor—millions of bottles—went through Malone's mind like an ice pick. He could almost see them, handle them, taste them. "Hair of the dog," he muttered. "What hair. What a dog."

"What did you say, Malone?"

"Nothing," Malone said hastily. "Nothing at all." After a second another query occurred to him. "You mean to tell me that only bars were robbed? Nothing else?"

"Oh, no," Fernack said. "Bars are only part of it. Malone, why are you asking me to tell you this?"

"Because I want to know," Malone said patiently.

"I still think—" Fernack began, and then said, "Never mind.. But it hasn't been only bars. Supermarkets. Homes. Cleaning and tailoring shops. Jewelers. Hell, Malone, you name it and it's been hit."

Malone tried valiantly to resist temptation, but he was not at his best, and he lost. "All right," he said. "I will name it. Here's a list of places that haven't even been touched by the rising crime wave. Banks, for one."

"Malone!"

"Safes that have been locked, for another," Malone went on. "Homes with wall safes, though that's not quite accurate. The homes may have been robbed, but the safes won't have been touched."

"Malone, how much do you know?" Fernack said. "My God, man—"

"I'll make a general rule for you," Malone said. "Any place that fits the following description is safe: it's got a secure lock on it, and it's too small for a human being to get into."

Fernack opened his mouth, shut it, and stared downward, obviously scanning some papers lying on the desk in front of him. Malone waited patiently for the explosion, but it never came.

Instead, Fernack said, "You know, Malone, you remind me of an old friend of mine."

"Really?" Malone said pleasantly.

"You certainly do," Fernack said. "There's just one small difference. You're an FBI man, and he's a crook. If that's a difference."

"It is," Malone said. "And on behalf of the FBI, I resent the allegation. And, as a matter of fact, defy the allegator. But that's neither here nor there," he continued. "If that's the difference, what are the similarities?"

Fernack drew in a deep, hissing breath, and when he spoke his voice was as calm and quiet as a coiled cobra. "The both of you come up with the goddamnedest answers to things. Things I never knew about or even cared about before. Things I wish I'd never heard of. Things that don't have any explanation. And—" He stopped, his face dark in the screen. Malone wondered what color it was going to turn, and decided on purple as a good choice.

"Well?" Malone said at last.

"And you're always so goddamned right it makes me sick," Fernack finished flatly. He rubbed a hand through his hair and stared into the screen at Malone. "How did you know all this stuff?" he said.

Malone waited one full second, while Fernack got darker and darker on the screen. When he judged that the color was right, he said quietly, "I'm prescient. And thanks a lot, John Henry; just send the reports to me personally, at 69th Street. By messenger. So long."

He cut the circuit just as Fernack started: "Now, Malone—"

With a satisfied, somewhat sheepish smile, Malone dialed another number. This time a desk sergeant told him politely that Lynch wasn't at the precinct, and wouldn't arrive until noon.

Malone had Lynch's home number. He dialed it.

It was a long wait before the lieutenant answered, and he didn't look much like a police officer when his face finally showed up on the screen. His hair was uncombed and he was unshaven. His eyes were slightly bleary, but he was definitely awake.

"Oh," Malone said. "Hello."

"Hi, there," Lynch said with enormous cheerfulness. "Old buddy-boy. Old pal. Old friend."

"What's wrong?" Malone said.

"Wrong?" Lynch said. "Nothing. Nothing. Nothing at all. I just wanted to thank you for not waking me up last night. I only waited for your call until midnight. Then I decided I just wasn't very important to you. You obviously had much bigger things on your mind."

"As a matter of fact," Malone said, speculatively eyeing Lynch's figure, dressed in a pair of trousers and a T-shirt, "you're right."

"That's what I thought," Lynch said. "And I decided that, since you were so terribly busy, it could wait until I woke up. Or even until I got down to the station. How about it, buddy-boy?"

"Listen, Lynch," Malone said, "we made a bet. Ten to one. I just want to know if I can come down to collect or not."

There was a second of silence.

"All right," Lynch said at last, looking crestfallen. "I owe you a buck. Every last one of those kids has skipped out on us."

"Good," Malone said. He wondered briefly just what was good about it, and decided he'd rather have lost the money to Lynch. But facts, he reflected, were facts. Thoroughly nasty facts.

"I spent all night tracing them," Lynch said. "Got nowhere. Nowhere at all. Malone, how did you know—"

"Classified," Malone said. "Very classified. But you're sure they're all gone? Vanished?"

Lynch's face reddened. "Sure I'm sure," he said. "Every last one of them is gone. And what more do you want me to do about it?" He paused, then added, "What do you expect, Malone? Miracles?"

Malone shook his head gently. "No," he said. "I—"

"Oh, never mind," Lynch said. "But I—"

"Look, Malone," Lynch said, "there's a guy who wants to talk to you."

"One of the Silent Spooks?" Malone said hopefully.

Lynch shook his head and made a growling noise. "Don't be silly," he said. "It's just that this guy might have some information, but he won't say anything to me about it. He's a social worker or something like that."

"Social worker?" Malone said. "He works with the kids, right?"

"I guess," Lynch said. "His name's Kettleman. Albert Kettleman."

Malone nodded. "Okay," he said. "I'll be right over."

"Hey," Lynch said, "hold on. He's not here now. What do you think this is-my house or a reception center?"

"Sorry," Malone said wearily. "Where and when?"

"How about three o'clock at the precinct station?" Lynch said. "I can have him there by then, and you can get together and talk." He paused. "Nobody likes the cops," he said. "People hear the FBI's mixed up in this, and they figure the cops are all second-stringers or something."

"Sorry to hear it," Malone said.

"I'll bet you are," Lynch told him bitterly.

Malone shrugged. "Anyway," he said, "I'll see you at three, right?"

"Right," Lynch said, and Malone flipped off.

He sat there for a few seconds, grinning quietly. His brain throbbed like an overheated motor, but he didn't really mind any more. His theory had been justified, and that was the most important thing.

The Silent Spooks were all teleports.

Eight of them-eight kids on the loose, stealing everything they could lay their hands on, and completely safe. How could you catch a boy who just disappeared when you started for him? No wonder their names hadn't appeared on the police blotter, Malone thought.

Spooks didn't get into trouble. They didn't have to.

They could get into any place big enough to hold them, take what they wanted and just disappear. They'd been doing it for about eight months, according to the figures Malone had received from Fernack; maybe teleportative ability didn't develop until you were around fourteen or fifteen.

But it had developed in these kids-and they were using it in the most obvious way. They had a sure method of getting away from the cops, and a sure method of taking anything they wanted. No wonder they had so much money.

Malone got up, feeling slightly dazed, and left the hotel room.

CHAPTER 8

By three o'clock, he was again among the living. Maybe his occupations had had something to do with it; he'd spent about four hours supervising Operation Dismemberment, and then listening to the reports on the dismantled Cadillacs. It was nice, peaceful, unimportant work, but there just wasn't anything else to do. FBI work was ninety-five per cent marking time, anyway. Malone felt grateful that there was any action at all in what he was doing.

Dr. Leibowitz had found all sort of things in the commandeered Caddies-everything from guns and narcotics to pornographic pictures in lots of three hundred, for shipment into New York City from the suburbs where the processing plant probably was. Of course, there had been personal effects, too-maps and lucky dolls and, just once, a single crutch.

Malone wondered about that for quite a while. Who'd just walk off and leave one crutch in a car? But people did things like that all the time, he finally told himself heavily. There wasn't any explanation for it, and there probably never would be.

But in spite of the majestic assortment of valuables found in the cars, there was no sign of anything remotely resembling an electro-psionic brain. Dr. Leibowitz had found just about everything-except what he was looking for.

At a quarter to three, Malone gave up. The search wasn't quite finished, but he'd heard enough to last him for a long time. He grabbed a cab downstairs and went over to Lynch's office to meet Kettleman.

The "social worker or something" was a large, balding man about six feet tall. Malone estimated his weight as close to two hundred and fifty pounds, and he looked every pound of it; his face was round without being chubby, and his body was stocky and hard. He wore black-rimmed glasses, and he was going bald in front. His face was like a mask; it was held in a gentle, almost eager expression that Malone would have sworn had nothing to do with the way Kettleman felt underneath.

Lynch performed the introductions, escorted the two of them to one of the interrogation rooms at the rear of the station, and left them there, with, "If either of you guys comes up with anything, let me know," for a parting shot.

Kettleman blinked slowly behind his glasses. "Mr. Malone," he said, "I understand that the FBI is interested in one of the-ah-adolescent social groups with which I work."

"Well, the Silent Spooks," Malone said. "That's right."

"The Spooks," Kettleman said. His voice was rather higher than Malone would have expected, oddly breathy without much depth to it. "My, yes. I did want to talk to somebody about it, and I thought you might be the man."

"I'll be interested in anything you have to say," Malone said diplomatically. He was beginning to doubt whether he'd get any real information out of Kettleman. But it was impossible to tell. He sat back in a hard wooden chair and tried to look fascinated.

"Well," Kettleman said tentatively, "the boys themselves have sort of a word for it. They'd say that there was something oddball about the Spooks. Do you understand? Not just the fact that they never drink liquor, but—"

"Something strange," Malone said. "Is that what you mean?"

"Ah," Kettleman said. "Strange. Of course." He acted, Malone thought, as if he had never heard the word before, and was both pleased and startled by its sound. "Perhaps I had better explain my position a little more clearly," he said. "That will give you an idea of just where I 'fit into' this picture."

"Whatever you think best," Malone said, resigning himself to a very dull hour. He tried to picture Kettleman in the midst of a gang of juvenile delinquents. It was very hard to do.

"I'm a social worker," Kettleman said, "working on an individual basis with these-social groups that the adolescents have formed. It's my job to make friends with them, become accepted by them, and try to turn their hostile impulses toward society into more useful, more acceptable channels."

"I see," Malone said, feeling that something was expected of him. "That's fine."

"Oh, we don't expect praise, we social workers," Kettleman said instantly. "The worth of a good job well done, that's enough for us." He smiled. The effect was a little unsettling, as if a hippopotamus had begun to laugh like a hyena. "But to continue, Mr. Malone," he said.

"Of course," Malone said. "Certainly."

"I've worked with many of the organizations in this neighborhood," Kettleman said. "And I've been quite successful in getting to know them, and in being accepted by them. Of course, the major part of my job is more difficult, but-well, I'm sure that's enough about my own background. That isn't what you're interested in, now, is it?"

He looked penitent. Malone said, "It's all right. I don't mind." He shifted positions on the hard chair.

"Well, then," Kettleman said, with the air of a man suddenly getting down to business. He leaned forward eagerly, his eyes big and bright behind the lenses. "There's something very peculiar about those boys," he said in a whisper.

"Really?" Malone said.

"Very peculiar indeed," Kettleman said. "My, yes. All of the other social groups are afraid of them."

"Big, huh?" Malone said. "Big strong boys who—"

"Oh, my, no," Kettleman said. "My goodness, no. All of the Spooks are rather slight, as a matter of fact. They've got something, but it isn't strength."

"My goodness," Malone said tiredly.

"I doubt if-in the language of my own groups-any one of the Spooks could punch his way out of a paper bag," Kettleman said. "It's more than that."

"Frankly," Malone said, "I'm inclined to agree with you. But what is this something that frightens everyone else?"

Kettleman leaned even closer. "I'm not sure," he said softly. "I can't say for certain, Mr. Malone. I've

only heard rumors."

"Well," Malone said, "rumors might—"

"Rumors are a very powerful force among my groups, Mr. Malone," Kettleman said. "I've learned, over the years, to keep my ear to the ground, as it were, and pay very close attention to rumors."

"I'm sure," Malone said patiently. "But what did this particular rumor say?"

"Well," Kettleman said, and stopped. "Well," he said again. And at last he gulped and got it out. "Magicians, Mr. Malone. They say the Spooks are magicians—that they can come and go at will. Make themselves invisible. All sorts of things. Of course, I don't believe that, but—"

"Oh, it's quite true," Malone said, solemn faced.

"It's what?"

"Perfectly true," Malone said. "We know all that."

"Oh, my," Kettleman said. His face took on a whitish cast. "Oh, my goodness," he said. "Isn't that—isn't that amazing." He swallowed hard. "True all the time," he said.

"Magicians. I—"

"You see, this information isn't new to us," Malone said.

"Oh," Kettleman said. "No. Of course not. My. It's—rather disconcerting to think about, isn't it?"

"There," Malone said, "I agree with you."

Kettleman fell silent. Malone offered him a cigarette, but the social worker refused with a pale smile, and Malone lit one for himself. He took a couple of puffs in the silence, and then Kettleman said, "Well, Mr. Malone, Lieutenant Lynch did say that I was to tell you everything I could about these boys."

"I'm sure we all appreciate that," Malone said at random, wondering exactly what he meant.

"There is—well, there is one more thing," Kettleman said. "Ordinarily, of course, I wouldn't say anything about this to anyone. In my line of work, Mr. Malone, you learn the need for confidence. For being able to keep one's word."

"Certainly," Malone said, wondering what startling new fact was on its way now.

"And we certainly try to keep the confidence of the boys," Kettleman said maddeningly. "We wouldn't betray them to the police in any way unless it were absolutely necessary."

"Betray them? Mr. Kettleman," Malone said, "just what are you trying to tell me?"

"It's about their meeting place," Kettleman said. "Oh, my. I'm not at all sure I ought to tell you this." He wrung his pale fat hands together and looked at Malone appealingly.

"Now, now," Malone said, feeling foolish. "It's perfectly all right. We don't want to hurt the Spooks. Not

any more than we have to. You can tell me, Mr. Kettleman."

"Oh," Kettleman said. "Well, the Spooks do have a sort of secret meeting place, you know. And they meet there."

He stopped. Malone said, "Where is it?"

"Oh, it's a big empty warehouse," Kettleman said. "I really feel terrible about this. They're meeting there tonight sometime, or that's what the rumors say. I shouldn't be telling you—"

"Of course you should," Malone said, trying to sound reassuring. "Don't worry about a thing, Mr. Kettleman. Tonight?"

"That's right," Kettleman said eagerly. He grinned, and then looked morosely down at his hands.

"Do you know where this warehouse is?" Malone said. "If any of the other little social groups use it—"

"Oh, no, they don't," Kettleman said. "That's what makes it so funny. You see, the warehouse is deserted, but it's kept in good repair; there are bars on the windows, and it's protected by all sorts of alarm systems and things like that. So none of the others can use it. Only the Spooks. You can't get in without a key, not at all."

"But do the Spooks—" Malone began.

"Oh, no," Kettleman moaned. "They don't have a key. At least, that's what the other groups say. The Spooks just-just melt through the walls, or something like that."

"Mr. Kettleman," Malone said, "where is this warehouse?"

"I shouldn't be telling you this," Kettleman said.

Malone sighed. "Please, Mr. Kettleman. You know we're working for the good of those boys, don't you?"

"Well, I—"

"Sure we are," Malone said. "So you can tell me."

Kettleman blinked behind his glasses, and moaned a little. Malone waited with his hands tense in his lap.

At last Kettleman said, "It's on West Street, near Chambers. That's downtown." He gave Malone an address. "That's where it is," he said. "But you won't do anything to the boys, will you? They're basically good boys. No matter what. And they—"

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Kettleman," Malone said. "We'll take care of the Spooks."

"Oh," Kettleman said. "Yes. Sure."

He got up. Malone said, "There's just one more thing, Mr. Kettleman."

"Yes?" The big man's voice had reached the high, breathy pitch of a fife.

"Do you have any idea what time the Spooks usually meet?"

"Well, now," Kettleman said, "I don't really know. You see, the reason I wanted to tell you all this was because Lieutenant Lynch was checking up on all those boys yesterday, and I thought..." He stopped and cleared his throat, and when he began again his voice had dropped almost to a whisper. "Well, Mr. Malone, I thought, after all, that since he was asking me questions-you know, questions about where the Spooks were, and all of that-since he was asking me questions..."

"Yes?" Malone said.

"I thought perhaps I ought to tell you about them," Kettleman said. "Where they were, and all of that."

Malone stood up. "Mr. Kettleman," he said in his most official voice, "I want you to know that the FBI appreciates what you've done. Your information will probably be very helpful to us, and the FBI certainly commends you for being public-spirited enough to come to us and tell us what you know." He thought for a second, and then added, "In the name of the FBI, Mr. Kettleman-well done!"

Kettleman stared, smiled, and gulped. "My goodness," he said. "Well." He smiled again, a little more broadly. "One has one's duty, you know. My, yes. Duty." He nodded to Malone.

"Of course," Malone said, going to the door and opening it. "Thanks again, Mr. Kettleman."

Kettleman saw the open door and headed for it blindly. As he left he flashed one last smile after Malone, who sighed, shut the door, and leaned against it for a second.

The things an FBI agent had to go through!

When he had recovered, he opened the door again and peered carefully down the hallway to make sure Kettleman had gone. Then he left the interrogation room and went down the hall, past the desk sergeant, and up the stairs to Lieutenant Lynch's office. He was still breathing a little hard when he opened Lynch's door, and Lynch didn't seem to be expecting him at all. He was very busy with a veritable snow flurry of papers, and he looked as if he had been involved with them steadily ever since he had left Malone and Kettleman alone downstairs.

"Well," Malone said. "Hello there, Lieutenant."

Lynch looked up, his face a mask of surprise. "Oh," he said. "It's you. Through with Kettleman?"

"I'm through," Malone said. "As if you didn't know." He looked at Lynch for a long minute, and then said, "Lieutenant..."

Lynch had gone right back to his papers. He looked up again with a bland expression. "Yes?"

"Lieutenant, how reliable is Kettleman?" Malone said.

Lynch shrugged. "He's always been pretty good with the kids, if that's what you mean. You know these social workers-I've never got much information out of him. He feels it's his duty to the kids-I don't know. Some such thing. Why do you ask?"

"Well," Malone said, "what he told me. Was he kidding me? Or does he know what he's talking about? Was what he said reasonably accurate?"

"How would I know?" Lynch said. "After all, you were down there alone, weren't you? I was up here working. If you'll tell me what he said, maybe I'll be able to tell you whether or not I think he was kidding."

Malone placed both his palms on the lieutenant's desk, mashing a couple of piles of papers. He leaned forward slowly, his eyes on Lynch's bland, innocent face. "Now look, Lynch," he said. "I like you. I really do. You're a good cop. You get things done."

"Well, thanks," Lynch said. "But I don't see what this has to do with—"

"I just don't want you trying to kid your buddy-boy," Malone said.

"Kid you?" Lynch said. "I don't get it."

"Come on, now," Malone said. "I know that room was bugged, just as well as you do. It was the sensible thing for you to pull, and you pulled it. You've got the whole thing recorded, haven't you?"

"Me?" Lynch said. "Why would I—"

"Oh, cut it out," Malone said impatiently. "Let's not play games, okay?"

There was a second of silence.

"All right," Lynch said. "So I recorded the conversation. Kill me. Crucify me. I'm stealing FBI secrets. I'm a spy secretly working for a foreign power. Take me out and electrocute me."

"I don't want to fight you," Malone said wearily. "So you've got the stuff recorded. That's your business."

"My business?"

"Sure," Malone said cheerfully. "As long as you don't try to use it."

"Now, Malone—" Lynch began.

"This is touchy stuff," Malone said. "We're going to have to take a lot of care in handling it. And I don't want you throwing raids all over the place and mixing everything up."

"Malone, I—"

"Eventually," Malone said, "I'm going to need your help with these kids. But for right now, I want to handle this my way, without any interference."

"I wouldn't think of—"

"You wanted information," Malone said. "Fine. That's all right with me. You got the information, and that's okay too. But if you try to use it before I say the word, I'll-I'll talk to good old Uncle John Henry Fernack. And he'll help me out; he'll give you a refresher course on How To Be A Beat Cop. In Kew Gardens. It's nice and lonely out there now, Lynch, You'd love it."

"Malone," Lynch said tiredly.

"Don't give me any arguments," Malone said. "I don't want any arguments."

"I won't argue with you, Malone," Lynch said. "I've been trying to tell you something."

Malone stepped away from the desk. "All right," he said. "Go ahead."

Lynch took a deep breath. "Malone, I'm not trying to queer your pitch," he said. "If I were going to pull a raid, here's what I'd have to do: get my own cops together, then call the precinct that covers that old warehouse. We don't cover the warehouse from here, Malone, and we'd need the responsible precinct's aid in anything we did down there."

Malone said, "Well, all I—"

"Not only that," Lynch said. "I'd have to call Safe and Loft, and get them in on it. A warehouse raid would probably be their baby first of all. That means it takes this precinct, the warehouse precinct, and the Safe and Loft Squad, all together, to raid that warehouse. Malone, would I pull a raid at this stage, if I had to go through all that, without knowing what the hell I was going to find down there?"

"Oh," Malone said.

"If those kids can just appear and disappear at will," Lynch said, "I'm not going to pull a raid on them, and end up looking like a damn fool, until I've got some way of making sure they're there when the raid goes through."

Malone coughed gently. "Okay," he said at last. "Sorry."

"There's only one thing I want," Lynch said. "I want to be able to move as soon as possible."

"Well, sure," Malone said apologetically.

"And that means I'm going to have to be informed," Lynch said. "I want to know what's going on, as fast as possible."

Malone nodded gently. "Sure," he said. "I'll tell you everything that happens-as soon as I know myself. But right now, I haven't got a thing for you. All I have is a kind of theory, and it's pretty screwy."

He stopped. Lynch looked up at him. "How screwy can it get?" he said. "The facts are nutty enough."

"You have absolutely no idea," Malone assured him. "I'm not even saying a word about this, not until I prove it out one way or another. I'm not even thinking about it-not until it stops sounding so nutty to me."

"Okay, Malone," Lynch said. "I can see a piece of it, if no more. The Fueyo kid vanishes mysteriously-never mind all that about you getting him out of the interrogation room by some kind of confidential method. There isn't any confidential method. I know that better than you do."

"I had to say something, didn't I?" Malone asked apologetically.

"So the kid disappears," Lynch said, brushing Malone's question away with a wave of his hand. "So now I hear all this stuff from Kettleman. And it begins to add up. The kids can disappear somehow, and

reappear some place else. Walk through walls?" He shrugged. "How should I know? But they can sure as hell do something like it."

"Something," Malone said. "Like I said, it sounds screwy."

"I don't like it," Lynch said.

Malone nodded. "Nobody likes it," he said. "But keep it under your hat. I'll give you everything I have—whenever I have anything. And by the way—"

"Yes?" Lynch said.

"Thanks for giving me and Kettleman a chance to talk," Malone said. "Even if you had reasons of your own."

"Oh," Lynch said. "You mean the recording."

"I was a little suspicious," Malone said. "I didn't think you'd give Kettleman to me without getting something for yourself."

"Would you?" Lynch said.

Malone shrugged. "I'm not crazy either," he said.

Lynch picked up a handful of papers. "I've got all this work to do," he said. "So I'll see you later."

"Okay," Malone said.

"And if you need my help, buddy-boy," Lynch said, "just yell. Right?"

"I'll yell," Malone said. "Don't worry about that. I'll yell loud enough to get myself heard in Space Station One."

CHAPTER 9

The afternoon was bright and sunny, but it didn't match Malone's mood. He got a cab outside the precinct station and headed for 69th Street, dining off his nails en route. When he hit the FBI headquarters, he called Washington and got Burris on the line.

He made a full report to the FBI chief, including his wild theory and everything else that had happened. "And there was this notebook," he said, and reached into his jacket pocket for it.

The pocket was empty.

"What notebook?" Burris said.

Malone tried to remember if he'd left the book in his room. He couldn't quite recall. "This book I picked up," he said, and described it. "I'll send it on, or bring it in when the case is over."

"All right," Burris said.

Malone went on with his description of what had happened. When he'd finished, Burris heaved a great sigh.

"My goodness," he said. "Last year it was telepathic spies, and this year it's teleporting thieves. Malone, I hate to think about next year."

"I wish you hadn't said that," Malone said sadly.

Burris blinked. "Why?" he said.

"Oh, just because," Malone said. "I haven't even had time to think about next year yet. But I'll think about it now."

"Well, maybe it won't be so bad," Burris said.

Malone shook his head. "No, Chief," he said. "You're wrong. It'll be worse."

"This is bad enough," Burris said.

"It's a great vacation," Malone said.

"Please," Burris said. "Did I have any idea—"

"Yes," Malone said.

Burris' eyes closed. "All right, Malone," he said after a little pause. "Let's get back to the report. At least it explains the red Cadillac business. Sergeant Jukovsky was hit by a boy who vanished. Vanished. My God."

"I was hit by a boy who vanished, too," Malone said bitterly. "But of course I'm just an FBI agent. Expendable. Nobody cares about—"

"Don't say that, Malone," Burris said. "You're one of my most valuable agents."

Malone tried to stop himself from beaming, but he couldn't. "Well, Chief," he began, "I—"

"Vanishing boys," Burris muttered. "What are you going to do with them, Malone?"

"I was hoping you might have some kind of suggestion," Malone said.

"Me?"

"Well," Malone said, "I suppose I'll figure it out. When I catch them. But I did want something from you, Chief."

"Anything, Malone," Burris said. "Anything at all."

"I want you to get hold of Dr. O'Connor, out at Yucca Flats, if you can. He's the best psionics man Westinghouse has right now, and I might need him."

"If you say so," Burriss said doubtfully.

"Well," Malone said, "these kids are teleports. And maybe there's some way to stop a teleport. Give him a good hard kick in the psi, for instance."

"In the what?"

"Never mind," Malone said savagely. "But if I'm going to get any information on what makes teleports tick, I'm going to have to get it from Dr. O'Connor. Right?"

"Right," Burriss said.

"So get in touch with Dr. O'Connor," Malone said.

"I'll have him call you," Burriss said. "Meanwhile-well, meanwhile just carry on, Malone. I've got every confidence in you."

"Thanks," Malone growled.

"If anybody can crack a case like this," Burriss said, "it's you."

"I suppose it had better be," Malone said, and rang off.

Then he started to think. The notebook wasn't in his pockets. He checked every one, even the jacket pocket where he usually kept a handkerchief and nothing else. It wasn't anywhere on his person.

Had he left it in his room?

He thought about that for several minutes, and finally decided that he hadn't. He hadn't taken it out of his pocket, for one thing, and if it had fallen to the ground he couldn't have helped seeing it. Of course he'd put his wallet, keys, change, and other such items on the dresser, and then replaced them in his pockets in the morning. But he could remember how they'd looked on the dresser.

The notebook hadn't been there among them.

Now that he came to think of it, when had he seen the notebook last? He'd shown it to Lieutenant Lynch during the afternoon, and then he'd put it back in his pocket, and he hadn't looked for it again.

So it had to be somewhere in one of the bars he'd visited, or at the theater where he and Dorothy had seen *The Hot Seat*.

Proud of himself for this careful and complete job of deduction, he strolled out and, giving Boyd and the Agent-in-Charge one small smile each, to remember him by, he went into the sunlight, trying to decide which place to check first.

He settled on the theater because it was most probable. After all, people were always losing things in theaters. Besides, if he started at the theater, and found the notebook there, he could then go on to a bar to celebrate. If he found the notebook in a bar, he didn't much relish the idea of going on to an empty theater in the middle of the afternoon to celebrate.

Shaking his head over this flimsy structure of logic, he headed down to *The Hot Seat*. He banged on the

lobby doors for a while without any good result, and finally leaned against one of the side doors, which opened. Malone fell through, recovered his balance, and found himself facing an old be whiskered man with a dustpan, a broom, and a surprised expression.

"I'm looking for a notebook," Malone said.

"Try a stationery store, youngster," the old man said. "I thought I'd heard 'em all, but—"

"No," Malone said. "You don't understand."

"I don't got to understand," the old man said. "That's what's so restful about this here job. I just got to sweep up. I don't got to understand nothing. Good-bye."

"I'm looking for a notebook I lost here last night," Malone said desperately.

"Oh," the old man said. "Lost and Found. That's different. You come with me."

The old man led Malone in silence to a cave deep in the bowels of the theater, where he went behind a little desk, took up a pencil as if it were a club, held it poised over a sheet of grimy paper, and said, "Name?"

Malone said, "I just want to find a notebook."

"Got to give me your name, youngster," the old man said solemnly. "It's the rules here."

Malone sighed. "Kenneth Malone," he said. "And my address is—"

The old man, fiercely scribbling, looked up. "Wait a minute, can't you?" he said. "I ain't through 'Kenneth' yet." He wrote on, and finally said, "Address?"

"Hotel New Yorker," Malone said. "In Manhattan?" the old man said. "That's right," Malone said wearily.

"Ah," the old man said. "Tourist, ain't you? Tourists is always losing things. Once it was a big dog. Don't know yet how a dog got into this here theater. Had to feed it for four days before somebody showed up to claim it. Fierce-looking animal. Part bloodhound, part water spaniel."

Fascinated in spite of himself, Malone said, "That's impossible."

"Nothing's impossible," the old man said. "Work for a theater long enough and you find that out. Part bloodhound, I said, and part water spaniel. Should have seen that dog before you start talking about impossibilities. Hell of a strange-looking beast. And then there was the time—"

"About the notebook," Malone said.

"Notebook?" the old man said.

"I lost a notebook," Malone said. "I was hoping that—"

"Description?" the old man said, and poised his pencil again.

Malone heaved a great sigh. "Black plastic," he said. "About so big." He made motions with his hands. "No names or initials on it. But the first page had my name written on it, along with Lieutenant Peter Lynch."

"Who's he?" the old man said.

"He's a cop," Malone said.

"My, my," the old man said. "Valuable notebook, with a cop's name in it and all. You a cop, youngster?"

Malone shook his head.

"Too bad," the old man said obscurely. "I like cops." He stood up. "You said black plastic? Black?"

"That's right," Malone said. "Do you have it here?"

"Got no notebooks at all here, youngster," the old man said. "Empty billfold, three hats, a couple of coats, and some pencils. And an umbrella. No dogs tonight, youngster, and no notebooks."

"Oh," Malone said. "Well-wait a minute."

"What is it, youngster?" the old man said. "I'm busy this time of day. Got to sweep and clean. Got work to do. Not like you tourists." With difficulty, Malone leashed his temper. "Why did I have to describe the notebook?" he said. "You haven't got any notebooks at all."

"That's right," the old man said cheerfully.

"But you made me describe—"

"That's the rules," the old man said. "And I ain't about to go against the rules. Not for no tourist." He put the pencil down and rose. "Wish you were a cop," he said. "I never met a cop. They don't lose things like people do."

Making a mental note to call up later and talk to the manager, if the notebook hadn't turned up in the meantime, Malone went off to find the bars he had stopped in before the theater.

Saving Topp's for last, he started at the Ad Lib, where a surprised bald-headed man told him they hadn't found a notebook anywhere in the bar for something like six weeks. "Now if you'd been looking for umbrellas," he said, "we could have accommodated you. Got over ten umbrellas downstairs, waiting for their owners. I wonder why people lose so many umbrellas?"

"Maybe they hate rain," Malone said.

"I don't know," the bald man said. "I'm sort of a psychologist—you know, a judge of people. I think it's an unconscious protest against the fetters of a society which is slowly strangling them by—"

Malone said good-bye in a hurry and left. His next stop was the Xochitl, the Mexican bar on 46th Street. He greeted the bartender warmly.

"Ah," the bartender told him. "You come back. We look for you."

"Look for me?" Malone said. "You mean you found my notebook?"

"Notesbook?" the bartender said.

"A little black plastic book," Malone said, making motions, "about so big. And it—"

"Not find," the bartender said. "You lose him?"

"Sure I lost him," Malone said. "I mean it. Would I be looking for it if I hadn't lost it?"

"Who knows?" the bartender said, and shrugged.

"But you said you were looking for me," Malone said. "What about?"

"Oh," the bartender said. "I only say that. Make customer feel good, think we miss him. Customers like, so we do. What your name?"

"Pizarro," Malone said disgustedly, and went away.

The last stop was Topp's. Well, he had to find the notebook there. It was the only place the notebook could be. That was logic, and Malone was proud of it. He walked into Topp's, trying to remember the bartender's name, and found it just as he walked into the bar.

"Hello, Wally," he said gaily.

The bartender stared at him. "I'm not Wally," he said. "Wally's the night barman. My name's Ray."

"Oh," Malone said, feeling deflated. "Well, I've come about a notebook."

"Yes, sir?" Ray said.

"I lost the notebook here yesterday evening, between six and eight. If you'll just take me to the Lost and Found—"

"One moment, sir," Ray said, and left him standing at the bar, all alone.

In a few seconds he was back. "I didn't see the notebook myself, sir," he said. "But if Wally picked it up, he'd have turned it over to the maître d'. Perhaps you'd like to check with him."

"Sure," Malone said. The daytime maître d' turned out to be a shortish, heavy-set man with large blue eyes, a silver mane, and a thin, pencil-line mustache. He was addressed, for no reason Malone was able to discover, as BeeBee.

Ray introduced them. "This gentleman wants to know about a notebook," he told BeeBee.

"Notebook?" BeeBee said.

Malone explained at length. BeeBee nodded in an understanding fashion for some moments and, when Malone had finished, disappeared in search of the Lost and Found. He came back rather quickly, with the disturbing news that no notebook was anywhere in the place.

"It's got to be here," Malone said.

"Well," BeeBee said, "it isn't. Maybe you left it some place else. Maybe it's home now."

"It isn't," Malone said. "And I've tried every place else."

"New York's a big city, Mr. Malone," BeeBee said.

Malone sighed. "I've tried every place I've been. The notebook couldn't be somewhere I haven't been. A rolling stone follows its owner." He thought about that. It didn't seem to mean anything, but maybe it had. There was no way to tell for sure.

He went back to the bar to think things over and figure out his next move. A bourbon and soda while thinking seemed the obvious order, and Ray bustled off to get it.

Had he left the notebook on the street somewhere, just dropping it by accident? Malone couldn't quite see that happening. It was, of course, possible; but the possibility was so remote that he decided to try and think of everything else first. There was Dorothy, for instance.

Had he got stewed enough so that he'd showed Dorothy the notebook?

He didn't remember doing it, and he didn't quite see why he would have. Most of the evening was more or less clear in his mind; he hadn't apparently, forgotten any other details, either.

All the same, it was an idea. He decided to give the girl a call and find out for sure. Maybe she remembered something that would help him, anyway.

He took the drink from Ray and slid off the bar stool. Two steps away, he remembered one more little fact. He didn't have her number, and he didn't know anything about where she lived, except that it could be reached by subway. That, Malone told himself morosely, limited things nicely to the five boroughs of New York.

And she said she was living with her aunt. Would she have a phone listing under her own name? Or would the listing be under her aunt's name, which he also didn't know?

At any rate, he could check listings under Dorothy Francis, he told himself.

He did so.

There were lots and lots of people named Dorothy Francis, in Manhattan and in all the other boroughs.

Malone went back to the bar to think some more. He was on his second bourbon and soda, still thinking but without any new ideas, when BeeBee tapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Pardon me," the maître d' said, "but are you English?"

"Am I what?" Malone said, spilling a little of his drink on the bar.

"Are you English?" BeeBee said.

"Oh," Malone said. "No. Irish. Very Irish."

"That's nice," BeeBee said.

Malone stared at him. "I think it's fine," he said, "but I'd love to know why you asked me."

"Well," BeeBee said, "I knew you couldn't be American. Not after the phone call. You don't have to hide your nationality here; we're quite accustomed to foreign visitors. And we don't have special prices for tourists."

Malone waited two breaths. "Will you please tell me," he said slowly, "what it is you're talking about?"

"Certainly," BeeBee said with aplomb. "There's a call for you in the upstairs booth. A long-distance call, personal."

"Oh," Malone said. "Who'd know I was—" He stopped, thinking hard. There was no way for anybody in the world to know he was in Topp's. Therefore, nobody could be calling him. "They've got the wrong name," he said decisively.

"Oh, no," BeeBee said. "I heard them quite distinctly. You are Sir Kenneth Malone, aren't you?"

Malone gaped for one long second, and then his mind caught up with the facts. "Oh," he said. "Sure." He raced upstairs to the phone booth, said, "This is Sir Kenneth Malone," into the blank screen, and waited.

After a while an operator said, "Person-to-person call, Sir Kenneth, from Yucca Flats. Will you take this call?"

"I'll take it," Malone said. A face appeared on the screen, and Malone knew he was right. He knew exactly how he'd been located, and by whom.

Looking only at the face in the screen, it might have been thought that the woman who appeared there was somebody's grandmother, kindly, red-cheeked, and twinkle-eyed. Perhaps that wasn't the only stereotype; she could have been an old-maid schoolteacher, one of the kindly schoolteachers who taught, once upon a time that never was, in the little red schoolhouses of the dim past. The face positively radiated kindness, and friendship, and peace.

But if the face was the face of a sentimental dream, the garb was the garb of royalty. Somebody's grandmother was on her way to a costume party. She wore the full court costume of the days of Queen Elizabeth I, complete with brocaded velvet gown, wide ruff collar, and jeweled skullcap.

She was, Malone knew, completely insane.

Like all the other telepaths Malone and the rest of the FBI had found during their work in uncovering a telepathic spy, she had been located in an insane asylum. Months of extensive psychotherapy, including all the newest techniques and some so old that psychiatrists were a little afraid to use them, had done absolutely nothing to shake the firm conviction in the mind of Miss Rose Thompson.

She was, she insisted, Elizabeth Tudor, rightful Queen of England.

She claimed she was immortal, which was not true. She also claimed to be a telepath. This was perfectly accurate. It had been her help that had enabled Malone to find the telepathic spy, and a grateful

government had rewarded her.

It had given her a special expense allotment for life, covering the clothing she wore, and the style in which she lived. Rooms had been set aside for her at Yucca Flats, and she held court there, sometimes being treated by psychiatrists and sometimes helping Dr. Thomas O'Connor in his experiments and in the development of new psionic machines.

She was probably the happiest psychopath on Earth.

Malone stared at her. For a second he could think of nothing to say but, "My God." He said it.

"Not at all, Sir Kenneth," the little old lady said. "Your Queen."

Malone took a deep breath. "Good afternoon, Your Majesty," he said.

"Good afternoon, Sir Kenneth," she said, and waited. After a second Malone figured out what she was waiting for.

He inclined his head in as courtly a bow as he could manage over a visiphone. "I am deeply honored," he said, "that Your Majesty has called on me. Is there any way in which I might be of service?"

"Oh, goodness me, no," said the little old lady. "I don't need a thing. They do one very well here in Yucca Flats. You must come out soon and see my new throne room. I've had the decorations done by-but I can see you're not interested in that, Sir Kenneth."

"But—" Malone realized it was useless to argue with the old lady. She was telepathic, and knew exactly what he was thinking. That, after all, was how he had been located; she had mentally "hunted" for him until she found him.

But why?

"I'll tell you why, Sir Kenneth," the little old lady said. "I'm worried about you."

"Worried? About me, Your Majesty?"

"Certainly," the little old lady said, inclining her head just the proper number of degrees, and raising it again. "You, Sir Kenneth, and that silly little notebook you lost. You've been stewing about it for the last hour."

It was obvious that, for reasons of her own, the Queen had seen fit to look into Malone's mind. She'd found him worrying, and called him about it. It was, Malone thought, sweet of her in a way. But it was also just a bit disconcerting.

He was perfectly well aware that the Queen could read his mind at any distance. But unless something reminded him of the fact, he didn't have to think about it.

And he didn't like to think about it.

"Don't be disturbed," the Queen said. "Please. I only want to help you, Sir Kenneth; you know that."

"Well, of course I do," Malone said. "But—"

"Heavens to Betsy," she said. "Sir Kenneth, what kind of a detective are you?"

"What?" Malone said, and added at once, "Your Majesty." He knew perfectly well, of course, that Miss Thompson was not Queen Elizabeth I—and he knew that Miss Thompson knew what he thought.

But she didn't mind. Politeness, she held, was the act of being pleasant on the surface, no matter what a person really thought. People were polite to their bosses, she pointed out, even though they were perfectly sure that they could do a better job than the bosses were doing.

So she insisted on the surface pretense that Malone was going through, treating her like a Queen.

The psychiatrists had called her delusion a beautifully rationalized one. As far as Malone was concerned, it made more sense than most of real life.

"That's very nice of you, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "But I ask you again, what kind of detective are you? Haven't you got any common sense at all?"

Malone hated to admit it, but he had always had just that suspicion. After all, he wasn't a very good detective. He was just lucky. His luck had enabled him to break a lot of tough cases. But some day people would find out, and then—

"Well," the Queen said, "at the very least you ought to act like a detective." She sniffed audibly. "Sir Kenneth, I'm ashamed that a member of my own FBI can't do any better than you're doing now."

Malone blinked into the screen. He did feel ashamed in a vague sort of way, and he was willing to admit it. But he did feel, wistfully, that it would be nice to know just what he was being ashamed of. "Have I been missing something?" he said.

"Outside of the obvious," the Queen said, "that you've been missing your notebook—or rather Mike Fueyo's notebook—"

"Yes?" Malone said.

"You certainly have," the Queen said. "Don't you see what happened to that notebook? You've been missing the only possible explanation."

"But there isn't any," Malone said. "Unless Miss Francis has it."

Her Majesty gave him a bright smile. "There!" she said.

"There, what?" Malone said.

"I knew you could do it," the Queen said. "All you had to do was apply your intelligence, and you'd come up with just the fact you needed."

"What fact?" Malone said.

"That Miss Francis has your notebook," the Queen said. "You just told me."

"All right," Malone said, and stopped and took a deep breath. "My God," he said after a pause. "What

is that supposed to mean? Did I give it to her after all?"

"No," the Queen said.

"Did I lose it, and did she pick it up?"

"No," the Queen said.

"My God," Malone said again. "All right. I give up. Is this Twenty Questions?"

"Sir Kenneth!" the Queen said. "What a way to talk to your Queen!"

Malone took another breath. "I'm sorry," he muttered. "But—"

"Yes, I know," the Queen said sympathetically. "You're upset. But you didn't give Miss Francis the notebook, and she didn't find it after you'd lost it."

"Then—" Malone stared. "She stole it. She stole it from me."

"I imagine she took it right from your jacket pocket," the Queen said. "Now, if you'd only wear proper clothing, and a proper pouch at your belt—"

"I'd be stared at," Malone said. "In court clothing."

"No one in New York would stare at you," the Queen said. "They'd think it was what they call an advertising stunt."

"Anyhow," Malone said, "I wasn't wearing court clothing. So that made it easy for her to steal the notebook. But why, for God's sake? Why?"

"Because," the Queen said, "she needed it."

"Needed it?" Malone shrieked.

"Please, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "Don't talk to your Sovereign in that manner. And I do wish you'd stop thinking of that girl as Dorothy Francis. She isn't at all, you know."

"No," Malone said. "I don't know. If she isn't Dorothy Francis, who in hell is she?"

"Don't swear, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "She's Dorothea Francisca Fueyo, if you want to know."

Malone gulped. "Then she's—"

"That's right," the Queen said. "She's little Miguel Fueyo's older sister."

CHAPTER 10

Malone put in a great deal of time, he imagined, just staring at the face of the little old lady on the screen. At last he spoke. "My God," he said. "Her name is Fueyo. I'll be damned."

"I've told you," the Queen said with some asperity, "not to swear, Sir Kenneth."

"I know," Malone said. "But—"

"You're excited," the Queen said. "You're stunned. Goodness, you don't need to tell me that, Sir Kenneth. I know."

"But she's—" Malone discovered that he couldn't talk. He swallowed a couple of times and then went on. "She's Mike Fueyo's sister."

"That's exactly right, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "That's just what I told you."

"Then she swiped the book to protect her little brother," Malone said. "Oh, boy."

"Exactly, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said.

"And she doesn't care about me at all," Malone said. "I mean, she only went out with me because I was me. Malone. And she wanted the notebook. That was all there was to it." He added an expletive. The Queen frowned, but said nothing about it.

"I wouldn't say that if I were you," she went on. "Quite the contrary. She does like you, you know. And she thinks you're a very nice person." The Queen beamed. "You are, you know," she said.

"Oh," Malone said uncomfortably. "Sure."

"You don't have to think that she merely went out with you because of her brother's notebook," the Queen said. "But she does have a strong sense of loyalty-and he is-her younger brother, after all."

"He sure is," Malone said. "He's a great kid, little Mike."

"You see," the Queen continued imperturbably, "Mike told her about losing the notebook the other night-when he struck you."

"When he struck me," Malone said. "Oh, yes. He struck me, all right."

"He guessed that you must have it when you started asking questions about the Silent Spooks, you see," the Queen said. "That was the only way you could have found out about him-unless you were telepathic. Which, of course, you're not."

"No," Malone said.

"Now, understand me," the Queen said. "I do not think that his striking you was a very nice act."

"I don't either," Malone said. "It hurt like-it hurt quite a lot."

"Certainly," the Queen said. "But he didn't hurt the car any, and he didn't want to. He just wanted to ride around in it for a while."

"He likes red Cadillacs," Malone said.

"Oh, yes," the Queen said. "He thinks they're wonderful."

"Good for him," Malone said sourly.

"Well, now," the Queen said. "You just go right on over to her house. Of course she doesn't live with an aunt."

"No," Malone said. "She lives with Mike and his mother."

"Why not?" the Queen said. "She's part of the family."

Malone nodded silently.

"She'll give you the book, Sir Kenneth. I just know that she will. And I want you to be very nice to her when you ask for it. She's a very nice girl, you know."

"She's a swell girl," Malone said morosely. "And I'll-hey. Wait a minute."

"Yes, Sir Kenneth?"

"How come you can read her thoughts?" Malone said. "And Mike's? I thought you had to know somebody pretty well before you could read them at a distance like this. Do you? Know them, I mean."

"Oh, no," the Queen said. "But I can read you, of course." Malone could see that the Queen was trying very hard not to look proud of herself. "And last night," she went on, "you two were-well, Sir Kenneth, you had a real rapport with each other. My goodness, yes."

"Well," Malone said, "we—"

"Don't explain, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "It really isn't necessary; I thought it was very sweet. And, in any case, I can pick her up now. Because of that rapport. Not quite as well as I can pick you up, but enough to get the strong surface thoughts."

"Oh," Malone said. "But Mike—"

"I can't pick him up at all, this far away," the Queen said. "There is just a faint touch of him, though, through the girl. But all I know about him is what she thinks." She smiled gently. "He's a nice boy, basically," she said.

"Sure he is," Malone said. "He's got a nice blackjack, too-basically." He grimaced. "Were you reading my mind all last night?" he said.

"Well," the Queen said, "no. Toward morning you were getting so fuzzy I just didn't bother."

"I can understand that," Malone said. "I nearly didn't bother myself."

The queen nodded. "But toward afternoon," she said, "I didn't have anything to do, so I just listened in. You do have such a nice mind, Sir Kenneth. So refreshing and different. Especially when you're in love."

Malone blushed quietly.

"Oh, I know," the Queen said. "You'd much rather think of yourself as a sort of apprentice lecher, a

kind of cynical Don Juan, but—"

"I know," Malone said. "Don't tell me about it. All right?"

"Of course, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said, "if you wish it."

"Basically, I'm a nice boy," Malone said. "Sure I am." He paused. "Do you have any more pertinent information, Your Majesty?"

"Not right now," the Queen admitted. "But if I do, I'll let you know." She giggled. "You know, I had to argue awfully hard with Dr. Hatterer to get to use the telephone," she said.

"I'll bet," Malone said.

"But I did manage," she said, and winked. "I won't have that sort of trouble again."

Malone wondered briefly what dark secret Dr. Hatterer had, that Her Majesty had discovered in his mind and used to blackmail him with. At last he decided that it was probably none of his business, and didn't matter too much anyway.

"Quite right, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said. "And good bye for now."

"Good-bye, Your Majesty," Malone said. He bowed again, and flipped off the phone. Bowing in a phone booth wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do, he thought to himself. But somehow he had managed it.

He reached into his pocket, half-convinced for a moment that it was an Elizabethan belt-pouch. Talks with Her Majesty always had that effect; after a time, Malone came to believe in the strange, bright world. But he shook off the lingering effects of her psychosis, fished out some coins and thought for a minute.

So Dorothy-Dorothea-had lifted the notebook. That was some help, certainly. It let him know something more about the enemy he was facing. But it wasn't really a lot of help.

What did he do now?

Her Majesty had suggested going to the Fueyo house, collaring the girl (but treating her nicely, Malone reminded himself) and demanding the book back. She'd even said he would get the book back, and since she knew some of what went on in Dorothea Fueyo's mind, she was probably right.

But what good was that going to do him?

He knew everything that was in the book. Getting it back was something that could wait. It didn't sound particularly profitable, and it didn't even sound like fun.

What he needed was a next move. He thought for a minute, dropped the coins into the phone and dialed the number of the Police Commissioner's office. After a brief argument with a secretary, he had Fernack on the phone. And this time, Malone told himself, he was going to be polite.

If possible.

"Good afternoon, John Henry," he said sunnily, when the commissioner's face was finally on the screen.
"Can you get me some more information?"

Fernack stared at him sourly. "Depends," he said.

"On what?" Malone said, telling himself he wasn't going to get irritated, and knowing perfectly well that he was lying.

"On what kind of information you want," Fernack said.

"Well," Malone said, "there's a warehouse I want to know some more about. Who the owner is, for one thing, and—"

Fernack nodded. "I've got it," he said. He fished around on his desk, and brought up a sheet of paper. He held it up to the screen while Malone copied off the name and address. "Lieutenant Lynch told me all about it."

"Lynch?" Malone said. "But he—"

"Lynch works for me, Malone," Fernack said. "Remember that."

"But he said he'd—"

"He said he wouldn't do anything, and he won't," Fernack said. "He just reported it to me for my action. He knew I was working with you, Malone. And I am his boss, remember."

"Great," Malone said. "Now, John Henry—"

"Hold it, Malone," Fernack said. "I'd like a little information too, you know. I'd like to know just what the hell is going on, if it isn't too much trouble."

"It's not that, John Henry," Malone said earnestly. "Really. It's just that I—"

"All this about vanishing boys," Fernack said. "Disappearing into thin air. All this nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense," Malone said.

"All right," Fernack said indulgently. "Boys disappear every day like that. Sure they do." He leaned toward the screen and his voice was as hard as his face. "Malone, are these kids mixed up with those impossible robberies you had me looking up?"

"Well," Malone said, "I think so. But I doubt if you could prove it."

Fernack's face had begun its slow climb toward purple again. "Malone," he said, "if you're suppressing evidence, even if you are the FBI, I'll—"

"I'm not suppressing any evidence," Malone said. "I don't think you could prove a connection. I don't think I could prove a connection. I don't think anybody could-not right now."

Fernack leaned back, apparently mollified.

"John Henry," Malone said, "I want to ask you to keep your hands off this case. To let me handle it my way."

Fernack nodded absently. "Sure, Malone," he said.

"What?"

"I said sure," Fernack said. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Well, yes," Malone said, "but—"

Fernack leaned all the way back in his chair, his face a mask of disappointment and frustration. "Malone," he said, "I wish I'd never heard of this case. I wish I'd been retired or died before it ever came up. I've been a police officer in New York for a long time, and I wish this case had waited a few more years to happen."

He stopped. Malone leaned against the back wall of the phone booth and lit a cigarette.

"Andy Burris called me less than half an hour ago," Fernack said.

"Oh," Malone said.

"That's right," Fernack said. "Good old Burris of the FBI. And he told me this was a National Security case. National Security! It's your baby, Malone, because Burris wants it that way." He snorted. "So don't worry about me," he said. "I'm just here to co-operate. The patriotic, loyal, dumb slave of a grateful government."

Malone blew out a plume of smoke. "You know, John Henry," he said, "you might have made a good FBI man yourself. You've got the right attitude."

"Never mind the jokes," Fernack said bitterly.

"Okay," Malone said. "But tell me, did you actually make arrangements for me to get into that warehouse? I suppose you know that's what I want."

"I guessed that much," Fernack said. "I haven't made any arrangements at all yet, but I will. I'll have Safe and Loft get the keys, and a full set of floor plans to the place while they're at it. Will that do, Your Majesty?"

Malone choked on his smoke and shot a quick look over his shoulder. There was nothing there but the wall of the booth. Queen Elizabeth I was nowhere in evidence. Then he realized that Fernack had been talking to him.

"Don't do that," he said.

"What?" Fernack said.

Malone realized in one awful second how strange the explanation was going to sound. Could he say that he thought he'd been mistaken for an old friend of his, Elizabeth Tudor? Could he say that he'd just had a call from her?

In the end he merely said, "Nothing," and let it go at that.

"Well, anyhow," Fernack said, "do you want anything else?"

"Not right now," Malone said. "I'll let you know, though. And thanks, John Henry. No matter why you're doing this, thanks."

"I don't deserve 'em," Fernack muttered. "And I hope you get caught in some kind of deadfall and have to come screaming to the cops."

That, Malone reflected, was the second time a cop had suggested his yelling if he got into trouble. Hadn't the police force ever heard of telephones?

He said good-bye and flipped off.

Then he stared at the screen for a little while, as his cigarette burned down between his fingers. At last he put the cigarette out and went downstairs again to the bar.

If he had to do some heavy thinking, he told himself, there was absolutely no reason why he couldn't enjoy himself a little while doing it.

The evening rush had begun, and Malone found himself a stool simply by slipping into one while a drinker's back was turned. Once ensconced, he huddled himself up like an old drunk, thus effectively cutting himself off from interruptions, and lit another cigarette. Ray was down at the other end of the bar, chatting with a red-headed woman and her pale, bald escort. Malone sighed and set himself to the job of serious, constructive thinking.

How, he asked himself, do you go about catching a person who can vanish away like so much smoke?

Well, Malone could think of one solution, but it was pretty bloody.

Nailing the kids to a wall would probably work, but he couldn't say much else for it. There had to be another way out. For some reason, Malone just couldn't see himself with a mouthful of nails, a hammer, and a teen-ager.

It sounded just a little too messy. Then, of course, there were handcuffs.

That sounded a little better. The trouble was that Malone simply didn't have enough information, and knew it. Obviously, the kids could carry stuff with them when they teleported; the stuff they stole proved that. And their clothes, Malone added. Apparently the kids didn't arrive at wherever they went stark staring naked.

But how close to a teleport did the things he carried have to be?

In other words, Malone thought, if you put handcuffs on a teleport, would the handcuffs vanish when the teleport did? And did that include the part of the cuff you were holding?

What happened if you snapped half the cuff around your own wrist first? Did you go along with the teleport? Or did your wrist go, while you stayed behind and wondered how long it would take to bleed to death?

Or what?

All the questions were intriguing ones. Malone sighed, wishing he knew the answer to even one of them.

It was somewhat comforting to think that he'd managed to progress a little, anyway. The kids hadn't meant anybody to find out about them; but Malone had found out about them, and alerted all the cops in town, as well as the rest of the FBI. He knew just who they were, and where they lived, and how they performed the "miracles" they performed.

Anyhow, he knew something about that last item.

He even knew who had his notebook.

He tabled that thought, and went back to feeling victorious. Within a few seconds, the sense of achievement was gone, and futility had come in its place. After all, he still didn't know how to catch the kids, did he?

No.

He thought about handcuffs some more and then gave up. He'd just have to try it and see how it worked. And if the teleports took his wrist away he'd-he'd go after them and make them give it back.

Sure he would.

That reminded him of the notebook again, and since the thing was being so persistent, he decided he might as well pay some attention to it.

Dorothea had the notebook. Malone tried to see himself barging in on her and asking for it, and he didn't care for the picture at all-no matter how Good Queen Bess felt about it.

After all, she thought Mike Fueyo was basically a nice kid.

So what did she know?

He closed his eyes. There he was, in the Fueyo apartment, talking to Dorothea.

"Dorothea," he muttered. "You filched my notebook."

That didn't sound very effective. And besides, it wasn't really his notebook. He tried again.

"Dorothea, you pinched your brother's notebook."

Now, for some reason, it sounded like something covered by the Vice Squad. It sounded terrible. But there were other ways of saying the same thing.

"Dorothea," he muttered, "you borrowed your brother's notebook."

That was too patronizing. Malone told himself that he sounded like a character straight out of 3-D screens, and settled himself gamely for another try.

"Dorothea, you have your brother's notebook."

To which the obvious answer was, "Yes, I do, and so what?"

Or possibly, "How do you know?"

And Malone thought about answering that one. "Queen Elizabeth told me," was the literal truth, but somehow it didn't sound like it. And he couldn't find another answer to give the girl.

"Dorothea," he said, and a voice from nowhere added:

"Will you have another drink?"

"Damn it," Malone exploded, "that's not the question. Drinks have nothing to do with notebooks. It's notebooks I'm after. Can't you understand..." Belatedly, he looked up.

There was Ray, the barman. "Oh," he said.

"I just came over," Ray said. "And I figured if you couldn't find your notebook, maybe you'd like a drink. So long as you're here."

"Ray," Malone said with feeling, "you are an eminently reasonable fellow. I accept your solution. Nay, more. I endorse your solution. Wholeheartedly."

Ray went off to mix, and Malone stared after him happily. This was really a nice place, he reflected; almost as nice as the City Hall Bar in Chicago, where he'd gone long ago with his father.

But he tore his mind away from the happy past, and concentrated instead on the miserable present. He decided for the last time that he was not going to ask Dorothea for the book-not just yet, anyhow. After all, it wasn't as if he needed the book; he knew his own name, and he knew Lynch's name, and he knew the names on the second page. And he didn't see any particular need for a picture of a red Cadillac, no matter how nicely colored it was.

So, he asked himself, why embarrass everybody by trying to get it back?

Of course, it was technically a crime to pick pockets, and that went double or triple for the pockets of FBI agents. But Malone told himself that he didn't feel like pressing charges, anyhow. And Dorothy probably didn't make a habit of pocket-picking.

He sighed and glanced at his watch. It was fifteen minutes of six.

Now he knew what his next move was going to be.

He was going to go back to his hotel and change his clothes.

That is, he amended, as soon as he finished the drink that Ray was setting up in front of him.

CHAPTER 11

By the time Malone reached the Hotel New Yorker it was six-twenty. Malone hadn't reckoned with New York's rush-hour traffic, and, after seeing it, he still didn't believe it. Finding a cab had been

impossible, and he had started for the subway, hoping that he wouldn't get lost and end up somewhere in Brooklyn.

But one look at the shrieking mob trying to sardine itself into the Seventh Avenue subway entrance had convinced him it was better to walk. Bucking the street crowds was bad enough. Bucking the subway crowds was something Malone didn't even want to think about.

He let himself into his room, and was taking off his shoes with a grateful sigh when there was a rap on the door of the bathroom that connected his room with Boyd's. Malone padded over to the door, his shoes in one hand. "Tom?" he said.

"You are expecting maybe Titus Moody?" Boyd called.

"Okay," Malone said. "Come on in."

Boyd pushed open the door. He was stripped to the waist, a state of dress which showed the largest expanse of chest Malone had ever seen, and he was carrying the small scissors which he used to trim his Henry VIII beard. He stabbed the scissors toward Malone, who shuffled back hurriedly.

"Listen," Boyd said. "Did you call the office after you left this afternoon?"

"No," Malone admitted. "Why? What happened?"

"There was a call for you," Boyd said. "Long distance, just before I left at five. I came on back to the hotel and waited until I heard you come in. Thought you might want to know about it."

"I do, I guess," Malone said. "Who from?" Looking at Boyd, a modern-day Henry VIII, the association was too obvious to be missed. Malone thought of Good Queen Bess, and wondered why she was calling him again.

And-more surprising-why she'd called him at FBI headquarters, when she must have known that he wasn't there.

"Dr. O'Connor," Boyd said.

"Oh," Malone said, somewhat relieved. "At Yucca Flats."

Boyd nodded. "Right," he said.

"You're to call operator nine."

"Thanks." Malone went over to the phone, remembered his shoes and put them down carefully on the floor. "Anything else of importance?" he asked.

"On the Cadillacs," Boyd said. "We've got a final report now. Leibowitz and Hardin finally finished checking the last of them; there weren't quite as many as we were afraid there were going to be. Red isn't a very popular color around here."

"Good," Malone said.

"And there isn't a doggone thing on any of 'em," Boyd said. "Oh, we cleared up a lot of small-time

crime, one thing and another, but that's about all. No such thing as an electro-psionic brain to be found anywhere in the lot. Leibowitz says he's willing to swear to it."

Malone sighed. "I didn't think he'd find one," he said.

"You didn't?"

"No," Malone said.

Boyd stabbed at him with the scissors again. "Then why did you cause all that trouble?" he said.

"Because I thought we might find electro-psionic brains," Malone said wearily. "Or one, anyhow."

"But you just said—"

Malone picked up the phone, got long distance, and motioned Boyd to silence in one sweeping series of moves. The long-distance operator said, "Yes, sir? May we help you?"

"Give me operator nine," Malone said.

There was a buzz, a click, and a new voice which said, "Operator ni-yun. May we help you?"

"All nine of you?" Malone muttered. "Never mind. This is Kenneth Malone. I've got a call from Dr. Thomas O'Connor at Yucca Flats. Please connect me."

There was another buzz, a click and an ungodly howl which was followed by the voice of operator ni-yun saying, "We are connecting you. There will be a slight delay. We are sor-ree."

Malone waited. At last there was another small howl, and the screen lit up. Dr. O'Connor's face, as stern and ascetic as ever, stared through at Malone.

"I understand you called me," Malone said.

"Ah, yes," Dr. O'Connor said. "It's very good to see you again, Mr. Malone." He gave Malone a smile good for exchange at your corner grocery; worth, one icicle.

"It's good to see you too," Malone lied.

"Mr. Burris explained to me what it was that you wanted to talk to me about," O'Connor said, "Am I to understand that you have actually found a teleport?"

"Unless my theories are away off," Malone said, "I've done a lot better than that. I've found eight of them."

"Eight." Dr. O'Connor's smile grew perceptibly warmer. It now stood at about thirty-four degrees Fahrenheit. "That is really excellent, Mr. Malone. You have done a fine job."

"Thanks," Malone muttered. He wished that O'Connor didn't make him feel quite so much like a first-year law student talking to an egomaniacal professor.

"When can you deliver them?" O'Connor said.

"Well," Malone said carefully, "that depends." O'Connor seemed to view the teleports as pieces of equipment, he thought. "I can't deliver them until I catch them," he said. "And that's why I wanted to talk to you."

"Some slight delay," Dr. O'Connor said, "will be quite understandable." His face left no doubt that he didn't like the necessity of understanding anything that was going to keep him and the eight teleports apart for even thirty seconds longer, now that he knew about them.

"You see," Malone said, "they're kids. Juvenile delinquents, or something like that. But they are teleports, that's for sure."

"I see," Dr. O'Connor said.

"So we've got to nab them," Malone said. "And for that I need all the information I can get."

Dr. O'Connor nodded slowly. "I'll be happy," he said, "to give you any information I can provide."

Malone took a deep breath, and plunged. "How does this teleportation bit work, anyhow?" he said.

"You've asked a very delicate question," Dr. O'Connor said. "Actually, we can't be quite positive." His expression showed just how little he wanted to make this admission. "However," he went on, brightening, "there is some evidence which seems to show that it is basically the same process as psychokinesis. And we do have quite a bit of empirical data on psychokinesis." He scribbled something on a sheet of paper and said, "For instance, there's this." He held the paper up to the screen so that Malone could read it.

It said:

$$(m*d)/(f*t**2) = 1/k$$

Malone looked at it for some seconds. At last he said, "It's very pretty. What the hell is it?"

"This," Dr. O'Connor said, in a condescending tone of voice that meant, You should have known all along, but you're just hopeless, "is the basic formula for the phenomenon, where m is the mass in grams, d is the distance in centimeters, f is the force in dynes, and t is the time in seconds. K is a constant whose value is not yet known, and the numeral 1 is unity."

Malone said, "Hmm," and stared at the equation again. Somehow, the explanation was not very helpful. The numeral 1 was unity. He understood that much, all right, but it didn't seem to do him any good.

"As you can see," Dr. O'Connor went on, "the greater the force, and the longer time it is applied, the greater distance any given mass can be moved. Or, contrariwise, the more mass, the greater mass, that is, the easier it is to move it any given distance. This is, as you undoubtedly understand, not at all in contradistinction to physical phenomena."

"Ah," Malone said, feeling that something was expected of him, but not being quite sure what.

Dr. O'Connor frowned. "I must admit," he said, "that the uncertainty as to the constant k, and the lack of any real knowledge as to just what kind of force is being applied, have held up our work so far." Then his face smoothed out. "Of course, when we have the teleports to work with, we may derive a full set of laws which—"

"Never mind that now," Malone said.

"But our work is most important, Mr. Malone," Dr. O'Connor said with a motion of his eyebrows. "As I'm sure you must understand."

"Oh," Malone said, feeling if he'd been caught without his homework, "of course. But if you don't mind—"

"Yes, Mr. Malone?" Dr. O'Connor said smoothly.

"What I want to know," Malone said, "is this. What are the limitations of this-uh-phenomenon?"

Dr. O'Connor brightened up thoroughly. "Well, theoretically," he said, "there do not appear to be any limitations. However, practical limitations do exist. If the process is at all parallel with psychokinesis, or with levitation"-he stared at Malone, as if daring him to say that it wasn't-"if that parallel exists, then the subject is mentally limited by his own physical strength." Malone said, "What?"

"Try and be patient, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said calmly. "Please. As I was saying, the subject is limited by his own physical strength. In other words, he cannot move psionically any subject larger than he can lift physically. This appears to be a psychological limitation which—"

"Oh," Malone said. "You mean he couldn't carry off a building, or anything like that?"

"Of course not," Dr. O'Connor said. "Nor, as a matter of fact, could he carry off anything that was securely bolted down. I hope you follow me."

"I think so," Malone said. "But look here. Suppose you handcuffed him to, say, a radiator, or a jail cell bar."

"Yes?"

"Could he get away?"

Dr. O'Connor appeared to consider this with some care. "Well," he said at last, "he certainly couldn't take the radiator with him, or the cell bar. If that's what you mean." He hesitated, looked slightly shamefaced, and then went on: "But you must realize that we lack any really extensive data on this phenomenon."

"Of course," Malone said.

"That's why I'm so very anxious to get those subjects," Dr. O'Connor said.

"Dr. O'Connor," Malone said earnestly, "that's just what I had in mind from the start. I've been going to a lot of extra trouble to make sure that those kids don't get killed or end up in reform schools or something, just so you could work with them."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said gravely.

Malone felt as if someone had given him a gold star. Fighting down the emotion, he went on: "I know right now that I can catch one or two of them. But I don't know for sure that I can hold one for more"

than a fraction of a second."

"I see your problem," Dr. O'Connor said. "Believe me, Mr. Malone. I do see your problem."

"And is there a way out?" Malone said. "I mean a way I can hold on to them for—"

"At present," Dr. O'Connor said heavily, "I have no suggestions. I lack data."

"Oh, fine," Malone said. "We need the kids to get the data, and we need the data to get the kids." He sighed. "Hooray for our side," he added.

"There does appear to be something of a dilemma here," Dr. O'Connor admitted sadly.

"Dilemma is putting it mildly," Malone said.

Dr. O'Connor opened his mouth, shut it, opened it again and said, "I agree."

"Well," Malone said, "maybe one of us will think of something. If anything does occur to you, let me know at once."

"I certainly will," Dr. O'Connor said. "Believe me, Mr. Malone, I want you to capture those kids just as badly as you want to capture them yourself."

"I'll try," Malone said at random. He flipped off and turned with a sense of relief back to Boyd. But it looked as if Henry VIII had been hit on the head with a cow, or something equally weighty. Boyd looked glassy-eyed and slightly stunned.

"What's the matter with you?" Malone said. "Sick?"

"I'm not sick," Boyd said carefully. "At least I don't think I'm sick. It's hard to tell."

"What's wrong?"

"Teleporting!" Boyd said. "Juvenile delinquents!"

Malone felt a sudden twinge in the area of his conscience. He realized that he had told Boyd nothing at all about what had been going on since the discovery of the notebook two nights ago. He filled his partner in rapidly, while Boyd stood in front of the mirror and rather shakily attempted to trim his beard.

"That's why I had the car search continue," Malone said. "I was fairly sure the fault wasn't in the cars, but the boys. But I had to make absolutely sure."

Boyd said, "Oh," chopped a small section out of the center of his beard and added, "Damn. My hand's shaky."

"Well," Malone said, "that's the story."

"It's a hell of a story," Boyd said. "And I don't want you to think I don't believe it. Because I don't."

"It's true," Malone said.

"That doesn't affect me," Boyd said. "I'll go along with the gag. But enough is enough. Vanishing teenagers. Ridiculous."

"Just so you go along with me," Malone said.

"Oh, I'll go along," Boyd said. "This is my vacation too, isn't it? What's the next move, Mastermind?"

"We're going down to that warehouse," Malone said decisively. "I've got a hunch the kids have been hiding there ever since they left their homes yesterday."

"Malone," Boyd said. "What?"

"You mean we're going down to the warehouse tonight?" Boyd said.

Malone nodded.

"I might have known," Boyd said. "I might have known!"

"Tom," Malone said. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," Boyd said. "Nothing at all. Everything's fine and dandy. I think I'm going to commit suicide, but don't let that bother you."

"What happened?" Malone said.

Boyd stared at him. "You happened," he said. "You and the teen-agers and the bloody damn warehouse happened. Three days' work-ruined."

Malone scratched his head, found out that his head still hurt and put his hand down again. "What work?" he said.

"For three days," Boyd said, "I've been taking this blonde chick all over New York. Wining her. Dining her. Spending money as if I were Burris himself, instead of the common or garden variety of FBI agent. Night clubs. Theaters. Bars. The works. Malone, we were getting along famously. It was wonderful."

"And tonight—" Malone said.

"Tonight," Boyd said, "was supposed to be the night. The big night. The payoff. We've got a date for dinner-T-bone steak, two inches thick, with mushrooms. At her apartment, Malone. She will probably—"

"You'll have to break it," Malone said sympathetically. "Too bad, but it can't be helped now. You can pick up a sandwich before you go."

"A sandwich," Boyd said with great dignity, "is not my idea of something to eat."

"Look, Tom—" Malone began.

"All right, all right," Boyd said tiredly. "Duty is duty. I'll go call her."

"Fine," Malone said. "And meanwhile, I'll get us a little insurance."

"Insurance?"

"John Henry Fernack," Malone said, "and his Safe and Loft Squad."

CHAPTER 12

The warehouse was locked up tight, all right, Malone thought. In the dim light that surrounded the neighborhood, it stood like a single stone block, alone near the waterfront. There were other buildings nearby, but they seemed smaller; the warehouse loomed over Malone and Boyd threateningly. They stood in a shadow-blackened alley just across the street, watching the big building nervously, studying it for weak points and escape areas.

Boyd whispered softly, "Do you think they have a look-out?"

Malone's voice was equally low. "We'll have to assume they've got at least one kid posted," he said. "But they can't be watching all the time. Remember, they can't do everything."

"They don't have to," Boyd said. "They do quite enough for me. Do you realize that, right now, I could be—"

"Break it up," Malone said. He took a small handset from his pocket and pressed the stud. "Lynch?" he whispered.

A tinny voice came from the earpiece. "Here, Malone."

"Have you got them located yet?" Malone said.

"Not yet," Lynch's voice replied. "We're working on a triangulation now. Just hold on for a minute or so. I'll let you know as soon as we've got results."

The police squads-Lynch and his men, the warehouse precinct men, and the Safe and Loft Squad-had set up a careful cordon around the area, and were now hard at work trying to determine two things.

First, they had to know whether there was anybody in the building at all.

Second, they had to be able to locate anyone in the building with precision.

The silence of the downtown warehouse district helped. They had several specially designed, highly sensitive directional microphones aimed at the building from carefully selected spots around the area, trying to pick up the muffled sounds of speech or motion within the warehouse. The watchmen in buildings nearby had been warned off for the time being so that their footsteps wouldn't occlude any results.

Malone waited, feeling nervous and cold. Finally Lynch's voice came through again. "We're getting something, all right," he said. "There are obviously several people in there. You were right, Malone."

"Thanks," Malone said. "How about that fix?"

"Hold it a second," Lynch said. Wind swept off the river at Malone and Boyd. Malone closed his eyes

and shivered. He could smell fish and iodine and waste, the odor of the Hudson as it passes the city. Across the river lights sparkled warmly. Here there was nothing but darkness.

A long time passed, perhaps ten seconds.

Then Lynch's voice was back. "Sergeant McNulty says they're on the top floor, Malone," he said. "Can't tell how many for sure. But they're talking and moving around."

"It's a shame these things won't pick up the actual words at a distance," Malone said.

"Just a general feeling of noise is all we get," Lynch said. "But it does some good."

"Sure," Malone said. "Now listen carefully. Boyd and I are going in. Alone."

Lynch's voice whispered, "Right."

"If those mikes pick up any unusual ruckus-any sharp increase in the noise level-come running," Malone said. "Otherwise, just sit still and wait for my signal. Got that?"

"Check," Lynch said.

Malone pocketed the radiophone. "Okay, Tom," he whispered. "This is it."

"Right," Boyd muttered. "Let's move in."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. He took his goggles and brought them down over his eyes, adjusting the helmet on his head. Boyd did the same. Malone flicked on the infrared flashlight he held in his hand.

"Okay?" he whispered. "Check," Boyd said.

Thanks to the goggles, both of them could see the normally invisible beams of the infrared flashlight. They'd equipped themselves to move in darkness without betraying themselves, and they'd be able to see where a person without equipment would be blind.

Malone stayed well within the shadows as he moved silently around to the alley behind the warehouse, and then to a narrow passageway that led to the building next door. Boyd followed a few feet behind him along the carefully planned route.

Malone unlocked the small door that led into the ground floor of the building adjoining. As he did so, he heard a sound behind him and called, "Tom?"

"Hey, Malone," Boyd whispered. "It's—"

Before there was any outcry, Malone rushed back. Boyd was struggling with a figure in the dimness. Malone grabbed the figure and clamped his hand over its mouth. It bit him. He swore in a low voice, and clamped the hand over the mouth again.

It hadn't taken him more than half a second to realize what, whoever it was who struggled in his arms, it wasn't a boy.

"Shut up!" Malone hissed in her ear. "I won't hurt you."

The struggle stopped immediately. Malone gently eased his hand off the girl's mouth. She turned and looked at him.

"Kenneth Malone," she said, "you look like a man from Mars."

"Dorothea!" Malone gasped. "What are you doing here? Looking for your brother?"

"Never mind that," she said. "You play too rough. I'm going home to Mother."

"Answer me!" Malone said.

"All right," Dorothea said. "You must know anyhow, since you're here.... Yes, I'm looking for that fatheaded brother of mine. But now I suppose it's too late. He'll-he'll go to prison."

Her voice broke. Malone found his shoulder suddenly occupied by a crying face.

"No," he said quickly. "No. Please. He won't."

"Really?"

Boyd whispered: "Malone, what is this? It's a hell of a place for a date. And I—"

"Oh, shut up," Malone told him in a kindly fashion. He turned back to Dorothea. "I promise he won't," he said. "If I can just talk to your brother, make him listen to reason, I think we can get him and the others off. Believe me."

"But you—"

"Please," Malone said. "Believe me."

"Oh, Ken," Dorothea said, raising her head. "Do you mean it?"

"Sure I mean it," Malone said. "What have I been saying? The Government needs these kids."

"The Government?"

"It's nothing to worry about," Malone said. "Just go on home now, and I'll call you tomorrow. Late tonight, if I can. All right?"

"No," Dorothea said. "It's not all right. Not at all."

"But—"

Boyd hissed, "Malone!"

Malone ignored him. He had a bigger fight on his hands. "I'm not going home," Dorothea announced. "I'm going in there with you. After all," she added, "I can talk more sense into Mike's head than you can."

"Now look," Malone began.

Dorothea grinned in the darkness. "If you don't take me along," she said quietly, "I'll scream and warn them."

Malone surrendered at once. He had no doubt at all that Dorothea meant what she said. And, after all, the girl might really be some use to them. And there probably wouldn't be much danger.

Of course there wouldn't, he thought. He was going to see to that.

"All right," he said. "Come along. Stick close to us, and don't worry about the darkness. We can see, even if you can't, so let us guide you. And for heaven's sake be quiet!"

Boyd whispered, "Malone, what's going on?"

"She's coming with us," Malone said, pointing to Dorothea.

Boyd shrugged. "Malone," he said, "who do you think you are? The Pied Piper of Hamelin?"

Malone wheeled and went ahead. Opening the door, he played his I-R flashlight on the room inside and he, Boyd, and Dorothea trailed in, going through rooms piled with huge boxes. They went up an iron stairway to the second floor, and so on up to the roof.

They moved quickly across the roof to the wall of the warehouse, which was two stories higher than the building they were on. Of course there were no windows in the warehouse wall facing them, except on the top story.

But there was a single, heavy, fireproof emergency exit. It would have taken power machinery or explosive to open that door from the outside without a key, although from the inside it would open easily. Fortunately, Malone had a key.

He took it out and stepped aside. "Give that lock the works," he whispered to Boyd.

Boyd took a lubricant gun from his pocket and fired three silent shots of special oil into the lock. Then he shot the hinges, and the cracks around the door.

They waited for a minute or two while the oil, forced in under pressure, did its work. Then Malone fitted the key carefully into the lock and turned it, slowly and delicately.

The door swung open in silence. Malone slipped inside, followed by Boyd and Dorothea Fueyo.

Infrared equipment went on again, and the eerie illumination spread over their surroundings. Malone tapped Boyd on the shoulder, and jerked his thumb toward the back stairs. This was plainly no time for talk.

From the floor above, they could hear the murmur of youthful voices.

They started for the stairway. Fortunately, the building was of the steel-and-concrete type; there were no wooden floors to creak and groan beneath their feet.

At the bottom of the stairs, they paused. Voices came down the stairwell clearly, even words being defined in the silence.

"...and quit harping on whose fault it was." Malone recognized Mike Fueyo's voice. "That FBI guy was onto us, and we had to pull out; you know that. We always figured we'd have to pull out some day. So why not now?"

"Yeah," another voice said. "But you didn't have to go and vanish right under that Fed's nose. You been beating it into our heads not to do that sort of stuff ever since we first found out we could make this vanishing bit. And then you go and do it in front of a Fed. Sure, you got a big bang out of it, but is it smart? I ask you—"

"Yeah?" Mike said. "Listen, Silvo, they never would've got onto us if it hadn't been for your stupid tricks. Slugging a cop on the dome. Cracking up a car. You and your bug for speed!"

Malone blinked. Then it hadn't been Miguel Fueyo who'd hit Sergeant Jukovsky, but Silvo. Malone tried to remember the list of Silent Spooks. Silvo Envoy—that was his name.

"You slugged the FBI guy, Mike," Silvo said. "And now you got us all on the run. That's your fault, Mike. I want to see my old lady."

"I had to slug him," Mike said. "Listen, all Ramon's stuff was in that Cadillac. What would've happened if he'd found all that stuff?"

"So what happened anyway?" a third voice said (That was probably Ramon Otravez, Malone thought.) "He found your stupid notebook, didn't he? He went yelling to the cops, didn't he? We're running, ain't we? So what's the difference?"

"Shut up!" Mike roared.

"You ain't telling me to shut up!"

"Me either," Silvo yelled. "You think you're a great big big-shot! You think you're king of the world!"

"Who figured out the Vanish?" Mike screamed. "You'd all be a bunch of bums if I hadn't showed you that! And you know it! You'd all—"

"Don't give us that," Silvo said. "We'd have been able to do it, same as you. Like you said, anybody who's got talent could do it. There were guys you tried to teach—"

"Sure," said a fourth voice. "Listen, Fueyo, you're so bright—so why don't you try teaching it to somebody who don't have the talent?"

"Yeah," said voice number five. "You think you could teach that flashy sister of yours the Vanish?"

"You shut up about my sister, Phil!" Mike screamed.

"So what's so great about her?"

"She got that book back from the Fed," Mike said. "That's what. It's enough!"

"Hell," a voice said, "any dame with a little—"

"Shut your goddamn face before I shut it for you!"

Malone couldn't tell who was yelling what at who after a minute. They all seemed unhappy about being on the run from the police, and they were all tired of being cooped up in a warehouse under Mike's orders. Mike was the only person they could take it out on—and Mike was under heavy attack.

Two of the boys, surprisingly, seemed to side with him. The other five were trying to shout them. Malone wondered if it would become a fight, and then realized that these kids could hardly fight each other when the one who was losing could always fade out.

He leaned over and whispered to Dorothea and Boyd, "Let's sneak up there while the argument's going on."

"But—" Boyd began.

"Less chance of their noticing us," Malone explained, and started forward.

They tiptoed up the stairs and got behind a pile of crates in the shadows, while invective roared around them. This floor was lit by a single small bulb hanging from a socket in the ceiling. The windows were hung with heavy blankets to keep the light from shining out.

The kids didn't notice anything except each other. Malone took a couple of deep breaths and began to look around.

All things considered, he thought, the kids had fixed the place up pretty nicely. The unused warehouse had practically been made over into an apartment. There were chairs, beds, tables, and everything else in the line of furnishings for which the kids could conceivably have any use. There were even some floor lamps scattered around, but they weren't plugged in. Malone guessed that a job would have to be done on the warehouse wiring to get the floor lamps in operation, and the kids just hadn't got around to it yet.

By now the boys were practically standing toe-to-toe, ripping air-blueing epithets at each other. Not a single hand was lifted.

Malone stared at them for a second, then turned to Dorothea. "We'll wait till they calm down a little," he whispered. "Then you go out and talk to them. Tell them we won't hurt them or lock them up or anything. All we want to do is talk to them for awhile."

"All right," she whispered back.

"They can vanish any time they want to," Malone said, "so there's no reason for them not to listen to—"

He stopped suddenly, listening. Over the shouting, screaming, and cursing of the kids, he heard motion on the floor below.

Cops?

It couldn't be, he told himself. But when he took out his radiophone, his hands were shaking a little.

Lynch's voice was already coming over it when Malone thumbed it on.

"...so hang on, Malone! I repeat: We heard the ruckus, and we're coming in! We're on our way! Hang on, Malone!"

The voice stopped. There was a click.

Malone stared at the handset, fascinated and horrified. He swallowed. "No, Lynch!" he whispered, afraid to talk any louder for fear the kids would hear him. "No! Don't come up. Go away. Repeat: Go away! Stay away, Lynch!"

It was no use. The radiophone was dead.

Lynch, apparently thinking Malone's set had been smashed in the fight, or else that Malone was unconscious, had shut his own receiver off.

There was absolutely nothing that Malone could do.

The kids were still yelling at the top of their voices, but the thundering of heavy, flat feet galumphing up from the lower depths couldn't be ignored for long. All the boys noticed it at about the same time. They jerked their heads round to face the stairway. Malone and his compatriots crouched lower behind the boxes.

Mike Fueyo was the first to speak. "Don't vanish yet," he snapped. "Let's see who it is."

The internal dissent among the Silent Spooks disappeared as if it had never been, as they faced a common foe. Once again they fell naturally under Fueyo's leadership. "If it's cops," he said, "we'll give 'em the grasshopper play we worked out. We'll show 'em."

"They can't fool with us," another boy said. "Sure. The grasshopper play."

It was cops, all right. Lieutenant Lynch ran up the stairs waving his billy in a heroic fashion, followed by a horde of blue-clad officers.

"Where's Malone?" Lynch shouted as he came through the doorway.

"Where's your what?" Mike yelled back, and the fight was on.

Later, Malone thought that he should have been surprised, but he wasn't. There wasn't any time to be surprised. The kids didn't disappear.

They spread out over the floor of the room easily and lightly, and the cops charged them in a great blundering mass.

Naturally, the kids winked out one by one-and re-formed in the center of the cops' muddle. Malone saw one cop raise his billy and swing it at Mike. Mike watched it come down and vanished at the last instant. The cop's billy descended on the head of another cop, standing just behind where Mike had been.

The second cop, blinded by the blow on his head, swung back and hit the first cop. Meanwhile, Mike was somewhere else.

Malone stayed crouched behind the boxes. Dorothea stood up and shouted, "Mike! Mike! We just want to talk to you!"

Unfortunately, the police were making such a racket that this could not be heard more than a foot or so from the speaker. Lynch himself charged into the mass, swinging his billy and his free fist, and laying others out one after the other. Pretty soon the floor was littered with cops. Lynch was doing yeoman duty, but it was hard to tell what side he was on.

The vanishing trick Mike had worked out was being used by all of the kids. Cops were hitting other cops, Lynch was hitting everybody, and the kids were winking on and off all over the loft. It was a scene of tremendous noise and carnage.

Malone suddenly sprang to his feet and charged into the melee, shouting at the top of his lungs and swinging both fists. The first person he saw was one of the teen-agers, and he charged him with abandon.

He should, he reflected, have known better. The kid disappeared. Malone caromed off the stomach of a policeman, received a blow on the shoulder from his billy, and rebounded into the arms of a surprised police officer at the edge of the battle.

"Who're you?" the officer gasped.

"Malone," Malone said.

"You on our side?"

"How about you?" Malone said.

"I'm a lieutenant here," the officer said. "In charge of the warehouse precinct. I—"

Malone and the lieutenant stepped nimbly aside as another cop careened by them, waving his billy helplessly. They looked away as the crash came. The cop had fallen over a table, and now lay with his legs in the air, supported by the overturned table, blissfully unconscious.

"We seem," Malone said, "to be in an area of some activity. Let's move."

They shifted away a few feet. Malone looked into the foray and saw Boyd at work, roaring and going after the kids. One of them had established a kind of game with him. He appeared just in front of Boyd, who rushed at him, arms outstretched. As Boyd almost reached him, the kid disappeared, and reappeared again just behind Boyd. He tapped the FBI agent gently on the shoulder; Boyd turned and the process was repeated.

Boyd seemed to be getting winded.

"Damn kids," the lieutenant muttered suddenly, and dashed back into the fray. Malone looked around, saw Mike Fueyo flickering in and out at the edges, and headed for him.

A cop swung at Mike, missed, and hit Malone on the arm. Malone swore. The cop backed off, looking in a bewildered fashion for his victim, who was nowhere in sight. Then Malone caught sight of him, at the other edge of the fight. He started to work his way around.

He tried to avoid blows, but it wasn't always possible. A reeling cop caught his lapel and tore it, and Lynch, indefatigable in battle, managed to graze his chin with a blow meant for one of the disappearing boys. Other cops were battling each other, going after the kids and clutching empty air, cursing and screaming unheard orders in the fracas.

Malone ducked past Lynch, rubbed at his chin and looked for Mike. In the tangle of bodies it was getting hard to see. There was the sound of breaking ceramics as a floor lamp went over, and then a table followed it, but Malone avoided both. He looked for Mike Fueyo.

A cop clutched him around the middle, out of nowhere, said, "Sorry, buddy. Who the hell are you?" and dove back into the mass of bodies. Malone caught his breath and forged onward.

There was Mike, at the edge of the fight, watching everything coolly. No cop was near him. In the dim light the place looked like a scene from hell, a special hell for policemen.

Malone wove through battling hordes to the edge, and came out a few feet away from Mike Fueyo.

Fueyo didn't see him. He was looking at Boyd instead—still stumbling back and forth as the teen-ager baiting him winked on and off in front of him and behind him. He was laughing.

Malone came up silently from behind. The trip seemed to take hours. He was being very quiet, although he was reasonably sure that even if he yelled he wouldn't be heard. But he didn't want to take the slightest chance.

He sprang on Mike, and attached the handcuffs to his wrist and to Mike's wrist within ten seconds.

"Ha!" he said involuntarily. "Now come with me!"

He gave his end of the handcuffs a tremendous yank.

He started to stagger, trailing an empty cuff behind him, flailing his arms wildly. Ahead of him he could see a big cop with an upraised billy. Malone tried to alter his course, but it was too late. He skidded helplessly into the cop, who jerked round and swung the billy automatically. Malone said: "Ugh," as he caught the blow on the cheekbone, bounced off the cop and kept going.

He careened past a blur of figures, trying to avoid hard surfaces and other human beings. But there was—

Oh, no, Malone thought. Lynch.

Lynch was ready to swing. His fist was cocked, and he was heading for one of the teen-agers with murder in his eye. Malone knew their paths were going to intersect. "Watch out," he yelled. "Watch out, it's me! Stop me! Somebody stop me!" He went completely unheard.

Lynch swung and missed, hitting a cop who had been hiding behind the teen-ager. The cop went down to join the wounded, and Lynch roared like a bull and swung around, looking for more enemies.

That was when Malone hit him.

Long afterward, he remembered Lynch's hat sailing through the air, and landing in the center of a struggling mass of policemen. He remembered Lynch saying, "So there you are!" and swinging before he looked.

He remembered the blow on the chin.

And then he remembered falling, and falling, and falling. Somewhere there was a voice: "Where the hell are they? They've disappeared for good."

And then, for long seconds, nothing.

He woke up with a headache, but it wasn't too bad. Surprisingly, not much time had passed; he got up and dusted off his trousers, looking around at the battlefield. Wounded and groaning cops were lying all over. The room was a shambles; the walking wounded—which comprised the rest of the force—were stumbling around in a slow, hopeless sort of fashion.

Lynch was standing next to him. "Malone," he said, "I'm sorry. I hit you, didn't I?"

"Uh-huh," Malone said. "You seemed to be hitting every body."

"I was trying for the kids," Lynch said.

"So was I," Malone said. "I got the cuffs on one and yanked him along, but he disappeared and left me with the cuffs."

"Great," Lynch said. "Hell of a raid."

"Very jolly," Malone agreed. "Fun and games were had by all."

A cop stumbled up, handed Lynch his cap and disappeared without a word. Lynch stared mournfully at it. The emblem was crushed, and the cap looked rather worn and useless. He put it on his head, where it assumed the rakish tilt of a hobo's favorite tam-o'-shanter, and said, "I hope you're not thinking of blaming me for this fiasco."

"Not at all," Malone said nobly. He hurt all over, but on reflection he thought that he would probably live. "It was nobody's fault." Except, he thought, his own. If he'd only told Lynch to come in when called for—and under no other circumstances—this wouldn't have happened. He looked around at the remains of New York's Finest, and felt guilty.

The lieutenant from the local precinct limped up, rubbing a well-kicked shin and trying to disentangle pieces of floor lamp from his hair. "Listen, Lynch," he said, "What's with these kids? What's going on here? Look at my men."

"Some days," Lynch said, "it just doesn't pay to get up."

"Sure," the local man said. "But what do I do now?"

"Make your reports."

"But—"

"To the Commissioner," Lynch said, "and to nobody else. If this gets into the papers, heads will roll."

"My head is rolling right now," the local man said. "Know what one of those kids did? Stood in front of a floor lamp. I swung at him and he vanished. Vanished! I hit the lamp, and then the lamp hit me."

"Just see that this doesn't get out," Lynch said.

"It can't," the local man said. "Anybody who mentioned this to a reporter would just be laughed out of town. It's not possible." He paused thoughtfully, and added, "We'd all be laughed out of town."

"And probably replaced with the FBI," Lynch said morosely. He looked at Malone. "Nothing personal, you understand," he said.

"Of course," Malone said. "We can't do any more here, can we?"

"I don't think we can do any more anywhere," Lynch said. "Let's lock the place up and leave and forget all about it."

"Fine," Malone said. "I've got work to do." He looked around, found Dorothea and signaled to her. "Come on, Dorothea. Where's Boyd?"

"Here I am," Boyd said, walking slowly across the big room to Malone. He had one hand held to his chin.

"What's the matter with you?" Malone asked.

Boyd took his hand away. There was a bald spot the size of a quarter on the point of his chin. "One of those kids," he said sadly, "has a hell of a strong grip. Come on, Miss Fueyo. Come on, Malone. Let's get out of here."

CHAPTER 13

"Logically," Malone said, "there has to be some way to catch them." He looked around the hotel room as though he expected to find an answer painted in big black letters on the wall. "Logically," he said again, and tried to think of what came next. He liked the sound of the word, but that was as far as it went.

"That's fine," Boyd said. He sat on a chair, staring gloomily at the floor and rubbing the bald spot on his chin with a single, sad, inquisitive forefinger. "There has to be an answer. You're probably right. But what the hell is it?"

Malone started to answer, and then wondered what he had been going to say. He sunk himself in thought. There was a knock at the door. "Who's there?" he called, glad of any relief at all.

"It's me," a small voice said. "Dorothea."

"Come in," Malone said.

The door opened. Dorothea came in, shut the door behind her, and looked around the room a little awkwardly.

"Did you get a good night's sleep?" Malone said.

She nodded. "I guess so," she said. "Sure. It was nice of you to get me a room for the night. I mean, I guess I was-well..."

"Forget it," Malone said grandly. "You were upset and tired, that's all. Hell, in the car on the way back here last night, you fainted."

"I did not faint," she said.

"Well," Malone said, "you sure looked like—"

"I was tired," Dorothea said.

Malone shrugged. "Okay. You were tired."

"You're not mad, are you," she said, "because I stole your notebook?"

"Of course not," Malone said. "I said forget it, didn't I? Sit down and help us out."

"Help you?" she said. "That's right," Boyd said. "Help us figure out how to catch this bunch of maniacs before they steal everything in New York."

Dorothea said, "Maniacs? I—" and Malone interrupted her in a hurry.

"Police Commissioner Fernack has called twice this morning already," he said. "He's screaming about all the burglaries that have been occurring since midnight last night."

"Oh," Dorothea said. "You mean the Spooks? Mike and the others? They've been stealing again?"

"They sure have, Miss Fueyo," Boyd said.

"I guess they're furnishing their new hideout," Malone said. "Wherever it is. Only God knows."

"And even if He told us," Boyd said, "it wouldn't do us any good. Chase 'em out of there, and they'd go somewhere else."

Malone stood up, fished for his cigarettes and lit one. "What we need," he said, blowing out smoke, "is some way to trap 'em and hold 'em. And I don't see how we can do either."

"After last night," Dorothea said, "I really don't see—"

"Wait a minute," Boyd said. "You said trap, didn't you?" He looked slowly and speculatively at Dorothea Fueyo.

A second passed.

"Oh, no, you don't!" she said. "Oh, no. Not on your life. I'll help catch him if I can, because I know you don't mean to hurt him or the others. But I wouldn't want Mike to know about it. You're not using me as bait in any trap."

Boyd looked at Malone, shook his head slowly, and said disconsolately, "Well, it was an idea." He returned his gaze to the floor.

The furtive gleam of the half bottle of bourbon on Malone's dresser caught his eye. He'd had it sent up the night before, feeling the need of some medicinal refreshment. Now it winked at him. He ignored it

resolutely. "Dorothea," he said.

"Yes?"

"Dorothea, do you have any idea how far one of those kids can go when he teleports?"

"No," Dorothea said. "I really haven't any idea about any of it. Mike tried to teach me once, but I guess I just don't have the talent."

"Oh," Malone said.

"I wish I could help," Dorothea said.

Silence fell, and gloom followed it.

Time ticked by. The bourbon bottle resumed its seductive winking.

"There is one thing," Dorothea said suddenly. "He did say one thing about it."

"What?" Malone said eagerly.

"He said you couldn't teleport to some place you haven't been before. You've got to be able to visualize where you're going."

Malone said, "Hmm." It seemed like the right answer. Dorothea's statement was a fact, certainly, but he didn't see how the fact fit in anywhere.

"He didn't mention anything about distance, and I don't think any of the Spooks ever tested it for that," Dorothea said.

"There probably is a distance limit," Malone said. "At least if Dr. O'Connor's theories are right. I just wish I knew what the limit was."

Silence fell again. Malone sighed. Dorothea sighed. Boyd sighed, looked around at the others and muttered, "Damn thing's catching." He got up and walked over to the dresser and picked up the bottle of bourbon.

"You, too?" Malone murmured, but Boyd didn't hear him.

"I don't care if it is early in the morning," he said, resolutely. "I need a drink. I need something to take the fog out of my head, anyhow." He poured himself a shot, held the bottle aloft, and said, "Dorothea? Malone?"

The girl shook her head.

Malone was tempted but he put Satan behind him with decision. "No," he said firmly. "The way I feel now, one drink would probably immobilize me."

Dorothea chuckled. "You sound just like Mike," she said.

"Mike doesn't drink in the morning either?" Malone said.

"Of course he doesn't," Boyd said. "Mike is a nice kid. A swell kid."

"You keep quiet," Dorothea shot at him. She turned back to Malone. "Mike never drinks at all," she said. "He says it immobilizes him—just what you said."

Somewhere in the black galactic depths of Malone's mind, a very small hot star gulped, took a deep breath and became a supernova.

The light was tremendous! It shed beams over everything, beams of a positively supernal brilliance. And in the all-pervasive brightness of that single inner light, bits of data began to fall into place with all the precision of aerial bombs, each falling neatly and exactly into its own little predetermined bomb crater.

It was beautiful. It was magnificent. Malone felt all choked up.

None of the Silent Spooks drank. He remembered Kettleman telling him that. And the Queen never touched the stuff either.

"What's wrong?" Boyd said.

"Malone, you look green."

"I feel green," Malone said. "I feel like newly sprung grass. I feel as if I had just hatched out of something. I feel wonderful."

"It's the strain," Boyd said. "That's what it is, strain. You've cracked at last."

Malone ignored him. "Tell me," he said to Dorothea with elaborate casualness, "when your brother says that, what does he mean?"

"What?" she said. "Oh, I don't know. I—" She stopped and her eyes widened. "You don't think that—"

"I don't know," Malone said. "But we can sure as hell find out."

Dorothea blinked. "What can you do?" she said. "I mean, to find out. You can't force them to drink or anything, can you?"

"No," Malone said. "I can't do that. But it does give me an idea."

Boyd held his untasted drink in his hand, staring at Malone and the girl. "What are you two talking about?" he said. "Or is this the special Captain Midnight code? I left my code ring home this week."

"Boyd," Malone snapped, "get on the phone."

"Are you sure it will hold me?" Boyd said.

"I want you to call Dr. O'Connor at Yucca Flats," Malone said. "Shut up and listen."

There was silence.

Finally Boyd said, "I don't hear anything."

"Never mind," Malone said. "I mean listen to me. I know it's pretty early out where O'Connor is, but that doesn't matter now. Wake him up. Wake everybody up, for all I care."

"Malone," Boyd said carefully, "are you sure you haven't gone nuts?"

Malone grinned cheerfully. "No," he said. "Are you? Now listen: find out what effect drugs have on psionic abilities."

"Drugs?" Boyd said, and then his eyes lit up. "My God!" he said. "We might have something, at that!"

"Get the Queen up too," Malone said. "Ask her the same question. I hope we do have something."

"So do I," Dorothea said.

"And if we get the information we're hoping to get, I want Her Majesty on the first plane to New York," Malone said. "I don't care what strings you have to pull to get that done. Call Burris if you have to. It'll be worth it." Malone paused. "Hell," he said, "call him anyway and tell him what's happened. But get the Queen here!"

"Right!" Boyd said. He dove for the phone and started dialing. Suddenly he looked around. "Hey!" he yelled. "Where are you going?"

Malone, one hand on the door, turned. "Down to see Fernack," he said. "I've got to make some arrangements. I'm betting we're right, Tom!" He charged out the door, slamming it. A second passed and it opened again. Malone's head popped back in. "Dorothea," he said. "When Tom gets off the phone call your mother. Tell her you're going to be away for a day or two-two at the most-and she's not to worry. We'll need you, and her, too, to talk to Mike when the time comes. So stick around."

Then he was gone.

* * * *

Twelve hours later, Kenneth J. Malone was sitting quietly in a small room at the rear of a sporting-goods store on upper Madison Avenue, trying to remain calm and hoping that the finest, most beautiful hunch he had ever had in his life was going to pay off. With him were Boyd and two agents from the 69th Street office. They were sitting quietly too, but there was a sense of enormous excitement in the air. Malone wanted to get up and walk around, but he didn't dare. He clamped his hands in his lap and sat tight.

They waited in silence, not daring to talk. There was no sound except for the faint whoosh of their breathing through the gas masks they were wearing, and the muffled hiss from a tank nearby.

There was no reason why the plan shouldn't work. Malone told himself.

It looked foolproof. But he didn't believe it would work. This was the time, he assured himself, that his luck ran out. He'd been lucky for too long, and now the wheel was going to turn and he'd be lost. All he could do was wait for it, and hope.

Her Majesty had said definitely that this would be the place the Spooks would hit tonight. She had no doubts about it. And Malone couldn't think of a single reason why she might be wrong. But maybe he'd got the address mixed up. Maybe the Spooks were somewhere else right now, robbing what they pleased, safe from capture....

His hunch about drugs had been correct, or at least everybody had said it was correct. Dr. O'Connor had assured Boyd that the deleterious effects of drugs on psionic abilities had been known ever since the early days of Dr. Rhine's pioneering work, more than twenty years before. And Good Queen Bess had admitted the same thing. She never drank, she said, because on the one occasion when she'd tried it, she'd lost her telepathic ability, and "My goodness, it was just like going blind."

Burris had had to put on the pressure, but it had worked. The Queen had been flown to New York, under psychiatric guard just as soon as possible after Boyd's phone call, and she'd been able to pick up Mike Fueyo without any trouble at all as soon as she was within the same city, and close enough to him.

It doesn't do much good to know where a teleporter is, Malone thought. But it's extremely handy to know where he's going to be. And if you also know what he plans to do when he gets where he's going, you've got an absolute lead-pipe cinch to work with.

The Queen had provided that lead-pipe cinch. Reading Mike's mind, she'd told Malone that he planned to raid the sporting-goods store with the rest of the Spooks that night. Lucky again, Malone thought; he might have had to wait two or three days before the Spooks set up a robbery.

But, of course, he might just be riding for some kind of horrible, unforeseen fall.

The main part of the sporting-goods store was fairly well lit, even at night, though it was by no means brightly illuminated. There were show-window lights on, and the street lamp from outside cast a nice glow. But the back room was dark, and the four men there were well concealed. A curtain closed the room off, and Malone watched the front of the store through a narrow opening in it. He stared through it until his eyes ached, afraid to blink in case he missed the appearance of the Spooks. Everything had to go off just right, precisely on schedule.

And it was going to happen any minute, he told himself nervously. In just a few minutes, everything would be over.

Malone held his breath.

Then he saw the figure walk slowly by the glass front of the shop, looking in with elaborate casualness. He was casing the joint, making sure there were none left in it.

Mike Fueyo.

Malone tried to breathe, and couldn't.

Seconds ticked by.

And then-almost magically-they appeared. Eight of them, almost simultaneously, in the center of the room.

Mike Fueyo spoke in a low, controlled voice. "Okay, now," he said. "Let's move fast. We—"

And that was all he said.

The odorless anesthetic gas that filled the room had its sudden effect. Fueyo dropped out like a light.

The other seven followed him within seconds. Ramon Otravez, the tallest of them, stayed on his feet a little longer than the rest, obviously trying with all his strength to teleport himself out of danger, but the effects of the fast-working gas had already been felt. He was, literally, too stunned to move.

He too slumped to the floor.

For a second after that, none of the men in the rear room moved.

Then Malone said, "All right, boys. Let's get them out of here. They can't stay too long in this atmosphere." The men started forward into the front room, toward the still bodies. "Boyd," Malone said. "Get out front and wave the ambulance over here. I'll get the air-conditioners working and stop the gas."

He reached down and turned off the valve on the gently hissing tank of anesthetic gas that sat on the floor near him. "You guys get the kids," he said. "And let's make it fast, okay?"

CHAPTER 14

"The one thing we had to worry about," Malone said, pouring some more champagne into the two hollow-stemmed glasses, "was whether it was possible to give them just enough synthecaine. Too little, and they'd still be able to teleport. Too much, and they'd be too groggy."

Dorothea relaxed in her chair and looked around at the hotel room walls with contentment. She looked like the proverbial cat who has swallowed the cream. "It looked to me as if it worked," she said. "Mike seemed pretty normal-except that he had that awful trapped feeling."

Malone handed her one of the filled glasses with an air. He was beginning slowly to feel less like the nervous, uncertain Kenneth J. Malone, and more and more like Sir Kenneth Malone. "I can see why he felt trapped," he said. "If a guy's been unhampered by four walls all the time, even only for a year or so, he's certainly going to feel penned in when he loses the ability to get through them. It might be just a little claustrophobic." He grinned, proud of himself. "Claustrophobic," he said again. "My tongue and palate are in excellent condition."

"The main thing is," Dorothea said, "that everybody's so happy. Commissioner Fernack, even-with Mr. Burris promising to give him a medal."

"And Lynch," Malone said reflectively. "He'll get a promotion out of this for sure. And good old Kettleman."

"Kettleman?" Dorothea said. "Oh, the funny fat man. He's some kind of social worker or something."

"And now he's getting a scroll from the FBI," Malone said. "A citation for coming up with the essential clue in this case. Even though he didn't know it was the essential clue. You know," he added reflectively, "one thing puzzles me about that man."

"Yes?"

"Well," Malone said, "he worked in your neighborhood. You knew him."

"Of course I did," Dorothea said. "We all knew Kettleman."

"He said he had a lot of success as a social worker," Malone said. "Now, I've met him. And talked with him. And I just can't picture—"

"Oh," Dorothea said. "We keep him around-kept him around, I mean-as a sort of joke. A pet, or a mascot. Of course, he never did catch on. I don't suppose he has yet."

Malone laughed. "Nope," he said. "He hasn't."

"And even your friend is happy," Dorothea said.

"Boyd?" Malone said. "Sure. He called his blonde and she was just thrilled at the adventures of an FBI agent, and he's with her now."

"You sound jealous," Dorothea said.

"The hell I am," Malone said, and proceeded to prove his point. Some minutes later they relaxed.

"Mike," Dorothea said. "What?"

"Mike," she said. "He's probably the happiest of all. After Mom and I talked to him for a while, anyhow, and he began to lose that-that trapped feeling. Now he's all excited about being an FBI man." She looked worriedly at Malone for a second. "You weren't kidding about that, were you?" she said.

She looked very pretty when she was worried. Malone leaned over and kissed her with great care. After a second, the kiss seemed to gain momentum on its own, and all restraint went by the wayside. A long time passed.

Then, as Malone pulled away and began to recover his breath, he said weakly, "You were saying?"

"Was I?" Dorothea said. "Oh, yes. I was. About Mike being an FBI man."

"Oh," Malone said. "Well, normally you've got to be a lawyer or an accountant, but there are a few special cases. And maybe Mike would fit into the special-case bracket. If he doesn't-well, he'll be doing some sort of official work for the Government. You can be sure of that."

"That woman in the costume-the one you call Your Majesty-certainly threw a scare into the boys," Dorothea said.

"Well," Malone said, "we had to prove one thing to them. We can pick them up at any time. You see, they've got to think about where they're teleporting, and as soon as they do that one of our telepaths-like the Queen-will know where they're going to be. And we can crack down."

"That's what she said," Dorothea said.

"Right," Malone said. "After all, we did them quite a favor-getting them out of all the trouble they'd gotten themselves into. If they try to—"

"That reminds me, Ken," Dorothea said. "All the things that were stolen. The liquor and all of that, Money. What's going to happen to that?"

"Well," Malone said, "everything that can be returned-and that includes most of the liquor, because they

hadn't had a chance to get rid of it to the bootleggers around this area-will be returned. What can't be returned-money, stuff that they've used, broken, or sold-well, I don't exactly know about that. It might take a special act of Congress," he said brightly.

"All for the boys?" Dorothea said.

"Well, they'll be at Yucca Flats, and they'll be pretty useful," Malone said. "And, as I was saying, if they try to run away from Yucca Flats, we'll just have to keep them drugged all the time, little as we want to. They can be of some use that way, too. The Government isn't doing all this for nothing."

"But keeping them drugged—"

"I said we didn't want to do it. And I don't think we'll have to. They'll be well taken care of, don't worry. Some of the best psychiatrists and doctors are out there. And Mike and the others-if they can show they're trustworthy-can come home every weekend, or even every night if they can teleport that far." Malone paused. "But it isn't charity," he added. "We need people with specialized psionic abilities-and, for a variety of reasons, they're pretty hard to find."

"You know," Dorothea said, "you're pretty wonderful, Mr. Malone."

Malone didn't answer her. He just kissed her again, not caring particularly whether or not the kiss went wild.

Dorothea pushed him gently away. "I'm envious," she announced. "Everybody gets a reward but me. Do I get left out just because I swiped your notebook?"

Malone kissed her again. "What kind of a reward do you want?" he asked.

She sighed. "Oh, well," she said. "I suppose this is good enough."

"Good enough?" Malone said. "Just good enough?"

His lips met hers for the fifth time. She reached one hand gently out to the light switch and pushed it.

The lights went out.

BOOK 3: SUPERMIND

CHAPTER 1

In 1914, it was enemy aliens.

In 1930, it was Wobblies.

In 1957, it was fellow travelers.

In 1971, it was insane telepaths.

And, in 1973:

"We don't know what the hell it is," said Andrew J. Burris, Director of the FBI. He threw his hands in the air and looked baffled and confused.

Kenneth J. Malone tried to appear sympathetic. "What what is?" he asked.

Burris frowned and drummed his fingers on his big desk. "Malone," he said, "make sense. And don't stutter."

"Stutter?" Malone said. "You said you didn't know what it was. What the hell it was. And I wanted to know what it was."

"That's just it," Burris said. "I don't know."

Malone sighed and repressed an impulse to scream. "Now wait a minute, Chief—" he started.

Burris frowned again. "Don't call me Chief," he said.

Malone nodded. "Okay," he said. "But if you don't know what it is, you must have some idea of what you don't know. I mean, is it larger than a breadbox? Does it perform helpful tasks? Is it self-employed?"

"Malone," Burris sighed, "you ought to be on television."

"But—"

"Let me explain," Burris said. His voice was calmer now, and he spoke as if he were enunciating nothing but the most obvious and eternal truths. "The country," he said, "is going to hell in a handbasket."

Malone nodded again. "Well, after all, Chief—"

"Don't call me Chief," Burris said wearily.

"Anything you say," Malone agreed peacefully. He eyed the Director of the FBI warily. "After all, it isn't anything new," he went on. "The country's always been going to hell in a handbasket, one way or another. Look at Rome."

"Rome?" Burris said.

"Sure," Malone said. "Rome was always going to hell in a handbasket, and finally it—" He paused. "Finally it did, I guess," he said.

"Exactly," Burris said. "And so are we. Finally." He passed a hand over his forehead and stared past Malone at a spot on the wall. Malone turned and looked at the spot, but saw nothing of interest.

"Malone," Burris said, and the FBI agent whirled around again.

"Yes, Ch-Yes?" he said.

"This time," Burris said, "it isn't the same old story at all. This time it's different."

"Different?" Malone said.

Burriss nodded. "Look at it this way," he said. His eyes returned to the agent. "Suppose you're a congressman," he went on, "and you find evidence of inefficiency in the government."

"All right," Malone said agreeably. He had the feeling that if he waited around a little while everything would make sense, and he was willing to wait. After all, he wasn't on assignment at the moment, and there was nothing pressing waiting for him. He was even between romances.

If he waited long enough, he told himself, Andrew J. Burriss might say something worth hearing. He looked attentive and eager. He considered leaning over the desk a little, to look even more eager, but decided against it; Burriss might think he looked threatening. There was no telling.

"You're a congressman," Burriss said, "and the government is inefficient. You find evidence of it. What do you do?"

Malone blinked and thought for a second. It didn't take any longer than that to come up with the old, old answer. "I start an investigation," he said. "I get a committee and I talk to a lot of newspaper editors and magazine editors and maybe I go on television and talk some more, and my committee has a lot of meetings—"

"Exactly," Burriss said.

"And we talk a lot at the meetings," Malone went on, carried away, "and get a lot of publicity, and we subpoena famous people, just as famous as we can get, except governors or presidents, because you can't—they tried that back in the Fifties, and it didn't work very well—and that gives us some more publicity, and then when we have all the publicity we can possibly get—"

"You stop," Burriss said hurriedly.

"That's right," Malone said. "We stop. And that's what I'd do."

"Of course, the problem of inefficiency is left exactly where it always was," Burriss said. "Nothing's been done about it."

"Naturally," Malone said. "But think of all the lovely publicity. And all the nice talk. And the subpoenas and committees and everything."

"Sure," Burriss said wearily. "It's happened a thousand times. But, Malone, that's the difference. It isn't happening this time."

There was a short pause. "What do you mean?" Malone said at last.

"This time," Burriss said, in a tone that sounded almost awed, "they want to keep it a secret."

"A secret?" Malone said, blinking. "But that's—that's not the American way."

Burriss shrugged. "It's un-congressman-like, anyhow," he said. "But that's what they've done. Tiptoed over to me and whispered softly that the thing has to be investigated quietly. Naturally, they didn't give me any orders—but only because they know they can't make one stick. They suggested it pretty strongly."

"Any reasons?" Malone said. The whole idea interested him strangely. It was odd—and he found himself almost liking odd cases, lately. That is, he amended hurriedly, if they didn't get too odd.

"Oh, they had reasons, all right," Burriss said. "It took a little coaxing, but I managed to pry some loose. You see, every one of them found inefficiency in his own department. And every one knows that other men are investigating inefficiency."

"Oh," Malone said.

"That's right," Burriss said. "Every one of them came to me to get me to prove that the goof-ups in his particular department weren't his fault. That covers them in case one of the others happens to light into the department."

"Well, it must be somebody's fault," Malone said.

"It isn't theirs," Burriss said wearily, "I ought to know. They told me. At great length, Malone."

Malone felt a stab of honest pity. "How many so far?" he asked.

"Six," Burriss said. "Four representatives, and two senators."

"Only two?" Malone said.

"Well," Burriss said, "the Senate is so much smaller. And, besides, we may get more. As a matter of fact, Senator Lefferts is worth any six representatives all by himself."

"He is?" Malone said, puzzled. Senator Lefferts was not one of his favorite people. Nor, as far as he knew, did the somewhat excitable senator hold any place of honor in the heart of Andrew J. Burriss.

"I mean his story," Burriss said. "I've never heard anything like it—at least, not since the Bilbo days. And I've only heard about those," he added hurriedly.

"What story?" Malone said. "He talked about inefficiency—"

"Not exactly," Burriss said carefully. "He said that somebody was out to get him—him, personally. He said somebody was trying to discredit him by sabotaging all his legislative plans."

"Well," Malone said, feeling that some comment was called for, "three cheers."

"That isn't the point," Burriss snapped. "No matter how we feel about Senator Lefferts or his legislative plans, we're sworn to protect him. And he says 'they' are out to get him."

"They?" Malone said.

"You know," Burriss said, shrugging. "The great 'they.' The invisible enemies all around, working against him."

"Oh," Malone said. "Paranoid?" He had always thought Senator Lefferts was slightly on the batty side, and the idea of real paranoia didn't come as too much of a surprise. After all, when a man was batty to start out with ... and he even looked like a vampire, Malone thought confusedly.

"As far as paranoia is concerned," Burriss said, "I checked with one of our own psych men, and he'll back it up. Lefferts has definite paranoid tendencies, he says."

"Well, then," Malone said, "that's that."

Burriss shook his head. "It isn't that simple," he said. "You see, Malone, there's some evidence that somebody is working against him."

"The American public, with any luck at all," Malone said.

"No," Burriss said. "An enemy. Somebody sabotaging his plans. Really."

Malone shook his head. "You're crazy," he said.

Burriss looked shocked. "Malone, I'm the Director of the FBI," he said. "And if you insist on being disrespectful—"

"Sorry," Malone murmured. "But—"

"I am perfectly sane," Burriss said slowly. "It's Senator Lefferts who's crazy. The only trouble is, he has evidence to show he's not."

Malone thought about odd cases, and suddenly wished he were somewhere else. Anywhere else. This one showed sudden signs of developing into something positively bizarre. "I see," he said, wondering if he did.

"After all," Burriss said, in a voice that attempted to sound reasonable, "a paranoid has just as much right to be persecuted as anybody else, doesn't he?"

"Sure," Malone said. "Everybody has rights. But what do you want me to do about that?"

"About their rights?" Burriss said. "Nothing, Malone. Nothing."

"I mean," Malone said patiently, "about whatever it is that's going on."

Burriss took a deep breath. His hands clasped behind his head, and he looked up at the ceiling. He seemed perfectly relaxed. That, Malone knew, was a bad sign. It meant that there was a dirty job coming, a job nobody wanted to do, and one Burriss was determined to pass off on him. He sighed and tried to get resigned.

"Well," the FBI director said, "the only actual trouble we can pinpoint is that there seem to be a great many errors occurring in the paperwork. More than usual."

"People get tired," Malone said tentatively.

"But computer-secretary calculating machines don't," Burriss said. "And that's where the errors are, in the computer-secretaries down in the Senate Office Building. I think you'd better start out there."

"Sure," Malone said sadly.

"See if there's any mechanical or electrical defect in any of those computers," Burriss said. "Talk to the computer technicians. Find out what's causing all these errors."

"Yes, sir," Malone said. He was still trying to feel resigned, but he wasn't succeeding very well.

"And if you don't find anything—" Burris began.

"I'll come right back," Malone said instantly.

"No," Burris said. "You keep on looking."

"I do?"

"You do," Burris said. "After all, there has to be something wrong."

"Sure," Malone said, "if you say so. But—"

"There are the interview tapes," Burris said, "and the reports the Congressmen brought in. You can go through those."

Malone sighed. "I guess so," he said.

"And there must be thousands of other things to do," Burris said.

"Well—" Malone began cautiously.

"You'll be able to think of them," Burris said heartily. "I know you will. I have confidence in you, Malone. Confidence."

"Thanks," Malone said sadly.

"You just keep me posted from time to time on what you're doing, and what ideas you get," Burris said. "I'm leaving the whole thing in your hands, Malone, and I'm sure you won't disappoint me."

"I'll try," Malone said.

"I know you will," Burris said warmly. "And no matter how long it takes, I know you'll succeed."

"No matter how long it takes?" Malone said hesitantly.

"That's right!" Burris said. "You can do it, Malone! You can do it."

Malone nodded slowly. "I hope so," he said. "Well, I-Well, I'll start out right away, then."

He turned. Before he could make another move Burris said, "Wait!"

Malone turned again, hope in his eyes. "Yes, sir?" he said.

"When you leave—" Burris began, and the hope disappeared. "When you leave," he went on, "please do one little favor for me. Just one little favor, because I'm an old, tired man and I'm not used to things any more."

"Sure," Malone said. "Anything, Chief."

"Don't call me—"

"Sorry," Malone said.

Burriss breathed heavily. "When you leave," he said, "please, please use the door."

"But—"

"Malone," Burriss said, "I've tried. I've really tried. Believe me. I've tried to get used to the fact that you can teleport. But—"

"It's useful," Malone said, "in my work."

"I can see that," Burriss said. "And I don't want you to, well, to stop doing it. By no means. It's just that it sort of unnerves me, if you see what I mean. No matter how useful it is for the FBI to have an agent who can go instantaneously from one place to another, it unnerves me." He sighed. "I can't get used to seeing you disappear like an overdried soap bubble, Malone. It does something to me, here." He placed a hand directly over his sternum and sighed again.

"I can understand that," Malone said. "It unnerved me, too, the first time I saw it. I thought I was going crazy, when that kid-Mike Fueyo-winked out like a light. But then we got him, and some FBI agents besides me have learned the trick." He stopped there, wondering if he'd been tactful. After all, it took a latent ability to learn teleportation, and some people had it, while others didn't. Malone, along with a few other agents, did. Burriss evidently didn't, so he couldn't teleport, no matter how hard he tried or how many lessons he took.

"Well," Burriss said, "I'm still unnerved. So please, Malone, when you come in here, or go out, use the door. All right?"

"Yes, sir," Malone said. He turned and went out. As he opened the door, he could almost hear Burriss' sigh of relief. Then he banged it shut behind him and, feeling that he might as well continue with his spacebound existence, walked all the way to the elevator, and rode it downstairs to the FBI laboratories.

The labs, highly efficient and divided into dozens of departments, covered several floors. Malone passed through the Fingerprint section, filled with technicians doing strange things to great charts and slides, and frowning over tiny pieces of material and photographs. Then came Forgery Detection, involving many more technicians, many more slides and charts and tiny pieces of things and photographs, and even a witness or two sitting on the white bench at one side and looking lost and somehow civilian. Identification Classified was next, a great barn of a room filled with index files. The real indexes were in the sub-basement; here, on microfilm, were only the basic divisions. A man was standing in front of one of the files, frowning at it. Malone went on by without stopping.

Cosmetic Surgery Classification came next. Here there were more indexes, and there were also charts and slides. There was an agent sitting on a bench looking bored while two female technicians-classified as O&U for Old and Ugly in Malone's mind-fluttered around him, deciding what disguises were possible, and which of those was indicated for the particular job on hand. Malone waved to the agent, whom he knew very slightly, and went on. He felt vaguely regretful that the FBI couldn't hire prettier girls for Cosmetic Surgery, but the trouble was that pretty girls fell for the Agents, and vice versa, and this led to an unfortunate tendency toward only handsome and virile-looking disguises. The O&U division was unfortunate, he decided, but a necessity.

Chemical Analysis (III) was next. The Chemical Analysis Section was scattered over several floors, with the first stages up above. Division III, Malone remembered, was devoted to nonpoisonous substances, like clay or sand found in boots or trouser cuffs, cigars ashes and such. They were placed on the same floor as Fingerprints to allow free and frequent passage between the sections on the problems of plastic prints, made in putty or like substances, and visible prints, made when the hand is covered with a visible substance like blood, ketchup or glue.

Malone found what he was looking for at the very end of the floor. It was the Computer Section, a large room filled with humming, clacking and buzzing machines of an ancient vintage, muttering to themselves as they worked, and newer machines which were smaller and more silent. Lights were lighting and bells were ringing softly, relays were relaying and the whole room was a gigantic maze of calculating and control machines. What space wasn't filled by the machines themselves was filled by workbenches, all littered with an assortment of gears, tubes, spare relays, transistors, wires, rods, bolts, resistors and all the other paraphernalia used in building the machines and repairing them. Beyond the basic room were other, smaller rooms, each assigned to a particular kind of computer work.

The narrow aisles were choked here and there with men who looked up as Malone passed by, but most of them gave him one quick glance and went back to work. A few didn't even do that, but went right on concentrating on their jobs. Malone headed for a man working all alone in front of a workbench, frowning down at a complicated-looking mechanism that seemed to have neither head nor tail, and prodding at it with a long, thin screwdriver. The man was thin, too, but not very long; he was a little under average height, and he had straight black hair, thick-lensed glasses and a studious expression, even when he was frowning. He looked as if the mechanism were a student who had cut too many classes, and he was being kind but firm with it.

Malone managed to get to the man's side, and coughed discreetly. There was no response.

"Fred?" he said.

The screwdriver waggled a little. Malone wasn't quite sure that the man was breathing.

"Fred Mitchell," he said.

Mitchell didn't look up. Another second passed.

"Hey," Malone said. Then he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Fred," he said in a loud, reasonable-sounding voice, "the State Department's translator has started to talk pig-Latin."

Mitchell straightened up as if somebody had jabbed him with a pin. The screwdriver waved wildly in the air for a second, and then pointed at Malone. "That's impossible," Mitchell said in a flat, precise voice. "Simply impossible. It doesn't have a pig-Latin circuit. It can't possibly—" He blinked and seemed to see Malone for the first time. "Oh," he said. "Hello, Malone. What can I do for you?"

Malone smiled, feeling a little victorious at having got through the Mitchell armor, which was almost impregnable when there was a job in hand. "I've been standing here talking to you for some time."

"Oh, have you?" Mitchell said. "I was busy." That, obviously, explained that. Malone shrugged.

"I want you to help me check over some calculators, Fred," he said. "We've had some reports that some of the government machines are out of kilter, and I'd like you to go over them for me."

"Out of kilter?" Fred Mitchell said. "No, you can forget about it. It's absolutely unnecessary to make a check, believe me. Absolutely. Forget it." He smiled suddenly. "I suppose it's some kind of a joke, isn't it?" he said, just a trifle uncertainly. Fred Mitchell's world, while pleasant, did not include much humor, Malone knew. "It's supposed to be funny," he said in the same flat, precise voice.

"It isn't funny," Malone said.

Fred sighed. "Then they're obviously lying," he said, "and that's all there is to it. Why bother me with it?"

"Lying, Fred?" Malone said.

"Certainly," Fred said. He looked at the machinery with longing.

Malone took a breath. "How do you know?" he said.

Fred sighed. "It's perfectly obvious," he said in a patient tone. "Since the State Department translator has no pig-Latin circuit, it can't possibly be talking pig-Latin. I will admit that such a circuit would be relatively easy to build, though it would have no utility as far as I can see. Except, of course, for a joke." He paused. "Joke?" he said, in a slightly uneasy tone.

"Sure," Malone said. "Joke."

Mitchell looked relieved. "Very well, then," he began. "Since—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "The pig-Latin is a joke. That's right. But I'm not talking about the pig-Latin."

"You're not?" Mitchell asked, surprised.

"No," Malone said.

Mitchell frowned. "But you said—" he began.

"A joke," Malone said. "You were perfectly right. The pig-Latin is a joke." He waited for Fred's expression to clear, and then added: "But what I want to talk to you about isn't."

"It sounds very confused," Fred said after a pause. "Not at all the sort of thing that-that usually goes on."

"You have no idea," Malone said. "It's about the political machines, all right, but it isn't anything as simple as pig-Latin." He explained, taking his time over it.

When he had finished, Fred was nodding his head slowly. "I see," he said. "I understand just what you want me to do."

"Good," Malone said.

"I'll take a team over to the Senate Office Building," Fred said, "and check the computer-secretaries there. That way, you see, I'll be able to do a full running check on them without taking any one machine out of operation for too long."

"Sure," Malone said.

"And it shouldn't take long," Fred went on, "to find out just what the trouble is." He looked very confident.

"How long?" Malone asked.

Fred shrugged. "Oh," he said, "five or six days."

Malone repressed an impulse to scream. "Days?" he said. "I mean-well, look, Fred, it's important. Very important Can't you do the job any faster?"

Fred gave a little sigh. "Checking and repairing all those machines," he said, "is an extremely complex job. Sometimes, Malone, I don't think you realize quite how complex and how delicate a job it is to deal with such a high-order machine. Why—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "Check and repair them?"

"Of course," Fred said.

"But I don't want them repaired," Malone said. Seeing the look of horror on Fred's face, he added hastily, "I only want a report from you on what's wrong, whether they are actually making errors or not. And if they are making errors, just what's making them do it. And just what kind of errors. See?"

Fred nodded very slowly. "But I can't just leave them there," he said piteously. "In pieces and everything. It isn't right, Malone. It just isn't right."

"Well, then," Malone said with energy, "you go right ahead and repair them, if you want to. Fix 'em all up. But you can do that after you make the report to me, can't you?"

"I—" Fred hesitated. "I had planned to check and repair each machine on an individual basis."

"The Congress can allow for a short suspension," Malone said. "Anyhow, they can now, or as soon as I get the word to them. Suppose you check all the machines first, and then get around to the repair work."

"It's not the best way," Fred demurred.

Malone discovered that it was his turn to sigh. "Is it the fastest?" he said.

Fred nodded.

"Then it's the best," Malone said. "How long?"

Fred rolled his eyes to the ceiling and calculated silently for a second. "Tomorrow morning," he announced, returning his gaze to Malone.

"Fine," Malone said. "Fine."

"But—"

"Never mind the buts," Malone said hurriedly. "I'll count on hearing from you tomorrow morning."

"All right."

"And if it looks like sabotage," Malone added, "if the errors aren't caused by normal wear and tear on the machines, you let me know right away. Phone me. Don't waste an instant."

"I'll-I'll start right away," Fred said heavily. He looked sadly at the mechanism he had been working on, and put his screwdriver down next to it. It looked to Malone as if he were putting flowers on the grave of a dear departed. "I'll get a team together," Fred added. He gave the mechanism and screwdriver one last fond parting look, and tore himself away.

Malone looked after him for a second, thinking of nothing in particular, and then turned in the opposite direction and headed back toward the elevator. As he walked, he began to feel more and more pleased with himself. After all, he'd gotten the investigation started, hadn't he?

And now all he had to do was go back to his office and read some reports and listen to some interview tapes, and then he could go home.

The reports and the interview tapes didn't exactly sound like fun, Malone thought, but at the same time they seemed fairly innocent. He would work his way through them grimly, and maybe he would even indulge his most secret vice and smoke a cigar or two to make the work pass more pleasantly. Soon enough, he told himself, they would be finished.

Sometimes, though, he regretted the reputation he'd gotten. It had been bad enough in the old days, the pre-1971 days when Malone had thought he was just lucky. Burris had called him a Boy Wonder then, when he'd cracked three difficult cases in a row. Being just lucky had made it a little tough to live with the Boy Wonder label. After all, Malone thought, it wasn't actually as if he'd done anything.

But since 1971 and the case of the Telepathic Spy, things had gotten worse. Much worse. Now Malone wasn't just lucky any more. Instead, he could teleport and he could even foretell the future a little, in a dim sort of way. He'd caught the Telepathic Spy that way, and when the case of the Teleporting Juvenile Delinquents had come up he'd been assigned to that one too, and he'd cracked it. Now Burris seemed to think of him as a kind of God, and gave him all the tough dirty jobs.

And if he wasn't just lucky any more, Malone couldn't think of himself as a fearless, heroic FBI agent, either. He just wasn't the type. He was ... well, talented. That was the word, he told himself: talented. He had all these talents and they made him look like something spectacular to Burris and the other FBI men. But he wasn't, really. He hadn't done anything really tough to get his talents; they'd just happened to him.

Nobody, though, seemed to believe that. He heaved a little sigh and stepped into the waiting elevator.

There were, after all, he thought, compensations. He'd had some good times, and the talents did come in handy. And he did have his pick of the vacation schedule lately. And he'd met some lovely girls...

And besides, he told himself savagely as the elevator shot upward, he wasn't going to do anything except return to his office and read some reports and listen to some tapes. And then he was going to go home and sleep all night, peacefully. And in the morning Mitchell was going to call him up and tell him that the computer-secretaries needed nothing more than a little repair. He'd say they were getting old, and he'd be a little pathetic about it; but it wouldn't be anything serious. Malone would send out orders to get the machines repaired, and that would be that. And then the next case would be something both normal and exciting, like a bank robbery or a kidnapping involving a gorgeous blonde who would be so grateful to Malone that...

He had stepped out of the elevator and gone down the corridor without noticing it. He pushed at his own office door and walked into the outer room. The train of thought he had been following was very nice, and sounded very attractive indeed, he told himself.

Unfortunately, he didn't believe it. His prescient ability, functioning with its usual efficient aplomb, told Malone that things would not be better, or simpler, in the morning. They would be worse, and more complicated.

They would be quite a lot worse.

And, as usual, that prescience was perfectly accurate.

CHAPTER 2

The telephone, Malone realized belatedly, had had a particularly nasty-sounding ring. He might have known it would be bad news.

As a matter of fact, he told himself sadly, he had known.

"Nothing at all wrong?" he said into the mouthpiece. "Not with any of the computers?" He blinked. "Not even one of them?"

"Not a thing," Mitchell said. "I'll be sending a report up to you in a little while. You read it; we put them through every test, and it's all detailed there."

"I'm sure you were very thorough," Malone said helplessly.

"Of course we were," Mitchell said. "Of course. And the machines passed every single test. Every one. Malone, it was beautiful."

"Goody," Malone said at random. "But there's got to be something—"

"There is, Malone," Fred said. "There is. I think there's definitely something odd going on. Something funny. I mean peculiar, not humorous."

"I thought so," Malone put in.

"Right," Fred said. "Malone, try and relax. This is a hard thing to say, and it must be even harder to hear, but—"

"Tell me," Malone said. "Who's dead? Who's been killed?"

"I know it's tough, Malone," Fred went on.

"Is everybody dead?" Malone said. "It can't be just one person, not from that tone in your voice. Has somebody assassinated the entire senate? Or the president and his cabinet? Or—"

"It's nothing like that, Malone," Fred said, in a tone that implied that such occurrences were really rather minor. "It's the machines."

"The machines?"

"That's right," Fred said grimly. "After we checked them over and found they were in good shape, I asked for samples of both the input and the output of each machine. I wanted to do a thorough job."

"Congratulations," Malone said. "What happened?"

Fred took a deep breath. "They don't agree," he said.

"They don't?" Malone said. The phrase sounded as if it meant something momentous, but he couldn't quite figure out what. In a minute, he thought confusedly, it would come to him. But did he want it to?

"They definitely do not agree," Fred was saying. "The correlation is erratic; it makes no statistical sense. Malone, there are two possibilities."

"Tell me about them," Malone said. He was beginning to feel relieved. To Fred, the malfunction of a machine was more serious than the murder of the entire Congress. But Malone couldn't quite bring himself to feel that way about things.

"First," Fred said in a tense tone, "it's possible that the technicians feeding information to the machines are making all kinds of mistakes." Malone nodded at the phone. "That sounds possible," he said. "Which ones?"

"All of them," Fred said. "They're all making errors-and they're all making about the same number of errors. There don't seem to be any real peaks or valleys, Malone; everybody's doing it."

Malone thought of the Varsity Drag and repressed the thought. "A bunch of fumblebums," he said. "All fumbling alike. It does sound unlikely, but I guess it's possible. We'll get after them right away, and—"

"Wait," Fred said. "There is a second possibility."

"Oh," Malone said.

"Maybe they aren't mistakes," Fred said. "Maybe the technicians are deliberately feeding the machine with wrong answers."

Malone hated to admit it, even to himself, but that answer sounded a lot more probable. Machine technicians weren't exactly picked off the streets at random; they were highly trained for their work, and the idea of a whole crew of them starting to fumble at once, in a big way, was a little hard to swallow.

The idea of all of them sabotaging the machines they worked on, Malone thought, was a tough one to take, too. But it had the advantage of making some sense. People, he told himself dully, will do nutty things deliberately. It's harder to think of them doing the same nutty things without knowing it.

"Well," he said at last, "however it turns out, we'll get to the bottom of it. Frankly, I think it's being done on purpose."

"So do I," Fred said. "And when you find out just who's making the technicians do such things-when you find out who gives them their orders-you let me know."

"Let you know?" Malone said. "But—"

"Any man who would give false data to a perfectly innocent computer," Fred said savagely, "would-would—" For a second he was apparently lost for comparisons. Then he finished: "Would kill his own mother." He paused a second and added, in an even more savage voice, "And then lie about it!"

The image on the screen snapped off, and Malone sat back in his chair and sighed. He spent a few minutes regretting that he hadn't chosen, early in life, to be a missionary to the Fiji Islands, or possibly simply a drunken bum without any troubles, but then the report Mitchell had mentioned arrived. Malone picked it up without much eagerness, and began going through it carefully.

It was beautifully typed and arranged; somebody on Mitchell's team had obviously been up all night at the job. Malone admired the work, without being able to get enthusiastic about the contents. Like all technical reports, it tended to be boring and just a trifle obscure to someone who wasn't completely familiar with the field involved. Malone and cybernetics were not exactly bosom buddies, and by the time he finished reading through the report he was suffering from an extreme case of ennui.

There were no new clues in the report, either; Mitchell's phone conversation had covered all of the main points. Malone put the sheaf of papers down on his desk and looked at them for a minute as if he expected an answer to leap out from the pile and greet him with a glad cry. But nothing happened. Unfortunately, he had to do some more work.

The obvious next step was to start checking on the technicians who were working on the machines. Malone determined privately that he would give none of his reports to Fred Mitchell; he didn't like the idea of being responsible for murder, and that was the least Fred would do to someone who confused his precious calculators.

He picked up the phone, punched for the Records Division, and waited until a bald, middle-aged face appeared. He asked the face to send up the dossiers of the technicians concerned to his office. The face nodded.

"You want them right away?" it said in a mild, slightly scratchy voice.

"Sooner than right away," Malone said.

"They're coming up by messenger," the voice said.

Malone nodded and broke the connection. The technicians had, of course, been investigated by the FBI before they'd been hired, but it wouldn't do any harm to check them out again. He felt grateful that he wouldn't have to do all that work himself; he would just go through the dossiers and assign field agents to the actual checking when he had a picture of what might need to be checked.

He sighed again and leaned back in his chair. He put his feet up on the desk, remembered that he was entirely alone, and swung them down again. He fished in a private compartment in his top desk drawer, drew out a cigar and unwrapped it. Putting his feet back on the desk, he lit the cigar, drew in a cloud of smoke, and lapsed into deep thought.

Cigar smoke billowed around him, making strange, fantastic shapes in the air of the office. Malone puffed away, frowning slightly and trying to force the puzzle he was working on to make some sense.

It certainly looked as though something were going on, he thought. But, for the life of him, he couldn't

figure out just what it was. After all, what could be anybody's purpose in goofing up a bunch of calculators the way they had? Of course, the whole thing could be a series of accidents, but the series was a pretty long one, and made Malone suspicious to start with. It was easier to assume that the goof-ups were being done deliberately.

Unfortunately, they didn't make much sense as sabotage, either.

Senator Deeds, for instance, had sent out a ten-thousand-copy form letter to his constituents, blasting an Administration power bill in extremely strong language, and asking for some comments on the Deeds-Hartshorn Air Ownership Bill, a pending piece of legislation that provided for private, personal ownership, based on land title, to the upper stratosphere, with a strong hint that rights of passage no longer applied without some recompense to the owner of the air. Naturally, Deeds had filed the original with a computer-secretary to turn out ten thousand duplicate copies, and the machine had done so, folding the copies, slipping them into addressed envelopes and sending them out under the Senator's franking stamp.

The addresses on the envelopes, however, had not been those of the Senator's supporters. The letter had been sent to ten thousand stockholders in major airline companies, and the Senator's head was still ringing from the force of the denunciatory letters, telegrams and telephone calls he'd been getting.

And then there was Representative Follansbee of South Dakota. A set of news releases on the proposed Follansbee Waterworks Bill contained the statement that the artificial lake which Follansbee proposed in the Black Hills country "be formed by controlled atomic power blasts, and filled with water obtained from collecting the tears of widows and orphans."

Newsmen who saw this release immediately checked the bill. The wording was exactly the same. Follansbee claimed that the "widows and orphans" phrase had appeared in his speech on the bill, and not in the proposed bill itself. "It's completely absurd," he said, with commendable calm, "to consider this method of filling an artificial lake." Unfortunately, the absurdity was now contained in the bill, which would have to go back to committee for redefinition, and probably wouldn't come up again in the present session of Congress. Judging from the amount of laughter that had greeted the error when it had come to light, Malone privately doubted whether any amount of redefinition was going to save it from a landslide defeat.

Representative Keller of Idaho had made a speech which contained so many errors of fact that newspaper editorials, and his enemies on the floor of Congress, cut him to pieces with ease and pleasure. Keller complained of his innocence and said he'd gotten his facts from a computer-secretary, but this didn't save him. His re-election was a matter for grave concern in his own party, and the opposition was, naturally, tickled. They would not, Malone thought, dare to be tickled pink.

And these were not the only casualties. They were the most blatant foul-ups, but there were others, such as the mistake in numbering of a House Bill that resulted in a two-month delay during which the opposition to the bill raised enough votes to defeat it on the floor. Communications were diverted or lost or scrambled in small ways that made for confusion-including, Malone recalled, the perfectly horrible mixup that resulted when a freshman senator, thinking he was talking to his girlfriend on a blanked-vision circuit, discovered he was talking to his wife.

The flow of information was being blocked by bottlenecks that suddenly existed where there had never been bottlenecks before.

And it wasn't only the computers, Malone knew. He remembered the reports the senators and

representatives had made. Someone forgot to send an important message here, or sent one too soon over there. Both courses were equally disturbing, and both resulted in more snarl-ups. Reports that should have been sent in weeks before arrived too late; reports meant for the eyes of only one man were turned out in triplicate and passed all over the offices of Congress.

Each snarl-up was a little one. But, together, they added up to inefficiency of a kind and extent that hadn't been seen, Malone told himself with some wonder, since the Harding administration fifty years before.

And there didn't seem to be anyone to blame anything on.

Malone thought hopefully of sabotage, infiltration and mass treason, but it didn't make him feel much better. He puffed out some more smoke and frowned at nothing.

There was a knock at the door of his office.

Speedily and guiltily, he swung his feet off the desk and snatched the cigar out of his mouth. He jammed it into a deep ashtray and put the ashtray back into his desk drawer. He locked the drawer, waved ineffectively at the clouds of smoke that surrounded him, and said in a resigned voice: "Come in."

The door opened. A tall, solidly-built man stood there, wearing a fringe of beard and a cheerful expression. The man had an enormous amount of muscle distributed more or less evenly over his chunky body, and a pot-belly that looked as if he had swallowed a globe of the world. In addition, he was smoking a cigarette and letting out little puffs of smoke, rather like a toy locomotive.

"Well, well," Malone said, brushing feebly at the smoke that still wreathed him faintly. "If it isn't Thomas Boyd, the FBI's answer to Nero Wolfe."

"And if the physique holds true, you're Sherlock Holmes, I suppose," Boyd said.

Malone shook his head, thinking sadly of his father and the cigar. "Not exactly," he said. "Not ex—" And then it came to him. It wasn't that he was ashamed of smoking cigars like his father, exactly, but cigars just weren't right for a fearless, dedicated FBI agent. And he had just thought of a way to keep Boyd from knowing what he'd been doing. "That's a hell of a cigarette you're smoking, by the way," he said.

Boyd looked at it. "It is?" he said.

"Sure is," Malone said, hoping he sounded sufficiently innocent. "Smells like a cigar or something."

Boyd sniffed the air for a second, his face wrinkled. Then he looked down at his cigarette again. "By God," he said, "you're right, Ken. It does smell like a cigar." He came over to Malone's desk, looked around for an ashtray and didn't find one, and finally went to the window and tossed the cigarette out into the Washington breeze. "How are things, anyhow, Ken?" he said.

"Things are confused," Malone said. "Aren't they always?"

Boyd came back to the desk and sat down in a chair at one side of it. He put his elbow on the desk. "Sure they are," he said. "I'm confused myself, as a matter of fact. Only I think I know where I can get some help."

"Really?" Malone said.

Boyd nodded. "Burriss told me I might be able to get some information from a certain famous and highly respected person," he said.

"Well, well," Malone said. "Who?"

"You," Boyd said.

"Oh," Malone said, trying to look disappointed, flattered and modest all at the same time. "Well," he went on after a second, "anything I can do—"

"Burriss thought you might have some answers," Boyd said.

"Burriss is getting optimistic in his old age," Malone said. "I don't even have many questions."

Boyd nodded. "Well," he said, "you know this California thing?"

"Sure I do," Malone said. "You're looking into the resignation out there, aren't you?"

"Senator Burley," Boyd said. "That's right But Senator Burley's resignation isn't all of it, by any means."

"It isn't?" Malone said, trying to sound interested.

"Not at all," Boyd said. "It goes a lot deeper than it looks on the surface. In the past year, Ken, five senators have announced their resignations from the Senate of the United States. It isn't exactly a record—"

"It sounds like a record," Malone said.

"Well," Boyd said, "there was 1860 and the Civil War, when a whole lot of senators and representatives resigned all at once."

"Oh," Malone said. "But there isn't any Civil War going on now. At least," he added, "I haven't heard of any."

"That's what makes it so funny," Boyd said. "Of course, Senator Burley said it was ill health, and so did two others, while Senator Davidson said it was old age."

"Well," Malone said, "people do get old. And sick."

"Sure," Boyd said. "The only trouble is—" He paused. "Ken," he said, "do you mind if I smoke? I mean, do you mind the smell of cigars?"

"Mind?" Malone said. "Not at all." He blinked. "Besides," he added, "maybe this one won't smell like a cigar."

"Well, the last one did," Boyd said. He took a cigarette out of a pack in his pocket, and lit it. He sniffed. "You know," he said, "you're right. This one doesn't."

"I told you," Malone said. "Must have been a bad cigarette. Spoiled or something."

"I guess so," Boyd said vaguely. "But about these retirements-the FBI wanted me to look into it because of Burley's being mixed up with the space program scandal last year. Remember?"

"Vaguely," Malone said. "I was busy last year."

"Sure you were," Boyd said. "We were both busy getting famous and well known."

Malone grinned. "Go on with the story," he said.

Boyd puffed at his cigarette. "Anyhow, we couldn't find anything really wrong," he said. "Three senators retiring because of ill health, one because of old age. And Farnsworth, the youngest, had a nervous breakdown."

"I didn't hear about it," Malone said.

Boyd shrugged "We hushed it up," he said. "But Farnsworth's got delusions of persecution. He apparently thinks somebody's out to get him. As a matter of fact, he thinks everybody's out to get him."

"Now that," Malone said, "sounds familiar."

Boyd leaned back a little more in his chair. "Here's the funny thing, though," he said. "The others all act as if they're suspicious of everybody who talks to them. Not anything obvious, you understand. Just worried, apprehensive. Always looking at you out of the corners of their eyes. That kind of thing."

Malone thought of Senator Lefferts, who was also suffering from delusions of persecution, delusions that had real evidence to back them up. "It does sound funny," he said cautiously.

"Well, I reported everything to Burris," Boyd went on. "And he said you were working on something similar, and we might as well pool our resources."

"Here we go again," Malone said. He took a deep breath, filling his nostrils with what remained of the cigar odor in the room, and felt more peaceful. Quickly, he told Boyd about what had been happening in Congress. "It seems pretty obvious," he finished, "that there is some kind of a tie-up between the two cases."

"Maybe it's obvious," Boyd said, "but it is just a little bit odd. Fun and games. You know, Ken, Burris was right."

"How?" Malone said.

"He said everything was all mixed up," Boyd went on. "He told me the country was going to Rome in a handbasket, or something like that."

Wondering vaguely if Burris had really been predicting mass religious conversions, Malone nodded silently.

"And he's right," Boyd said. "Look at the newspapers. Everything's screwy lately."

"Everything always is screwy," Malone said.

"Not like now," Boyd said. "So many big-shot gangsters have been killed lately we might as well bring back Prohibition. And the labor unions are so busy with internal battles that they haven't had time to go on strike for over a year." "Is that bad?" Malone said.

Boyd shrugged. "God knows," he said. "But it's sure confusing as all hell."

"And now," Malone said, "with all that going on—"

"The Congress of the United States decides to go off its collective rocker," Boyd finished. "Exactly." He stared down at his cigarette for a minute with a morose and pensive expression on his face. He looked, Malone thought, like Henry VIII trying to decide what to do about all these here wives.

Then he looked up at Malone. "Ken," he said in a strained voice, "there seem to be a lot of nutty cases lately."

Malone considered. "No," he said at last. "It's just that when a nutty one comes along, we get it."

"That's what I mean," Boyd said. "I wonder why that is."

Malone shrugged. "It takes a thief to catch a thief," he said.

"But these aren't thieves," Boyd said. "I mean, they're just nutty." He paused. "Oh," he said.

"And two thieves are better than one," Malone said.

"Anyhow," Boyd said with a small, gusty sigh, "it's company."

"Sure," Malone said.

Boyd looked for an ashtray, failed again to find one, and walked over to flip a second cigarette out onto Washington. He came back to his chair, sat down, and said, "What's our next step, Ken?"

Malone considered carefully. "First," he said finally, "we'll start assuming something. We'll start assuming that there is some kind of organization behind all this, behind all the senators' resignations and everything like that."

"It sounds like a big assumption," Boyd said.

Malone shook his head. "It isn't really," he said. "After all, we can't figure it's the work of one person: it's too widespread for that. And it's silly to assume that everything's accidental."

"All right," Boyd said equably. "It's an organization."

"Trying to subvert the United States," Malone went on. "Reducing everything to chaos. And that brings in everything else, Tom. That brings in the unions and the gang wars and everything."

Boyd blinked. "How?" he said.

"Obvious," Malone said. "Strife brought on by internal confusion, that's what's going on all over. It's the same pattern. And if we assume an organization trying to jam up the United States, it even makes sense." He leaned back and beamed.

"Sure it makes sense," Boyd said. "But who's the organization?"

Malone shrugged.

"If I were doing the picking," Boyd said, "I'd pick the Russians. Or the Chinese. Or both. Probably both."

"It's a possibility," Malone said. "Anyhow, if it's sabotage, who else would be interested in sabotaging the United States? There's some Russian or Chinese organization fouling up Congress, and the unions, and the gangs. Come to think of it, why the gangs? It seems to me that if you left the professional gangsters strong, it would do even more to foul things up."

"Who knows?" Boyd said. "Maybe they're trying to get rid of American gangsters so they can import some of their own."

"That doesn't make any sense," Malone said, "but I'll think about it. In the meantime, we have one more interesting question."

"We do?" Boyd said.

"Sure we do," Malone said. "The question is: how?"

Boyd said: "Mmm." Then there was silence for a little while.

"How are the saboteurs doing all this?" Malone said. "It just doesn't seem very probable that all the technicians in the Senate Office Building, for instance, are spies. It makes even less sense that the labor unions are composed mostly of spies. Or, for that matter, the Mafia and the organizations like it. What would spies be doing in the Mafia?"

"Learning Italian," Boyd said instantly.

"Don't be silly," Malone said. "If there were that many spies in this country, the Russians wouldn't have to fight at all. They could vote the Communists into power, and by a nice big landslide, too."

"Wait a minute," Boyd said. "If there aren't so many spies, then how is all this getting done?"

Malone beamed. "That's the question," he said. "And I think I have an answer."

"You do?" Boyd said. After a second he said: "Oh, no."

"Suppose you tell me," Malone said.

Boyd opened his mouth. Nothing emerged. He shut it. A second passed and he opened it again. "Magic?" he said weakly.

"Not exactly," Malone said cheerfully. "But you're getting warm."

Boyd shut his eyes. "I'm not going to stand for it," he announced. "I'm not going to take any more."

"Any more what?" Malone said. "Tell me what you have in mind."

"I won't even consider it," Boyd said. "It haunts me. It gets into my dreams. Now, look, Ken, I can't even see a pitchfork any more without thinking of Greek letters."

Malone took a breath. "Which Greek letter?" he said.

"You know very well," Boyd said. "What a pitchfork looks like. Psi. And I'm not even going to think about it."

"Well," Malone said equably, "you won't have to. If you'd rather start with the Russian-spy end of things, you can do that."

"What I'd rather do," Boyd said, "is resign."

"Next year," Malone said instantly. "For now, you can wait around until the dossiers come up—they're for the Senate Office Building technicians, and they're on the way. You can go over them, and start checking on any known Russian agents in the country for contacts. You can also start checking on the dossiers, and in general for any hanky-panky."

Boyd blinked. "Hanky-panky?" he said.

"It's a perfectly good word," Malone said, offended. "Or two words. Anyhow, you can start on that end, and not worry about anything else."

"It's going to haunt me," Boyd said.

"Well," Malone said, "eat lots of ectoplasm and get enough sleep, and everything will be fine. After all, I'm going to have to do the real end of the work, the psionics end. I may be wrong, but—"

He was interrupted by the phone. He flicked the switch and Andrew J. Burris' face appeared on the screen.

"Malone," Burris said instantly, "I just got a complaint from the State Department that ties in with your work. Their translator has been acting up."

Malone couldn't say anything for a minute.

"Malone," Burris went on. "I said—"

"I heard you," Malone said. "And it doesn't have one."

"It doesn't have one what?" Burris said.

"A pig-Latin circuit," Malone said. "What else?"

Burris' voice was very calm. "Malone," he said, "what does pig-Latin have to do with anything?"

"You said—"

"I said one of the State Department translators was acting up," Burris said. "If you want details—"

"I don't think I can stand them," Malone said.

"Some of the Russian and Chinese releases have come through with the meaning slightly altered," Burriss went on doggedly. "And I want you to check on it right away. I—"

"Thank God," Malone said.

Burriss blinked. "What?"

"Never mind," Malone said. "Never mind. I'm glad you told me, Chief. I'll get to work on it right away, and—"

"You do that, Malone," Burriss said. "And for God's sake stop calling me Chief! Do I look like an Indian? Do I have feathers in my hair?"

"Anything," Malone said grandly, "is possible." He broke the connection in a hurry.

CHAPTER 3

The summer sun beat down on the white city of Washington, D. C, as if it had mistaken its instructions slightly and was convinced that the city had been put down somewhere in the Sahara. The sun seemed confused, Malone thought. If this were the Sahara, obviously there was no reason whatever for the Potomac to be running through it. The sun was doing its best to correct this small error, however, by exerting even more heat in a valiant attempt to dry up the river.

Its attempt was succeeding, at least partially. The Potomac was still there, but quite a lot of it was not in the river bed any more. Instead, it had gone into the air, which was so humid by now that Malone was willing to swear that it was splashing into his lungs at every inhalation. Resisting an impulse to try the breaststroke, he stood in the full glare of the straining sun, just outside the Senate Office Building. He looked across at the Capitol, just opposite, squinting his eyes manfully against the glare of its dome in the brightness.

The Capitol was, at any rate, some relief from the sight of Thomas Boyd and a group of agents busily grilling two technicians. That was going on in the Senate Office Building, and Malone had come over to watch the proceedings. Everything had been set up in what Malone considered the most complicated fashion possible. A big room had been turned into a projection chamber, and films were being run off over and over. The films, taken by hidden cameras watching the computer-secretaries, had caught two technicians red-handed punching errors into the machines. Boyd had leaped on this evidence, and he and his crew were showing the movies to the technicians and questioning them under bright lights in an effort to break down their resistance.

But it didn't look as though they were going to have any more success than the sun was having, turning Washington into the Sahara. After all, Malone told himself, wiping his streaming brow, there were no Pyramids in Washington. He tried to discover whether that made any sense, but it was too much work. He went back to thinking about Boyd.

The technicians were sticking to their original stories that the mistakes had been honest ones. It sounded like a sensible idea to Malone; after all, people did make mistakes. And the FBI didn't have a single shred of evidence to prove that the technicians were engaged in deliberate sabotage. But Boyd wasn't giving up. Over and over he got the technicians to repeat their stories, looking for discrepancies or slips.

Over and over he ran off the films of their mistakes, looking for some clue, some shred of evidence.

Even the sight of the Capitol, Malone told himself sadly, was better than any more of Boyd's massive investigation techniques.

He had come out to do some thinking. He believed, in spite of a good deal of evidence to the contrary, that his best ideas came to him while walking. At any rate, it was a way of getting away from four walls and from the prying eyes and anxious looks of superiors. He sighed gently, crammed his hat onto his head and started out.

Only a maniac, he reflected, would wear a hat on a day like the one he was swimming through. But the people who passed him as he trudged onward to no particular destination didn't seem to notice; they gave him a fairly wide berth, and seemed very polite, but that wasn't because they thought he was nuts, Malone knew. It was because they knew he was an FBI man.

That was the result of an FBI regulation. All agents had to wear hats. Malone wasn't sure why, and his thinking on the matter had only dredged up the idea that you had to have a hat in case somebody asked you to keep something under it. But the FBI was firm about its rulings. No matter what the weather, an agent wore a hat. Malone thought bitterly that he might just as well wear a red, white and blue luminous sign that said FBI in great winking letters, and maybe a hooting siren too. Still, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was not supposed to be a secret organization, no matter what occasional critics might say. And the hats, at least as long as the weather remained broiling, were enough proof of that for anybody.

Malone could feel water collecting under his hat and soaking his head. He removed the hat quickly, wiped his head with a handkerchief and replaced the hat, feeling as if he had become incognito for a few seconds. The hat was back on now, feeling official but terrible, and about the same was true of the fully-loaded Smith & Wesson .44 Magnum revolver which hung in his shoulder holster. The harness chafed at his shoulder and chest and the weight of the gun itself was an added and unwelcome burden.

But even without the gun and the hat, Malone did not feel exactly chipper. His shirt and undershirt were no longer two garments, but one, welded together by seamless sweat and plastered heavily and not too skillfully to his skin. His trouser legs clung damply to calves and thighs, rubbing as he walked, and at the knees each trouser leg attached and detached itself with the unpleasant regularity of a wet bastinado. Inside Malone's shoes, his socks were completely awash, and he seemed to squish as he walked. It was hard to tell, but there seemed to be a small fish in his left shoe. It might, he told himself, be no more than a pebble or a wrinkle in his sock. But he was willing to swear that it was swimming upstream.

And the forecast, he told himself bitterly, was for continued warm.

He forced himself to take his mind off his own troubles and get back to the troubles of the FBI in general, such as the problem at hand. It was an effort, but he frowned and kept walking, and within a block he was concentrating again on the psi powers.

Psi, he told himself, was behind the whole mess. In spite of Boyd's horrified refusal to believe such a thing, Malone was sure of it. Three years ago, of course, he wouldn't have considered the notion either. But since then a great many things had happened, and his horizons had widened. After all, capturing a double handful of totally insane, if perfectly genuine telepaths, from asylums all over the country, was enough by itself to widen quite a few stunned horizons. And then, later, there had been the gang of juvenile delinquents. They had been perfectly normal juvenile delinquents, stealing cars and bopping a stray policeman or two. It happened, though, that they had solved the secret of instantaneous teleportation, too. This made them just a trifle unusual.

In capturing them, Malone, too, had learned the teleportation secret. Unlike Boyd, he thought, or Burris, the idea of psionic power didn't bother him much. After all, the psionic spectrum (if it was a spectrum at all) was just as much a natural phenomenon as gravity or magnetism.

It was just a little hard for some people to get used to.

And, of course, he didn't fully understand how it worked, or why. This put him in the position, he told himself, of an Australian aborigine. He tried to imagine an Australian aborigine in a hat on a hot day, decided the aborigine would have too much sense, and got back off the subject again.

However, he thought grimly, there was this Australian aborigine. And he had a magnifying glass, which he'd picked up from the wreck of some ship. Using that—assuming that experience, or a friendly missionary, taught him how—he could manage to light a fire, using the sun's thermonuclear processes to do the job. Malone doubted that the aborigine knew anything about thermonuclear processes, but he could start a fire with them.

As a matter of fact, he told himself, the aborigine didn't understand oxidation, either. But he could use that fire, when he got it going. In spite of his lack of knowledge, the aborigine could use that nice, hot, burning fire...

Hurriedly, Malone pried his thoughts away from aborigines and heat, and tried to focus his mind elsewhere. He didn't understand psionic processes, he thought; but then, nobody did, really, as far as he knew. But he could use them.

And, obviously, somebody else could use them too.

Only what kind of force was being used? What kind of psionic force would it take to make so many people in the United States goof up the way they were doing?

That, Malone told himself, was a good question, a basic and an important question. He was proud of himself for thinking of it.

Unfortunately, he didn't have the answer.

But he thought he knew a way of getting one.

It was perfectly true that nobody knew much about how psionics worked. For that matter, nobody knew very much about how gravity worked. But there was still some information, and, in the case of psionics, Malone knew where it was to be found.

It was to be found in Yucca Flats, Nevada.

It was, of course, true that Nevada would probably be even hotter than Washington, D. C. But there was no help for that, Malone told himself sadly; and, besides, the cold chill of the expert himself would probably cool things off quite rapidly. Malone thought of Dr. Thomas O'Connor, the Westinghouse psionics expert and frowned. O'Connor was not exactly what might be called a friendly man.

But he did know more about psionics than anyone else Malone could think of. And his help had been invaluable in solving the two previous psionic cases Malone had worked on.

For a second he thought of calling O'Connor, but he brushed that thought aside bravely. In spite of the heat of Yucca Flats, he would have to talk to the man personally. He thought again of O'Connor's congealed personality, and wondered if it would really be effective in combating the heat. If it were, he told himself, he would take the man right back to Washington with him, and plug him into the air-conditioning lines.

He sighed deeply, thought about a cigar and decided regretfully against it, here on the public street where he would be visible to anyone. Instead, he looked around him, discovered that he was only a block from a large, neon-lit drugstore and headed for it. Less than a minute later he was in a phone booth.

The operators throughout the country seemed to suffer from heat prostration, and Malone was hardly inclined to blame them. But, all the same, it took several minutes for him to get through to Dr. O'Connor's office, and a minute or so more before he could convince a security-addled secretary that, after all, he would hardly blow O'Connor to bits over the long-distance phone.

Finally the secretary, with a sigh of reluctance, said she would see if Dr. O'Connor were available. Malone waited in the phone booth, opening the door every few seconds to breathe. The booth was air-conditioned, but remained for some mystical reason an even ten degrees above the boiling point of Malone's temper.

Finally Dr. O'Connor's lean, pallid face appeared on the screen. He had not changed since Malone had last seen him. He still looked, and acted, like one of Malone's more disliked law professors.

"Ah," the scientist said in a cold, precise voice. "Mr. Malone. I am sorry for our precautions, but you understand that security must be served."

"Sure," Malone said.

"Being an FBI man, of course you would," Dr. O'Connor went on, his face changing slightly and his voice warming almost to the boiling point of nitrogen. It was obvious that the phrase was Dr. O'Connor's idea of a little joke, and Malone smiled politely and nodded. The scientist seemed to feel some friendliness toward Malone, though it was hard to tell for sure. But Malone had brought him some fine specimens to work with-telepaths and teleports, though human, being no more than specimens to such a very precise scientific mind-and he seemed grateful for Malone's diligence and effort in finding such fascinating objects of study.

That Malone certainly hadn't started out to find them made, it appeared, very little difference.

"Well, then," O'Connor said, returning to his normal, serious tone. "What can I do for you, Mr. Malone?"

"If you have the time, Doctor," Malone said respectfully, "I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes." He had the absurd feeling that O'Connor was going to tell him to stop by after class, but the scientist only nodded.

"Your call is timed very well," he said. "As it happens, Mr. Malone, I do have a few seconds to spare just now."

"Fine," Malone said.

"I should be glad to talk with you," O'Connor said, without looking any more glad than ever.

"I'll be right there," Malone said. O'Connor nodded again, and blanked out. Malone switched off and took a deep, superheated breath of phone booth air. For a second he considered starting his trip from outside the phone booth, but that was dangerous—if not to Malone, then to innocent spectators. Psionics was by no means a household word, and the sight of Malone leaving for Nevada might send several citizens straight to the wagon. Which was not a place, he thought judiciously, for anybody to be on such a hot day.

He closed his eyes for a fraction of a second. In that time he reconstructed from memory a detailed, three-dimensional, full-color image of Dr. O'Connor's office in his mind. It was perfect in detail; he checked it over mentally and then, by a special effort of will, he gave himself the psychic push that made the transition possible.

When he opened his eyes, he was in O'Connor's office, standing in front of the scientist's wide desk. He hoped nobody had been looking into the phone booth at the instant he had disappeared, but he was reasonably sure he'd been unobserved. People didn't go around peering into phone booths, after all, and he had seen no one.

O'Connor looked up without surprise. "Ah," he said. "Sit down, Mr. Malone." Malone looked around for the chair, which was an uncomfortably straight-backed affair, and sat down in it gingerly. Remembering past visits to O'Connor, he was grateful for even the small amount of relaxation the hard wood afforded him. O'Connor had only recently unbent to the point of supplying a spare chair in his office for visitors, and, apparently, especially for Malone. Perhaps, Malone thought, it was more gratitude for the lovely specimens.

Malone still felt uncomfortable, but tried bravely not to show it. He felt slightly guilty, too, as he always did when he popped into O'Connor's office without bothering to stay space-bound. By law, after all, he knew he should check in and out at the main gate of the huge, ultra-top-secret Government reservation whenever he visited Yucca Flats. But that meant wasting a lot of time and going through a lot of trouble. Malone had rationalized it out for himself that way, and had gotten just far enough to do things the quick and easy way and not quite far enough to feel undisturbed about it. After all, he told himself grimly, anything that saved time and trouble increased the efficiency of the FBI, so it was all to the good.

He swallowed hard. "Dr. O'Connor—" he began.

O'Connor looked up again. "Yes?" he said. He'd had plenty of practice in watching people appear and disappear, between Malone and the specimens Malone had brought him; he was beyond surprise or shock by now.

"I came here to talk to you," Malone began again.

O'Connor nodded, a trifle impatiently. "Yes," he said. "I know that."

"Well—" Malone thought fast. Presenting the case to O'Connor was impossible; it was too complicated, and it might violate governmental secrecy somewhere along the line. He decided to wrap it up in a hypothetical situation. "Doctor," he said, "I know that all the various manifestations of the psi powers were investigated and named long before responsible scientists became interested in the subject."

"That," O'Connor said with some reluctance, "is true." He looked sad, as if he wished they'd waited on naming some of the psionic manifestations until he'd been born and started investigating them. Malone

tried to imagine a person doing something called O'Connorizing, and decided he was grateful for history.

"Well, then—" he said.

"At least," O'Connor cut in, "it is true in a rather vague and general way. You see, Mr. Malone, any precise description of a psionic manifestation must wait until a metalanguage has grown up to encompass it; that is, until understanding and knowledge have reached the point where careful and accurate description can take place."

"Oh," Malone said helplessly. "Sure." He wondered if what O'Connor had said meant anything, and decided that it probably did, but he didn't want to know about it.

"While we have not yet reached that point," O'Connor said, "we are approaching it in our experiments. I am hopeful that, in the near future—"

"Well," Malone cut in desperately, "sure. Of course. Naturally."

Dr. O'Connor looked miffed. The temperature of the room seemed to drop several degrees, and Malone swallowed hard and tried to look ingratiating and helpful, like a student with nothing but A's on his record.

Before O'Connor could pick up the thread of his sentence, Malone went on: "What I mean is something like this. Picking up the mental activity of another person is called telepathy. Floating in the air is called levitation. Moving objects around is psychokinesis. Going from one place to another instantaneously is teleportation. And so on."

"The language you use," O'Connor said, still miffed, "is extremely loose. I might go so far as to say that the statements you have made are, essentially, meaningless as a result of their lack of rigor."

Malone took a deep breath. "Dr. O'Connor," he said, "you know what I mean, don't you?"

"I believe so," O'Connor said, with the air of a king granting a pardon to a particularly repulsive-looking subject in the lowest income brackets.

"Well, then," Malone said. "Yes or no?"

O'Connor frowned. "Yes or no what?" he said.

"I—" Malone blinked. "I mean, the things have names," he said at last. "All the various psionic manifestations have names."

"Ah," O'Connor said. "Well. I should say—" He put his fingertips together and stared at a point on the white ceiling for a second. "Yes," he said at last.

Malone breathed a sigh of relief. "Good," he said. "That's what I wanted to know." He leaned forward. "And if they all do have names," he went on, "what is it called when a large group of people are forced to act in a certain manner?"

O'Connor shrugged. "Forced?" he said.

"Forced by mental power," Malone said.

There was a second of silence.

"At first," O'Connor said, "I might think of various examples: the actions of a mob, for example, or the demonstrations of the Indian Rope Trick, or perhaps the sale of a useless product through television or through other advertising." Again his face moved, ever so slightly, in what he obviously believed to be a smile. "The usual name for such a phenomenon is 'mass hypnotism,' Mr. Malone," he said. "But that is not, strictly speaking, a psi phenomenon at all. Studies in that area belong to the field of mob psychology; they are not properly in my scope." He looked vastly superior to anything and everything that was outside his scope. Malone concentrated on looking receptive and understanding.

"Yes?" he said.

O'Connor gave him a look that made Malone feel he'd been caught cribbing during an exam, but the scientist said nothing to back up the look. Instead he went on: "I will grant that there may be an amplification of the telepathic faculty in the normal individual in such cases."

"Good," Malone said doubtfully.

"Such an amplification," O'Connor went on, as if he hadn't heard, "would account for the apparent-ah-mental linkage that makes a mob appear to act as a single organism during certain periods of-ah-stress." He looked judicious for a second, and then nodded. "However," he said, "other than that, I would doubt that there is any psionic force involved."

Malone spent a second or two digesting O'Connor's reply.

"Well," he said at last, "I'm not sure that's what I meant. I mean, I'm not sure I meant to ask that question." He took a breath and decided to start all over. "It's not like a mob," he said, "with everybody all doing the same thing at the same time. It's more like a group of men, all separated, without any apparent connections between any of the men. And they're all working toward a common goal. All doing different things, but all with the same objective. See?"

"Of course I do," O'Connor said flatly. "But what you're suggesting—" He looked straight at Malone. "Have you had any experience of this ... phenomenon?"

"Experience?" Malone said.

"I believe you have had," O'Connor said. "Such a concept could not have come to you in a theoretical manner. You must be involved with an actual situation very much like the one you describe."

Malone swallowed. "Me?" he said.

"Mr. Malone," O'Connor said. "May I remind you that this is Yucca Flats? That the security checks here are as careful as anywhere in the world? That I, myself, have top-security clearance for many special projects? You do not need to watch your words here."

"It's not security," Malone said. "Anyhow, it's not only security. But things are pretty complicated."

"I assure you," O'Connor said, "that I will be able to understand even events which you feel are complex."

Malone swallowed again, hard. "I didn't mean—" he started.

"Please, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said. His voice was colder than usual. Malone had the feeling that he was about to take the extra chair away. "Go on," O'Connor said. "Explain yourself."

Malone took a deep breath. He started with the facts he'd been told by Burris, and went straight through to the interviews of the two computer-secretary technicians by Boyd and Company.

It took quite awhile. By the time he had finished, O'Connor wasn't looking frozen any more; he'd apparently forgotten to keep the freezer coils running. Instead, his face showed frank bewilderment, and great interest. "I never heard of such a thing," he said. "Never. Not at any time."

"But—"

O'Connor shook his head. "I have never heard of a psionic manifestation on that order," he said. It seemed to be a painful admission. "Something that would make a random group of men co-operate in that manner—why, it's completely new."

"It is?" Malone said, wondering if, when it was all investigated and described, it might be called O'Connorizing. Then he wondered how anybody was going to go about investigating it and describing it, and sank even deeper into gloom.

"Completely new," O'Connor said. "You may take my word." Then, slowly, he began to brighten again, with all the glitter of newly-formed ice. "As a matter of fact," he said, in a tone more like his usual one, "as a matter of fact, Mr. Malone, I don't think it's possible."

"But it happened," Malone said. "It's still happening. All over."

O'Connor's lips tightened. "I have given my opinion," he said. "I do not believe that such a thing is possible. There must be some other explanation."

"All right," Malone said agreeably. "I'll bite. What is it?"

O'Connor frowned. "Your levity," he said, "is uncalled-for."

Malone shrugged. "I didn't mean to be—" He paused. "Anyhow, I didn't mean to be funny," he went on. "But I would like to have another idea of what's causing all this."

"Scientific theories," O'Connor said sternly, "are not invented on the spur of the moment. Only after long, careful thought."

"You mean you can't think of anything," Malone said.

"There must be some other explanation," O'Connor said. "Naturally, since the facts have only now been presented to me, it is impossible for me to display at once a fully-constructed theory."

Malone nodded slowly. "Okay," he said. "Have you got any hints, then? Any ideas at all?"

O'Connor shook his head. "I have not," he said. "But I strongly suggest, Mr. Malone, that you recheck your data. The fault may very well lie in your own interpretations of the actual facts."

"I don't think so," Malone said.

O'Connor grimaced. "I do," he said firmly.

Malone sighed, very faintly. He shifted in the chair and began to realize, for the first time, just how uncomfortable it really was. He also felt a little chilly, and the chill was growing. That, he told himself, was the effect of Dr. O'Connor. He no longer regretted wearing his hat. As a matter of fact, he thought wistfully for a second of a small, light overcoat.

O'Connor, he told himself, was definitely not the warm, friendly type.

"Well, then," he said, conquering the chilly feeling for a second, "maybe there's somebody else. Somebody who knows something more about psionics, and who might have some other ideas about—"

"Please, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said. "The United States Government would hardly have chosen me had I not been uniquely qualified in my field."

Malone sighed again. "I mean, maybe there are some books on the subject," he said quietly, hoping he sounded tactful. "Maybe there's something I could look up."

"Mr. Malone." The temperature of the office, Malone realized, was definitely lowering. O'Connor's built-in freezer coils were working overtime, he told himself. "The field of psionics is so young that I can say, without qualification, that I am acquainted with everything written on the subject. By that, of course, I mean scientific works. I do not doubt that the American Society for Psychical Research, for instance, has hundreds of crackpot books which I have never read, or even heard of. But in the strictly scientific field, I must say that—"

He broke off, looking narrowly at Malone with what might have been concern, but looked more like discouragement and boredom.

"Mr. Malone," he said, "are you ill?"

Malone thought about it. He wasn't quite sure, he discovered. The chill in the office was bothering him more and more, and as it grew he began to doubt that it was all due to the O'Connor influence. Suddenly a distinct shudder started somewhere in the vicinity of his shoulders and rippled its way down his body.

Another one followed it, and then a third.

"Mr. Malone," O'Connor said.

"Me?" Malone said. "I'm-I'm all right."

"You seem to have contracted a chill," O'Connor said.

A fourth shudder followed the other three.

"I-guess so," Malone said. "I d-d-I do s-seem to be r-r-rather chilly."

O'Connor nodded. "Ah," he said. "I thought so. Although a chill is certainly odd at seventy-two degrees Fahrenheit." He looked at the thermometer just outside the window of his office, then turned back to Malone. "Pardon me," he said. "Seventy-one point six."

"Is-is that all it is?" Malone said. Seventy-one point six degrees, or even seventy-two, hardly sounded like the broiling Nevada desert he'd expected.

"Of course," O'Connor said. "At nine o'clock in the morning, one would hardly expect great temperatures. The desert becomes quite hot during the day, but cools off rapidly; I assume you are familiar with the laws covering the system."

"Sure," Malone said. "S-sure."

The chills were not getting any better. They continued to travel up and down his body with the dignified regularity of Pennsylvania Railroad commuter trains.

O'Connor frowned for a second. It was obvious that his keen scientific eye was sizing up the phenomenon, and reporting events to his keen scientific brain. In a second or less, the keen scientific brain had come up with an answer, and Dr. O'Connor spoke in his very keenest scientific voice.

"I should have warned you," he said, without an audible trace of regret. "The answer is childishly simple, Mr. Malone. You left Washington at noon."

"Just a little before noon," Malone said. Remembering the burning sun, he added: "High noon. Very high."

"Just so," O'Connor said. "And not only the heat was intense; the humidity, I assume, was also high."

"Very," Malone said, thinking back. He shivered again.

"In Washington," O'Connor said, "it was noon. Here it is nine o'clock, and hardly as warm. The atmosphere is quite arid, and about twenty degrees below that obtaining in Washington."

Malone thought about it, trying to ignore the chills. "Oh," he said at last. "And all the time I thought it was you."

"What?" O'Connor leaned forward.

"Nothing," Malone said hastily. "Nothing at all."

"My suggestion," O'Connor said, putting his fingertips together again, "is that you take off your clothes, which are undoubtedly damp, and—"

Naturally, Malone had not brought any clothes to Yucca Flats to change into. And when he tried to picture himself in a spare suit of Dr. O'Connor's, the picture just wouldn't come. Besides, the idea of doing a modified striptease in, or near, the O'Connor office was thoroughly unattractive.

"Well," he said slowly, "thanks a lot, Doctor, but no thanks. I really have a better idea."

"Better?" O'Connor said.

"Well, I—" Malone took a deep breath and shut his eyes.

He heard Dr. O'Connor say: "Well, Mr. Malone, goodbye. And good luck."

Then the office in Yucca Flats was gone, and Malone was standing in the bedroom of his own apartment, on the fringes of Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER 4

He walked over to the wall control and shut off the air-conditioning in a hurry. He threw open a window and breathed great gulps of the hot, humid air from the streets. In a small corner at the back of his mind, he wondered why he was grateful for the air he had suffered under only a few minutes before. But that, he reflected, was life. And a very silly kind of life, too, he told himself without rancor.

In a few minutes he left the window, somewhat restored, and headed for the shower. When it was running nicely and he was under it, he started to sing. But his voice didn't sound as much like the voice of Lauritz Melchior as it usually did, not even when he made a brave, if foolhardy stab at the Melchior accent. Slowly, he began to realize that he was bothered.

He climbed out of the shower and started drying himself. Up to now, he thought, he had depended on Dr. Thomas O'Connor for edifying, trustworthy and reasonably complete information about psionics and psi phenomena in general. He had looked on O'Connor as a sort of living version of an extremely good edition of the Britannica, always available for reference.

And now O'Connor had failed him. That, Malone thought, was hardly fair. O'Connor had no business failing him, particularly when there was no place else to go.

The scientist had been right, of course, Malone knew. There was no other scientist who knew as much about psionics as O'Connor, and if O'Connor said there were no books, then that was that: there were no books.

He reached for a drawer in his dresser, opened it and pulled out some underclothes, humming tunelessly under his breath as he dressed. If there was no one to ask, he thought, and if there were no books...

He stopped with a sock in his hand, and stared at it in wonder. O'Connor hadn't said there were no books. As a matter of fact, Malone realized, he'd said exactly the opposite.

There were books. But they were "crackpot" books. O'Connor had never read them. He had, he said, probably never even heard of many of them.

"Crackpot" was a fighting word to O'Connor. But to Malone it had all the sweetness of flattery. After all, he'd found telepaths in insane asylums, and teleports among the juvenile delinquents of New York.

"Crackpot" was a word that was rapidly ceasing to have any meaning at all in Malone's mind.

He realized that he was still staring at the sock, which was black with a pink clock. Hurriedly, he put it on, and finished dressing. He reached for the phone and made a few fast calls, and then teleported himself to his locked office in FBI Headquarters, on East 69th Street in New York. He let himself out, and strolled down the corridor. The agent-in-charge looked up from his desk as Malone passed, blinked, and said, "Hello, Malone. What's up now?"

"I'm going prowling," Malone said. "But there won't be any work for you, as far as I can see."

"Oh?"

"Just relax," Malone said. "Breathe easy."

"I'll try to," the agent-in-charge said, a little sadly. "But every time you show up, I think about that wave of red Cadillacs you started. I'll never feel really secure again."

"Relax," Malone said. "Next time it won't be Cadillacs. But it might be spirits, blowing on ear-trumpets. Or whatever it is they do."

"Spirits, Malone?" the agent-in-charge said.

"No, thanks," Malone said sternly. "I never drink on duty." He gave the agent a cheery wave of his hand and went on out to the street.

The Psychological Research Society had offices in the Ravell Building, a large structure composed mostly of plate glass and anodized aluminum that looked just a little like a bright blue transparent crackerbox that had been stood on end for purposes unknown. Having walked all the way down to this box on 56th Street, Malone had recovered his former sensitivity range to temperature and felt pathetically grateful for the coolish sea breeze that made New York somewhat less of an unbearable Summer Festival than was normal.

The lobby of the building was glittering and polished, as if human beings could not possibly exist in it. Malone took an elevator to the sixth floor, stepped out into a small, equally polished hall, and hurriedly looked off to his right. A small door stood there, with a legend engraved in elegantly small letters. It said:

The Psychological Research Society—Push

Malone obeyed instructions. The door swung noiselessly open, and then closed behind him.

He was in a large square-looking room which had a couch and chair set at one corner, and a desk at the far end. Behind the desk was a brass plate, on which was engraved:

The Psychological Research Society—Main Offices

To Malone's left was a hall that angled off into invisibility, and to the left of the desk was another one, going straight back past doors and two radiators until it ran into a right-angled turn and also disappeared.

Malone took in the details of his surroundings almost automatically, filing them in his memory just in case he ever needed to use them.

One detail, however, required more than automatic attention. Sitting behind the desk, her head just below the brass plaque, was a redhead. She was, Malone thought, positively beautiful. Of course, he could not see the lower two-thirds of her body, but if they were half as interesting as the upper third and the face and head, he was willing to spend days, weeks or even months on their investigation. Some jobs, he told himself, feeling a strong sense of duty, were definitely worth taking time over.

She was turned slightly away from Malone, and had obviously not heard him come in. Malone wondered how best to announce himself, and regretfully gave up the idea of tiptoeing up to the girl, placing his hands over her eyes, kissing the back of her neck and crying: "Surprise!" It was elegant, he felt, but it just wasn't right.

He compromised at last on the old established method of throat-clearing to attract her attention. He was sure he could take it from there, to an eminently satisfying conclusion.

He tiptoed on the deep-pile rug right up to her desk. He took a deep breath.

And the expected happened.

He sneezed.

The sneeze was loud and long, and it echoed through the room and throughout the corridors. It sounded to Malone like the blast of a small bomb, or possibly a grenade. Startled himself by the volume of sound he had managed to generate, he jumped back.

The girl had jumped, too, but her leap had been straight upward, about an inch and a half. She came down on her chair and reached up a hand. The hand wiped the back of her neck with a slow, lingering motion of complete loathing. Then, equally slowly, she turned.

"That," she said in a low, sweet voice, "was a hell of a dirty trick."

"It was an accident," Malone said. "The Will of God."

"God has an exceedingly nasty mind," the girl said. "Something, by the way, which I have often suspected." She regarded Malone darkly. "Do you always do that to strangers? Is it some new sort of perversion?"

"I have never done such a thing before," Malone said sternly.

"Oh," the girl said. "An experimenter. Avid for new sensations. Probably a jaded scion of a rich New York family." She paused. "Tell me," she said, "is it fun?"

Malone opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He shut it, thought for a second and then tried again. He got as far as: "I—" before Nemesis overtook him. The second sneeze was even louder and more powerful than the first had been.

"It must be fun," the girl said acidly, producing a handkerchief from somewhere and going to work on her face. "You just can't seem to wait to do it again. Would it do any good to tell you that the fascination with this form of greeting is not universal? Or don't you care?"

"Damn it," Malone said, goaded, "I've got a cold."

"And you feel you should share it with the world," the girl said. "I quite understand. Tell me, is there anything I can do for you? Or has your mission been accomplished?"

"My mission?" Malone said.

"Having sneezed twice at me," the girl said, "do you feel satisfied? Will you vanish softly and silently away? Or do you want to sneeze at somebody else?"

"I want the president of the Society," Malone said. "According to my information, his name is Sir Lewis Carter."

"And if you sneeze at him," the girl said, "yours is going to be mud. He isn't much on novelty."

"I—"

"Besides which," she said, "he's extremely busy. And I don't think he'll see you at all. Why don't you go and sneeze at somebody else? There must be lots of people who would consider themselves honored to be noticed, especially in such a startling way. Why don't you try and find one somewhere? Somewhere very far away."

Malone was beyond speech. He fumbled for his wallet, flipped it open and showed the girl his identification.

"My, my," she said. "And hasn't the FBI anything better to do? I mean, can't you go and sneeze at counterfeiters in their lairs, or wherever they might be?"

"I want to see Sir Lewis Carter," Malone said doggedly.

The girl shrugged and picked up the phone on the desk. It was a blank-vision device, of course; many office intercoms were. She dialed, waited and then said, "Sir Lewis, please." Another second went by. Then she spoke again. "Sir Lewis," she said, "this is Lou, at the front desk. There's a man here named Malone, who wants to see you."

She waited a second. "I don't know what he wants," she told the phone. "But he's from the FBI." A second's pause. "That's right, the FBI," she said. "All right, Sir Lewis. Right away." She hung up the phone and turned to watch Malone warily.

"Sir Lewis," she said, "will see you. I couldn't say why. But take the side corridor to the rear of the suite. His office has his name on it, and I won't tell you you can't miss it because I have every faith that you will. Good luck."

Malone blinked. "Look," he said. "I know I startled you, but I didn't mean to. I—" He started to sneeze, but this time he got his own handkerchief out in time and muffled the explosion slightly.

"Good work," the girl said approvingly. "Tell me, Mr. Malone, have you been toilet-trained, too?"

There was nothing at all to say to that remark, Malone reflected as he wended his way down the side corridor. It seemed endless, and kept branching off unexpectedly. Once he blundered into a large open room filled with people at desks. A woman who seemed to have a great many teeth and rather bulbous eyes looked up at him. "Can I help you?" she said in a fervent whine.

"I sincerely hope not," Malone said, backing away and managing to find the corridor once more. After what seemed like a long time, and two more sneezes, he found a small door which was labeled in capital letters:

THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

SIR LEWIS CARTER

PRESIDENT

Malone sighed. "Well," he muttered, "they certainly aren't hiding anything." He pushed at the door, and it

swung open.

Sir Lewis was a tall, solidly-built man with a kindly expression. He wore grey flannel trousers and a brown tweed jacket, which made an interesting color contrast with his iron-grey hair. His teeth were clenched so firmly on the bit of a calabash pipe with a meerschaum bowl that Malone wondered if he could ever get loose. Malone shut the door behind him, and Sir Lewis rose and extended a hand.

Malone went to the desk and reached across to take the hand. It was firm and dry. "I'm Kenneth Malone," Malone said.

"Ah, yes," Sir Lewis said. "Pleased to meet you. Always happy, of course, to do whatever I can for your FBI. Not only a duty, so to speak, but a pleasure. Sit down. Please do sit down."

Malone found a chair at the side of the desk, and sank into it. It was soft and comfortable. It provided such a contrast to O'Connor's furnishings that Malone began to wish it was Sir Lewis who was employed at Yucca Flats. Then he could tell Sir Lewis everything about the case.

Now, of course, he could only hedge and try to make do without stating very many facts. "Sir Lewis," he said, "I trust you'll keep this conversation confidential."

"Naturally," Sir Lewis said. He removed the pipe, stared at it, and replaced it.

"I can't give you the full details," Malone went on, "but the FBI is presently engaged in an investigation which requires the specialized knowledge your organization seems to have."

"FBI?" Sir Lewis said. "Specialized investigation?" He seemed pleased, but a trifle puzzled. "Dear boy, anything we have is at your disposal, of course. But I quite fail to see how you can consider us—"

"It's rather an unusual problem," Malone said, feeling that that was the understatement of the year. "But I understand that your records go back nearly a century."

"Quite true," Sir Lewis murmured.

"During that time," Malone said, "the Society investigated a great many supposedly supernatural or supernormal incidents."

"Many of them," Sir Lewis said, "were discovered to be fraudulent, I'm afraid. The great majority, in fact."

"That's what I'd assume," Malone said. He fished in his pockets, found a cigarette and lit it. Sir Lewis went on chewing at his unlit pipe. "What we're interested in," Malone said, "is some description of the various methods by which these frauds were perpetrated."

"Ah," Sir Lewis said. "The tricks of the trade, so to speak?"

"Exactly," Malone said.

"Well, then," Sir Lewis said. "The luminous gauze, for instance, that passes for ectoplasm; the various methods of table-lifting; control of the Ouija board-things like that?"

"Not quite that elementary," Malone said. He puffed on the cigarette, wishing it was a cigar. "We're

pretty much up to that kind of thing. But had it ever occurred to you that many of the methods used by phony mind-reading acts, for instance, might be used as communication methods by spies?"

"Why, I believe some have been," Sir Lewis said. "Though I don't know much about that, of course; there was a case during the First World War—"

"Exactly," Malone said. He took a deep breath. "It's things like that we're interested in," he said, and spent the next twenty minutes slowly approaching his subject. Sir Lewis, apparently fascinated, was perfectly willing to unbend in any direction, and jotted down notes on some of Malone's more interesting cases, murmuring: "Most unusual, most unusual," as he wrote.

The various types of phenomena that the Society had investigated came into the discussion, and Malone heard quite a lot about the Beyond, the Great Summerland, Spirit Mediums and the hypothetical existence of fairies, goblins and elves.

"But, Sir Lewis—" he said.

"I make no claims personally," Sir Lewis said. "But I understand that there is a large and somewhat vocal group which does make rather solid-sounding claims in that direction. They say that they have seen fairies, talked with goblins, danced with the elves."

"They must be very unusual people," Malone said, understating heavily.

"Oh," Sir Lewis said, without a trace of irony, "they certainly are."

Talk like this passed away nearly a half-hour, until Malone finally felt that it was the right time to introduce some of his real questions. "Tell me, Sir Lewis," he said. "Have you had many instances of a single man, or a small group of men, controlling the actions of a much larger group? And doing it in such a way that the larger group doesn't even know it is being manipulated?"

"Of course I have," Sir Lewis said. "And so have you. They call it advertising."

Malone flicked his cigarette into an ashtray. "I didn't mean exactly that," he said. "Suppose they're doing it in such a way that the larger group doesn't even suspect that manipulation is going on?"

Sir Lewis removed his pipe and frowned at it. "I may be able to give you a little information," he said slowly, "but not much."

"Ah?" Malone said, trying to sound only mildly interested.

"Outside of mob psychology," Sir Lewis said, "and all that sort of thing, I really haven't seen any record of a case of such a thing happening. And I can't quite imagine anyone faking it."

"But you have got some information?" Malone said.

"Certainly," Sir Lewis said. "There is always spirit control."

"Spirit control?" Malone blinked.

"Demonic intervention," Sir Lewis said. "My name is Legion, you know."

Sir Lewis Legion, Malone thought confusedly, was a rather unusual name. He took a breath and caught hold of his revolving mind. "How would you go about that?" he said, a little hopelessly.

"I haven't the foggiest," Sir Lewis admitted cheerfully. "But I will have it looked up for you." He made a note. "Anything else?"

Malone tried to think. "Yes," he said at last. "Can you give me a condensed report on what is known-and I mean known-on telepathy and teleportation?"

"What you want," Sir Lewis said, "are those cases proven genuine, not the ones in which we have established fraud, or those still in doubt."

"Exactly," Malone said. If he got no other use out of the data, it would provide a measuring-stick for the Society. The general public didn't know that the Government was actually using psionic powers, and the Society's theories, checked against actual fact, would provide a rough index of reliability to use on the Society's other data.

But spirits, somehow, didn't seem very likely. Malone sighed and stood up.

"I'll have copies made of all the relevant material," Sir Lewis said, "from our library and research files. Where do you want the material sent? I do want to warn you of its bulk; there may be quite a lot of it."

"FBI Headquarters, on 69th Street," Malone said. "And send a statement of expenses along with it. As long as the bill's within reason, don't worry about itemizing; I'll see that it goes through Accounting myself."

Sir Lewis nodded. "Fine," he said. "And, if you should have any difficulties with the material, please let me know. I'll always be glad to help."

"Thanks for your co-operation," Malone said. He went to the door, and walked on out.

He blundered back into the same big room again, on his way through the corridors. The bulbous-eyed woman, who seemed to have inherited a full set of thirty-two teeth from each of her parents, gave him a friendly if somewhat crowded smile, but Malone pressed on without a word. After awhile, he found the reception room again.

The girl behind the desk looked up. "How did he react?" she said.

Malone blinked. "React?" he said.

"When you sneezed at him," she said. "Because I've been thinking it over, and I've got a new theory. You're doing a survey on how people act when encountering sneezes. Like Kinsey."

This girl-Lou something, Malone thought, and with difficulty refrained from adding "Gehrig"-had an unusual effect, he decided. He wondered if there were anyone in the world she couldn't reduce to paralyzed silence.

"Of course," she went on, "Kinsey was dealing with sex, and you aren't. At least, you aren't during business hours." She smiled politely at Malone.

"No," he said helplessly, "I'm not."

"It is sneezing, then," she said. "Will I be in the book when it's published?"

"Book?" Malone said, feeling more and more like a rather low-grade moron.

"The book on sneezing, when you get it published," she said. "I can see it now: The Case of Miss X, a Receptionist."

"There isn't going to be any book," Malone said.

She shook her head. "That's a shame," she said. "I've always wanted to be a Miss X. It sounds exciting."

"X," Malone said at random, "marks the spot."

"Why, that's the sweetest thing that's been said to me all day," the girl said. "I thought you could hardly talk, and here you come out with lovely things like that. But I'll bet you say it to all the girls."

"I have never said it to anybody before," Malone said flatly. "And I never will again."

The girl sighed. "I'll treasure it," she said. "My one great moment. Goodbye, Mr.-Malone, isn't it?"

"Ken," Malone said. "Just call me Ken."

"And I'm Lou," the girl said. "Goodbye."

An elevator arrived and Malone ducked into it. Louie? he thought. Louise? Luke? Of course, there was Sir Lewis Carter, who might be called Lou. Was he related to the girl?

No, Malone thought wildly. Relations went by last names. There was no reason for Lou to be related to Sir Lewis. They didn't even look alike. For instance, he had no desire whatever to make a date with Sir Lewis Carter, or to take him to a glittering nightclub, or to make him any whispered propositions. And the very idea of Sir Lewis Carter sitting on the Malone lap was enough to give him indigestion and spots before the eyes.

Sternly, he told himself to get back to business. The elevator stopped at the lobby and he got out and started down the street, feeling that consideration of the lady known as Lou was much more pleasant.

After all, what did he have to work with, as far as his job was concerned?

So far, two experts had told him that his theory was full of lovely little holes. Worse than that, they had told him that mass control of human beings was impossible, as far as they knew.

And maybe it was impossible, he told himself sadly. Maybe he should just junk his whole theory and think up a new one. Maybe there was no psionics involved in the thing at all, and Boyd and O'Connor were right.

Of course, he had a deep-seated conviction that psionics was somewhere at the root of everything, but that didn't necessarily mean anything. A lot of people had deep-seated convictions that they were beetles, or that the world was flat. And then again, murderers often suffered as a result of deep-seated convictions of one sort or another.

On the other hand, maybe he had invented a whole new psionic theory or, at least, observed some new psionic facts. Maybe they would call the results Malonizing, instead of O'Connorizing. He tried to picture a man opening a door and saying: "Come out quick, Mr. Frembits is Malonizing again."

It didn't sound very plausible. But, after all, he did have a deep-seated conviction. He tried to think of a shallow-seated conviction, and failed. Didn't convictions ever stand up, anyhow, or lie down?

He shook his head, discovered that he was on 69th Street, and headed for the FBI Headquarters. His convictions, he had found, were sometimes an expression of his precognitive powers; he determined to ride with them, at least for awhile.

By the time he came to the office of the agent-in-charge, he had figured out the beginnings of a new line of attack.

"How about the ghosts?" the agent-in-charge asked as he passed.

"They'll be along," Malone said. "In a big bundle, addressed to me personally. And don't open the bundle."

"Why not?" the agent-in-charge asked.

"Because I don't want the things to get loose and run around saying boo to everybody," Malone said brightly, and went on.

He opened the door of his private office, went inside and sat down at the desk there. He took his time about framing a thought, a single, clear, deliberate thought:

Your Majesty, I'd like to speak to you.

He hardly had time to finish it. A flash of color appeared in the room, just a few feet from his desk. The flash resolved itself into a tiny, grandmotherly-looking woman with a coronal of white hair and a kindly, twinkling expression. She was dressed in the full court costume of the First Elizabethan period, and this was hardly surprising to Malone. The little old lady believed, quite firmly, that she was Queen Elizabeth I, miraculously preserved over all these centuries. Malone, himself, had practically forgotten that the woman's real name was Rose Thompson, and that she had only been alive for sixty-five years or so. For most of that time, she had been insane.

For all of that time, however, she had been a genuine telepath. She had been discovered during the course of Malone's first psionic case, and by now she had even learned to teleport by "reading" the process in Malone's mind.

"Good afternoon, Sir Kenneth," she said in a regal, kindly voice. She was mad, he knew, but her delusion was nicely kept within bounds. All of her bright world hinged on the single fact that she was unshakably certain of her royalty. As long as the FBI catered to that notion-which included a Royal dwelling for her in Yucca Flats, and the privilege of occasionally knighting FBI agents who had pleased her unpredictable fancy-she was perfectly rational on all other points. She co-operated with Dr. O'Connor and with the FBI in the investigation of her psionic powers, and she had given her Royal word not to teleport except at Malone's personal request.

"I'd like to talk to you," Malone said, "Your Majesty."

There was an odd note in the Queen's voice, and an odd, haunted expression on her face. "I've been hoping you'd ask me to come," she said.

"I had a hunch you were following me telepathically," Malone said. "Can you give me any help?"

"I-I really don't know," she said. "It's something new, and something disturbing. I've never come across anything like it before."

"Like what?" Malone asked.

"It's the—" She made a gesture that conveyed nothing at all to Malone. "The-the static," she said at last.

Malone blinked. "Static?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "You're not telepathic, so I can't tell you what it's really like. But-well, Sir Kenneth, have you ever seen disturbance on a TV screen, when there's some powerful electric output nearby? The bright, senseless snowstorms, the meaningless hash?"

"Sure," Malone said.

"It's like that," she said. "It's a sudden, meaningless, disturbing blare of telepathic energy."

The telephone rang once. Malone ignored it.

"What's causing these disturbances?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know, Sir Kenneth. I don't know," she said. "I can't pick up a person's mind over a distance unless I know him, and I can't see what's causing this at all. It's-frankly, Sir Kenneth, it's rather terrifying."

The phone rang again.

"How long have you been experiencing this disturbance?" Malone asked. He looked at the phone.

"The telephone isn't important," Her Majesty said. "It's only Sir Thomas, calling to tell you he's arrested three spies, and that doesn't matter at all."

"It doesn't?"

"Not at all," Her Majesty said. "What does matter is that I've only been picking up these flashes since you were assigned to this new case, Sir Kenneth. And..." She paused.

"Well?" Malone said.

"And they only appear," Her Majesty said, "when I'm tuned to your mind!"

CHAPTER 5

Malone stared. He tried to say something but he couldn't find any words. The telephone rang again and he pushed the switch with a sense of relief. The beard-fringed face of Thomas Boyd appeared on the

screen.

"You're getting hard to find," Boyd said. "I think you're letting fame and fortune go to your head."

"I left word at the office that I was coming here," Malone said aggrievedly.

"Sure you did," Boyd said. "How do you think I found you? Am I telepathic? Do I have strange powers?"

"Wouldn't surprise me in the least," Malone said. "Now, about those spies—"

"See what I mean?" Boyd said. "How did you know?"

"Just lucky, I guess," Malone murmured. "But what about them?"

"Well," Boyd said, "we picked up two men working in the Senate Office Building, and another one working for the State Department."

"And they are spies?" Malone said. "Real spies?"

"Oh, they're real enough," Boyd said. "We've known about 'em for years, and I finally decided to pick them up for questioning. God knows, but maybe they have something to do with all this mess that's bothering everybody."

"You haven't the faintest idea what you mean," Malone said. "Mess is hardly the word."

Boyd snorted. "You go on getting yourself confused," he said, "while some of us do the real work. After all—"

"Never mind the insults," Malone said. "How about the spies?"

"Well," Boyd said, a trifle reluctantly, "they've been working as janitors and maintenance men, and of course we've made sure they haven't been able to get their hands on any really valuable information."

"So they've suddenly turned into criminal masterminds," Malone said. "After being under careful surveillance for years."

"Well, it's possible," Boyd said defensively.

"Almost anything is possible," Malone said.

"Some things," Boyd said carefully, "are more possible than others."

"Thank you, Charles W. Aristotle," Malone said. "I hope you realize what you've done, picking up those three men. We might have been able to get some good lines on them, if you'd left them where they were."

There is an old story about a general who went on an inspection tour of the front during World War I, and, putting his head incautiously up out of a trench, was narrowly missed by a sniper's bullet. He turned to a nearby sergeant and bellowed: "Get that sniper!"

"Oh, we've got him spotted, sir," the sergeant said. "He's been there for six days now."

"Well, then," the general said, "why don't you blast him out of there?"

"Well, sir, it's this way," the sergeant explained. "He's fired about sixty rounds since he's been out there, and he hasn't hit anything yet. We're afraid if we get rid of him they'll put up somebody who can shoot."

This was standard FBI policy when dealing with minor spies. A great many had been spotted, including four in the Department of Fisheries. But known spies are easier to keep track of than unknown ones. And, as long as they're allowed to think they haven't been spotted, they may lead the way to other spies or spy networks.

"I thought it was worth the risk," Boyd said. "After all, if they have something to do with the case—"

"But they don't," Malone said.

"Damn it," Boyd exploded, "let me find out for myself, will you? You're spoiling all the fun."

"Well, anyhow," Malone said, "they don't."

"You can't afford to take any chances," Boyd said. "After all, when I think about William Logan, I tell myself we'd better take care of every lead."

"Well," Malone said finally, "you may be right. And then again, you may be normally wrong."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Boyd said.

"How should I know?" Malone said. "I'm too busy to go around and around like this. But since you've picked the spies up, I suppose it won't do any harm to find out if they know anything."

Boyd snorted again. "Thank you," he said, "for your kind permission."

"I'll be right down," Malone said.

"I'll be waiting," Boyd said. "In Interrogation Room 7. You'll recognize me by the bullet hole in my forehead and the strange South American poison, hitherto unknown to science, in my esophagus."

"Very funny," Malone said. "Don't give up the ship."

Boyd switched off without a word. Malone shrugged at the blank screen and pushed his own switch. Then he turned slowly back to Her Majesty, who was standing, waiting patiently, at the opposite side of the desk. Interference, he thought, located around him...

"Why yes," she said. "That's exactly what I did say."

Malone blinked. "Your Majesty," he said, "would you mind terribly if I asked you questions before you answered them? I know you can see them in my mind, but it's simpler for me to do things the normal way, just now."

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely. "I do agree that matters are confused enough already. Please go on."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Malone said. "Well, then. Do you mean that I'm the one causing all this

mental static?"

"Oh, no," she said. "Not at all. It's definitely coming from somewhere else, and it's beamed at you, or beamed around you."

"But—"

"It's just that I can only pick it up when I'm tuned to your mind," she said.

"Like now?" Malone said.

She shook her head. "Right now," she said, "there isn't any. It only happens every once in awhile, every so often, and not continuously."

"Does it happen at regular intervals?" Malone asked.

"Not as far as I've been able to tell," Her Majesty said. "It just happens, that's all. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to it. Except that it did start when you were assigned to this case."

"Lovely," Malone said. "Perfectly lovely. And what is it supposed to mean?"

"Interference," she said. "Static. Jumble. That's all it means. I just don't know any more than that, Sir Kenneth; I've never experienced anything like it in my life. It really does disturb me."

That, Malone told himself, he could believe. It must be an experience, he told himself, like having someone you were looking at suddenly dissolve into a jumble of meaningless shapes and lights.

"That's a very good analogy," Her Majesty said. "If you'll pardon me speaking before you've voiced your thought."

"Not at all," Malone said. "Go right ahead."

"Well, then," Her Majesty said. "The analogy you use is a good one. It's just as disturbing and as meaningless as that."

"And you don't know what's causing it?" Malone said.

"I don't know," she said.

"Nor what the purpose of it is?" he said.

Her Majesty shook her head slowly. "Sir Kenneth," she said, "I don't even know whether or not there is any purpose."

Malone sighed deeply. Nothing in the case seemed to make any sense. It wasn't that there were no clues, or no information for him to work with. There were a lot of clues, and there was a lot of information. But nothing seemed to link up with anything else. Every new fact was a bright, shiny arrow pointing nowhere in particular.

"Well, then—" he started.

The intercom buzzed. Malone jabbed ferociously at the button. "Yes?" he said.

"The ghosts are here," the agent-in-charge's voice said.

Malone blinked. "What?" he said.

"You said you were going to get some ghosts," the agent-in-charge said. "From the Psychological Research Society, in a couple of large bundles. And they're here now. Want me to exorcise 'em for you?"

"No," Malone said wearily. "Just send them in to join the crowd. Got a messenger?"

"I'll send them down," the agent-in-charge said. "About one minute."

Malone nodded, realized the man couldn't see him, said: "Fine," and switched off. He looked at his watch. A little over half an hour had passed since he had left the Psychological Research Society offices. That, he told himself, was efficiency.

Not that the books would mean anything, he thought. They would just take their places at the end of the long row of meaningless, disturbing, vicious facts that cluttered up his mind. He wasn't an FBI agent any more; he was a clown and a failure, and he was through. He was going to resign and go to South Dakota and live the life of a hermit. He would drink goat's milk and eat old shoes or something, and whenever another human being came near he would run away and hide. They would call him Old Kenneth, and people would write articles for magazines about The Twentieth Century Hermit.

And that would make him famous, he thought wearily, and the whole circle would start all over again.

"Now, now, Sir Kenneth," Queen Elizabeth said. "Things aren't quite that bad."

"Oh, yes, they are," Malone said. "They're even worse."

"I'm sure we can find an answer to all your questions," Her Majesty said.

"Sure," Malone said. "Even I can find an answer. But it isn't the right one."

"You can?" Her Majesty said.

"That's right," Malone said. "My answer is: to hell with everything."

* * * *

Malone's Washington offices didn't look any different. He sighed and put the two big packages from the Psychological Research Society down on his desk, and then turned to Her Majesty.

"I wanted you to teleport along with me," he said, "because I need your help."

"Yes," she said. "I know."

He blinked. "Oh. Sure you do. But let me go over the details."

Her Majesty waved a gracious hand. "If you like, Sir Kenneth," she said.

Malone nodded. "We're going on down to Interrogation Room 7 now," he said. "Next door to it, there's

an observation room, with a one-way panel in the wall. You'll be able to see us, but we won't be able to see you."

"I really don't require an observation panel," Her Majesty said. "If I enter your mind, I can see through your eyes."

"Oh, sure," Malone said. "But the observation room was built for more normal people-saving your presence, Your Majesty."

"Of course," she said.

"Now," Malone went on, "I want you to watch all three of the men we're going to bring in, and dig everything you can out of their minds."

"Everything?" she said.

"We don't know what might be useful," Malone said. "Anything you can find. And if you want any questions asked-if there's anything you think I ought to ask the men, or say to them-there's a non-vision phone in the observation room. Just lift the receiver. That automatically rings the one in the interrogation room and I'll pick it up. Understand?"

"Perfectly, Sir Kenneth," she said.

"Okay, then," Malone said. "Let's go." They headed for the door. Malone stopped as he opened it. "And by the way," he said.

"Yes?"

"If you get any more of those disturbances, let me know."

"At once," Her Majesty promised.

They went on down the hall and took the elevator down to Interrogation Room 7, on the lowest level. There was no particular reason for putting the interrogation section down there, except that it tended to make prisoners more nervous. And a nervous prisoner, Malone knew, was very possibly a confessing prisoner.

Malone ushered Her Majesty through the unmarked door of the observation chamber, made sure that the panel and phone were in working order, and went out. He stepped into Interrogation Room 7 trying hard to look bored, businesslike and unbeatable. Boyd and four other agents were already there, all standing around and talking desultorily in low tones. None of them looked as if they had a moment's worry in their lives. It was all part of the same technique, of course, Malone thought. Make the prisoner feel resistance is useless, and you've practically got him working for you.

The prisoner was a hulking, flabby fat man in work coveralls. He had black hair that spilled all over his forehead, and tiny button eyes. He was the only man in the room who was sitting down, and that was meant to make him feel even more inferior and insecure. His hands were clasped fatly in his lap, and he was staring down at them in a regretful manner. None of the agents paid the slightest attention to him. The general impression was that something really tough was coming up, but that they were in no hurry for it. They were willing to wait for the third degree, it seemed, until the blacksmith had done a really good job with the new spikes for the Iron Maiden.

The prisoner looked up apprehensively as Malone shut the door. Malone paid no attention to him, and the prisoner unclasped his hands, rubbed them on his coveralls and then reclasped them in his lap. His eyes fell again.

Boyd looked up too. "Hello, Ken," he said. He tapped a sheaf of papers on the single table in the room. Malone went over and picked them up.

They were the abbreviated condensations of three dossiers. All three of the men covered in the dossiers were naturalized citizens, but all had come in as "political refugees" from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia, and from East Germany. Further checking had turned up the fact that all three were actually Russians. They had been using false names during their stay in the United States, but their real ones were appended to the dossiers.

The fat one in the interrogation room was named Alexis Brubitsch. The other two, who were presumably waiting separately in other rooms, were Ivan Borbitsch and Vasili Garbitsch. The collection sounded, to Malone, like a seedy musical-comedy firm of lawyers: Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch. He could picture them dancing gaily across a stage while the strains of music followed them, waving legal forms and telephones and singing away.

Brubitsch did not, however, look very gay. Malone went over to him now, walking slowly, and looked down. Boyd came and stood next to him.

"This is the one who won't talk, eh?" Malone said, wondering if he sounded as much like Dick Tracy as he thought he did. It was a standard opening, meant to make the prisoner think his fellows had already confessed.

"That's him," Boyd said.

"Mmm," Malone said, trying to look as if he were deciding between the rack and the boiling oil. Brubitsch fidgeted slightly, but he didn't say anything.

"We didn't know whether we had to get this one to talk, too," Boyd said. "What with the others, and all. But we did think you ought to have a look at him." He sounded very bored. It was obvious from his tone that the FBI didn't care in the least if Alexis Brubitsch never opened his mouth again, in what was likely to be a very short lifetime.

"Well," Malone said, equally bored, "we might be able to get a few corroborative details."

Brubitsch swallowed hard. Malone ignored him.

"Now, just look at him," Boyd said. "He certainly doesn't look like the head of a spy ring, does he?"

"Of course he doesn't," Malone said. "That's probably why the Russians used him. They figured nobody would ever look twice at a fat slob like this. Nobody would ever suspect him of being the head man."

"I guess you're right," Boyd said. He yawned, which Malone thought was overacting a trifle. Brubitsch saw the yawn, and one hand came up to jerk at his collar.

"Who'd ever think," Malone said, "that he plotted those killings in Redstone-all three of them?"

"It is surprising," Boyd said.

"But, then," Malone said, "we know he did. There isn't any doubt of that."

Brubitsch seemed to be turning a pale green. It was a fascinating color, unlike any other Malone had ever seen. He watched it with interest.

"Oh, sure," Boyd said. "We've got enough evidence from the other two to send this one to the chair tomorrow, if we want to."

"More than enough," Malone agreed.

Brubitsch opened his mouth, shut it again and closed his eyes. His lips moved silently.

"Tell me," Boyd said conversationally, leaning down to the fat man. "Did your orders on that job come from Moscow, or did you mastermind it all by yourself?" Brubitsch's eyes stirred, then snapped open as if they'd been pulled by a string. "Me?" he said in a hoarse bass voice. "I know nothing about this murder. What murder? I know nothing about it."

There were no such murders, of course. But Malone was not ready to let Brubitsch know anything about that. "Oh, the ones you shot in Redstone," he said in an offhand way.

"The what?" Brubitsch said. "I shot people? Never."

"Oh, sure you did," Boyd said. "The others say you did."

Brubitsch's head seemed to sink into his neck. "Borbitsch and Garbitsch, they tell you about a murder? It is not true. Is a lie."

"Really?" Malone said. "We think it's true."

"Is a lie," Brubitsch said, his little eyes peering anxiously from side to side. "Is not true," he went on hopefully. "I have alibi."

"You do?" Boyd said. "For what time?"

"For time when murder happened," Brubitsch said. "I was someplace else."

"Well, then," Malone said, "how do you know when the murders were done? They were kept out of the newspapers." That, he reflected, was quite true, since the murders had never happened. But he watched Brubitsch with a wary eye.

"I know nothing about time," Brubitsch said, jerking at his collar. "I don't know when they happened."

"Then how can you have an alibi?" Boyd snapped.

"Because I didn't do them!" Brubitsch said tearfully. "If I didn't, then I must have alibi!"

"You'd be surprised," Malone said. "Now, about these murders—"

"Was no murder, not by me," Brubitsch said firmly. "Was never any killing of anybody, not even by

accident."

"But your two friends say—" Boyd began.

"My two friends are not my friends," Brubitsch said firmly. "If they tell you about murder and say it was me, they are no friends. I did not murder anybody, I have alibi. I did not even murder anybody a little bit. They are no friends. This is terrible."

"There," Malone said reflectively, "I agree with you. It's positively awful. And I think we might as well give it up. After all, we don't need your testimony. The other two are enough; they'll get maybe ten years apiece, but you're going to get the chair."

"I will not sit down," Brubitsch said firmly. "I am innocent. I am innocent like a small child. Does a small child commit a murder? It is ridiculous."

Boyd picked up his cue with ease. "You might as well give us your side of the story, then," he said easily. "If you didn't commit any murders—"

"I am a small child," Brubitsch announced.

"Okay," Boyd said. "But if you didn't commit any murders, just what have you been doing since you've been in this country as a Soviet agent?"

"I will say nothing," Brubitsch announced. "I am a small child. It is enough." He paused, blinked, and went on, "I will only tell you this: no murders were done by our group in any of our activities."

"And what were your activities?" Malone asked.

"Oh, many things," Brubitsch said. "Many, many things. We—"

The telephone rang loudly, and Malone scooped it up with a practiced hand. "Malone here," he said.

Her Majesty's voice was excited. "Sir Kenneth!" she said. "I just got a tremendous burst of static!"

Malone blinked. Is my mind acting up again? he thought, knowing she would pick it up. Am I being interfered with?

He didn't feel any different. But then, how was he supposed to feel?

"It's not your mind, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "Not this time. It's his mind. That sneaky-thinking Brubitsch fellow."

Brubitsch? Malone thought. Now what is that supposed to mean?

"I don't know, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "But get on back to your questioning. He's ready to talk now."

"Okay," Malone said aloud. "Fine." He hung up and looked back to the Russian sitting on his chair. Brubitsch was ready to talk, and that was one good thing, anyhow. But what was all the static about?

What was going on?

"Now, then," Malone said. "You were telling us about your group activities."

"True," Brubitsch said. "I did not commit any murders. It is possible that Borbitsch committed murders. It is maybe even possible that Garbitsch committed murders. But I do not think so."

"Why not?" Boyd said.

"They are my friends," Brubitsch said. "Even if they tell lies. They are also small children. Besides, I am not even the head of the group."

"Who is?" Malone said.

"Garbitsch," Brubitsch said instantly. "He worked in the State Department, and he told us what to look for in the Senate Office Building."

"What were you supposed to look for?" Boyd said.

"For information," Brubitsch said. "For scraps of paper, or things we overheard. But it was very bad, very bad."

"What do you mean, bad?" Malone said.

"Everything was terrible," Brubitsch said mournfully. "Sometimes Borbitsch heard something and forgot to tell Garbitsch about it. Garbitsch did not like this. He is a very inflamed person. Once he threatened to send Borbitsch to the island of Yap as a spy. That is a very bad place to go to. There are no enjoyments on the island of Yap, and no ones likes strangers there. Borbitsch was very sad."

"What did you do with your information?" Boyd said.

"We remembered it," Brubitsch said. "Or, if we had a scrap of paper, we saved it for Garbitsch and gave it to him. But I remember once that I had some paper. It had a formula on it. I do not know what the formula said."

"What was it about?" Malone said.

Brubitsch gave a massive shrug. "It was about an X and some numbers," he said. "It was not very interesting, but it was a formula, and Garbitsch would have liked it. Unfortunately, I did not give it to him."

"Why not?" Boyd said.

"I am ashamed," Brubitsch said, looking ashamed. "I was lighting a cigarette in the afternoon, when I had the formula. It is a very relaxing thing to smoke a cigarette in the afternoon. It is soothing to the soul." He looked very sad. "I was holding the piece of paper in one hand," he said. "Unfortunately, the match and the paper came into contact. I burned my finger. Here." He stuck out a finger toward Malone and Boyd, who looked at it without much interest for a second. "The paper is gone," he said. "Don't tell Garbitsch. He is very inflamed."

Malone sighed. "But you remember the formula," he said. "Don't you?"

Brubitsch shook his massive head very slowly. "It was not very interesting," he said. "And I do not have a mathematical mind."

"We know," Malone said. "You are a small child."

"It was terrible," Brubitsch said. "Garbitsch was not happy about our activities."

"What did Garbitsch do with the information?" Boyd said.

"He passed it on," Brubitsch said. "Every week he would send a short-wave message to the homeland, in code. Some weeks he did not send the message."

"Why not?" Malone said.

"The radio did not work," Brubitsch said simply. "We received orders by short-wave, but sometimes we did not receive the orders. The radio was of very poor quality, and some weeks it refused to send any messages. On other weeks, it refused to receive any messages."

"Who was your contact in Russia?" Boyd said.

"A man named X," Brubitsch said. "Like in the formula."

"But what was his real name?" Malone said.

"Who knows?" Brubitsch said. "Does it matter?"

"What else did you do?" Boyd said.

"We met twice a week," Brubitsch said. "Sometimes in Garbitsch's home, sometimes in other places. Sometimes we had information. At other times, we were friends, having a social gathering."

"Friends?" Malone said.

Brubitsch nodded. "We drank together, talked, played chess. Garbitsch is the best chess player in the group. I am not very good. But once we had some trouble." He paused. "We had been drinking Russian liquors. They are very strong. We decided to uphold the honor of our country."

"I think," Malone murmured sadly, "I know what's coming."

"Ah?" Brubitsch said, interested. "At any rate, we decided to honor our country in song. And a policeman came and talked to us. He took us down to the police station."

"Why?" Boyd said.

"He was suspicious," Brubitsch said. "We were singing the Internationale, and he was suspicious. It is unreasonable."

"Oh, I don't know," Boyd said. "What happened then?"

"He took us to the police station," Brubitsch said, "and then after a little while he let us go. I do not understand this." "It's all right," Malone said. "I do." He drew Boyd aside for a second, and whispered

to him: "The cops were ready to charge these three clowns with everything in the book. We had a hell of a time springing them so we could go on watching them. I remember the stir-up, though I never did know their names until now."

Boyd nodded, and they returned to Brubitsch, who was staring up at them with surly eyes.

"It is a secret you are telling him," Brubitsch said. "That is not right."

"What do you mean, it's not right?" Malone said.

"It is wrong," Brubitsch went on. "It is not the American way."

He went on, with some prodding, to tell about the activities of the spy ring. It did not seem to be a very efficient spy ring; Brubitsch's long sad tale of forgotten messages, mixed orders, misplaced documents and strange mishaps was a marvel and a revelation to the listening officers. "I've never heard anything like it," one of them whispered in a tone of absolute wonder. "They're almost working on our side."

Over an hour later, Malone turned wearily away from the prisoner. "All right, Brubitsch," he said. "I guess that pretty much covers things for the moment. If we want any more information, though—"

"Call on me," Brubitsch said sadly. "I am not going anyplace. And I will give you all the information you desire. But I did not commit any murders."

"Goodbye, small child," Malone said, as two agents led the fat man away. The other two left soon afterward, and Malone and Boyd were alone.

"Think he was telling the truth?" Boyd said.

Malone nodded. "Nobody," he said, "could make up a story like that."

"I suppose so," Boyd said, and the phone rang. Malone picked it up.

"Well?" he asked.

"He was telling the truth, all right," Her Majesty said. "There are a few more details, of course, like the girl Brubitsch was involved with, Sir Kenneth. But she doesn't seem to have anything to do with the spy ring, and besides, she isn't a very nice person. She always wants money."

"Sounds perfectly lovely," Malone said. "As a matter of fact, I think I know her. I know a lot of girls who always want money. It seems to be in fashion."

"You don't know this one, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said, "and besides, she wouldn't be a good influence on you."

Malone sighed. "How about the static explosions?" he said. "Pick up any more?"

"No," she said. "Just that one."

Malone nodded at the receiver. "All right," he said. "We're going to bring in the second one now. Keep up the good work."

He hung up.

"Who've you got in the observation room?" Boyd asked.

"Queen Elizabeth I," Malone said. "Her Royal Majesty."

"Oh," Boyd said without surprise. "Well, was Brubitsch telling the truth?"

"He wasn't holding back anything important," Malone said, thinking about the girl. It would be nice to meet a bad influence, he thought mournfully. It would be nice to go somewhere with a bad influence (a bad influence, he amended, with a good figure) and forget all about his job, about the spies, about telepathy, teleportation, psionics and everything else. It might be restful.

Unfortunately, it was impossible.

"What's this business about a static explosion?" Boyd said.

"Don't ask silly questions," Malone said. "A static explosion is a contradiction in terms. If something is static, it doesn't move-whoever heard of a motionless explosion?"

"If it is a contradiction in terms," Boyd said, "they're your terms."

"Sure," Malone said. "But I don't know what they mean. I don't even know what I mean."

"You're in a bad way," Boyd said, looking sympathetic.

"I'm in a perfectly terrible way," Malone said, "and it's going to get worse. You wait and see."

"Of course I'll wait and see," Boyd said. "I wouldn't miss the end of the world for anything. It ought to be a great spectacle." He paused. "Want them to bring in the next one?"

"Sure," Malone said. "What have we got to lose but our minds? And who is the next one?"

"Borbitsch," Boyd said. "They're saving Garbitsch for a big finish."

Malone nodded wearily. "Onward," he said, and picked up the phone. He punched a number, spoke a few words and hung up.

A minute later, the four FBI agents came back, leading a man. This one was tall and thin, with the expression of a gloomy, degenerate and slightly nauseated bloodhound. He was led to the chair and he sat down in it as if he expected the worst to start happening at once.

"Well," Malone said in a bored, tired voice. "So this is the one who won't talk."

CHAPTER 6

Midnight.

Kenneth J. Malone sat at his desk, in his Washington office, surrounded by piles of papers covering the desk, spilling off onto the floor and decorating his lap. He was staring at the papers as if he expected

them to leap up, dance round him and shout the solution to all his problems at him in trained choral voices. They did nothing at all.

Seated cross-legged on the rug in the center of the room, and looking like an impossible combination of the last Henry Tudor and Gautama Buddha, Thomas Boyd did nothing either. He was staring downward, his hands folded on his ample lap, wearing an expression of utter, burning frustration. And on a nearby chair sat the third member of the company, wearing the calm and patient expression of the gently-born under all vicissitudes: Queen Elizabeth I.

"All right," Malone said into the silence. "Now let's see what we've got."

"I think we've got cerebral palsy," Boyd said. "It's been coming on for years."

"Don't be funny," Malone said. Boyd gave a short, mirthless bark. "Funny?" he said. "I'm absolutely hysterical with joy and good humor. I'm out of my mind with happiness." He paused. "Anyway," he finished, "I'm out of my mind. Which puts me in good company. The entire FBI, Brubitsch, Borbitsch, Garbitsch, Dr. Thomas O'Connor and Sir Lewis Carter—we're all out of our minds. If we weren't, we'd all move away to the moon."

"And drink to forget," Malone added. "Sure. But let's try and get some work done."

"By all means, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. Boyd had not included her in his list of insane people, and she looked slightly miffed. It was hard for Malone to tell whether she was miffed by the mention of insanity, or at being left out.

"Let's review the facts," Malone said. "This whole thing started with some inefficiency in Congress."

"And some upheavals elsewhere," Boyd said. "Labor unions, gangster organizations."

"Just about all over," Malone said. "And though we've found three spies, it seems pretty obvious that they aren't causing this."

"They aren't causing much of anything," Boyd said. "Except a lot of unbelieving laughter further up the FBI line. I don't think anybody is going to believe our reports of those interviews."

"But they're true," Her Majesty said.

"Sure they're true," Boyd said. "That's the unbelievable part. They read like farce, and not very good farce at that."

"Oh, I don't know," Malone said. "I think they're pretty funny."

"Shall we get back to the business at hand?" Her Majesty said gently.

"Ah," Malone said. "Anyhow, it isn't the spies. And what we now have is confusion even worse compounded."

"Confounded," Boyd said. "John Milton. Paradise Lost, I heard it somewhere."

"I don't mean confounded," Malone said. "I mean confusion. Anyhow, the Russian espionage rings in this country seem to be in as bad a state as the Congress, the labor unions, the syndicates, and all the

rest. And all of them seem to have some sort of weird tie-in to these flashes of telepathic interference.
Right, Your Majesty?"

"I believe so, Sir Kenneth," she said. The old woman looked tired and confused. Somehow, a lot of the brightness seemed to have gone out of her life. "That's right," she said. "I didn't realize there was so much of it going on. You see, Sir Kenneth, you're the only one I can pick up at a distance who has been having these flashes. But now that I'm here in Washington, I can feel it going on all around me."

"It may not have anything to do with everything else," Boyd said.

Malone shook his head. "If it doesn't," he said, "it's the weirdest coincidence I've ever even dreamed about, and my dreams can be pretty strange. No, it's got to be tied in. There's some kind of mental static that is somehow making all these people goof up."

"But why?" Boyd said. "What is it being done for? Just fun?"

"God only knows," Malone said. "But we're going to have to find out."

"In that case," Boyd said, "I suggest lots and lots of prayers."

Her Majesty looked up. "That's a fine idea," she said.

"But God helps those," Malone said, "who help themselves. And we're going to help ourselves. Mostly with facts."

"All right," Boyd said. "So far, all the facts have been a great help."

"Well, here's one," Malone said. "We got one flash each from Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch while we were questioning them. And in each case, that flash occurred just before they started to blab everything they knew. Before the flash, they weren't talking. They were behaving just like good spies and keeping their mouths shut. After the flash, they couldn't talk fast enough."

"That's true," Boyd said reflectively. "They did seem to give up pretty fast, even for amateurs."

Malone nodded. "So the question is this," he said. "Just what happens during those crazy bursts of static?"

He looked expectantly at Her Majesty, but she shook her head sadly. "I don't know," she said. "I simply don't know. It's just noise to me, meaningless noise." She put her hands slowly over her face. "People shouldn't do things like that to their Sovereign," she said in a muffled voice.

Malone got up and went over to her. She wasn't crying, but she wasn't far from it. He put an arm around her thin shoulders. "Now, look, Your Majesty," he said in gentle tones, "this will all clear up. We'll find out what's going on, and we'll find a way to put a stop to it."

"Sure we will," Boyd said. "After all, Your Majesty, Sir Kenneth and I will work hard on this."

"And the Queen's own FBI," Malone said, "won't stop until we've finished with this whole affair, once and for all."

Her Majesty brought her hands down from her face, very slowly. She was forcing a smile, but it didn't

look too well. "I know you won't fail your Queen," she said. "You two have always been the most loyal of my subjects."

"We'll work hard," Malone said. "No matter how long it takes."

"Because, after all," Boyd said in a musing, thoughtful tone, "it is a serious crime, you know."

The words seemed to have an effect on Her Majesty, like a tonic. For a second her face wore an expression of Royal anger and indignance, and the accustomed strength flowed back into her aged voice. "You're quite correct, Sir Thomas!" she said. "The security of the Throne and the Crown are at stake!"

Malone blinked. "What?" he said. "Are you two talking about something? What crime is this?"

"An extremely serious one," Boyd said in a grave voice. He rose unsteadily to his feet, planted them firmly on the carpet, and frowned.

"Go on," Malone said, fascinated. Her Majesty was watching Boyd with an intent expression.

"The crime," Boyd said, "the very serious crime involved, is that of Threatening the Welfare of the Queen. The criminal has committed the crime of Causing the Said Sovereign, Baselessly, Reasonlessly and Without Consent or Let, to Be in a State of Apprehension for Her Life or Her Well-Being. And this crime—"

"Aha," Malone said. "I've got it. The crime is—"

"High treason," Boyd intoned.

"High treason," Her Majesty said with satisfaction and fire in her voice.

"Very high treason," Malone said. "Extremely high."

"Stratospheric," Boyd agreed. "That is, of course," he added, "if the perpetrators of this dastardly crime are Her Majesty's subjects."

"My goodness," the Queen said. "I never thought of that. Suppose they're not?"

"Then," Malone said in his most vibrant voice, "it is an Act of War."

"Steps," Boyd said, "must be taken."

"We must do our utmost," Malone said. "Sir Thomas—"

"Yes, Sir Kenneth?" Boyd said.

"This task requires our most fervent dedication," Malone said. "Please come with me."

He went to the desk. Boyd followed him, walking straight-backed and tall. Malone bent and removed from a drawer of the desk a bottle of bourbon. He closed the drawer, poured some bourbon into two handy water-glasses from the desk, and capped the bottle. He handed one of the water-glasses to Boyd, and raised the other one aloft.

"Sir Thomas," Malone said, "I give you Her Majesty, the Queen!"

"To the Queen!" Boyd echoed.

They downed their drinks and turned, as one man, to hurl the glasses into the wastebasket.

In thinking it over later, Malone realized that he hadn't considered anything about that moment silly at all. Of course, an outsider might have been slightly surprised at the sequence of events, but Malone was no outsider. And, after all, it was the proper way to treat a Queen, wasn't it?

And...

When Malone had first met Her Majesty, he had wondered why, although she could obviously read minds, and so knew perfectly well that neither Malone nor Boyd believed she was Queen Elizabeth I, she insisted on an outward show of respect and dedication. He'd asked her about it at last, and her reply had been simple, reasonable and to the point.

According to her-and Malone didn't doubt it for an instant-most people simply didn't think their superiors were all they claimed to be. But they acted as if they did, at least while in the presence of those superiors. It was a common fiction, a sort of handy oil on the wheels of social intercourse.

And all Her Majesty had ever insisted on was the same sort of treatment.

"Bless you," she'd said, "I can't help the way you think, but, as Queen, I do have some control over the way you act."

The funny thing, as far as Malone was concerned, was that the two parts of his personality were becoming more and more alike. He didn't actually believe that Her Majesty was Queen Elizabeth I, and he hoped fervently that he never would. But he did have a great deal of respect for her, and more affection than he had believed possible at first. She was the grandmother Malone had never known; she was good, and kind, and he wanted to keep her happy and contented. There had been nothing at all phony in the solemn toast he had proposed, nor in the righteous indignation he had felt against anyone who was giving Her Majesty even a minute's worth of discomfort.

And Boyd, surprisingly enough, seemed to feel the same way. Malone felt good about that; Her Majesty needed all the loyal supporters she could get.

But all of this was later. At the time, Malone was doing nothing except what came naturally. Nor, apparently, was Boyd. After the glasses had been thrown, with a terrifying crash, into the metal wastebasket, and the reverberations of that second had stopped ringing in their ears, a moment of silence had followed.

Then Boyd turned, briskly rubbing his hands. "All right," he said. "Let's get back to work."

Malone looked at the proud, happy look on Her Majesty's face; he saw the glimmer of a tear in the corner of each eye. But he gave no indication that he had noticed anything at all out of the ordinary.

"Fine," he said. "Now, getting on back to the facts, we've established something, anyhow. Some agency is causing flashes of telepathic static all over the place. And those flashes are somehow connected with the confusion that's going on all around us. Somehow, these flashes have an effect on the minds of people."

"And we know at least one manifestation of that effect," Boyd said. "It makes spies blab all their secrets when they're exposed to it."

"These three spies, anyhow," Malone said.

"If spies is the right word," Boyd said.

"Okay," Malone said. "And now we've got another obvious question."

"It seems to me we've got about twelve," Boyd said.

"I mean, who's doing it?" Malone said. "Who is causing these telepathic flashes?"

"Maybe it's just happening," Boyd said. "Out of thin air."

"Maybe," Malone said. "But let's go on the assumption that there's a human cause. The other way, we can't do a thing except sit back and watch the world go to hell."

Boyd nodded. "It doesn't seem to be the Russians," he said. "Although, of course, it might be a Red herring."

"What do you mean?" Malone said.

"Well," Boyd said, "they might have known we were on to Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch—" He stopped. "You know," he said, "every time I say that name I have to reassure myself that we're not all walking around in the world of Florenz Ziegfeld."

"Likewise," Malone said. "But go on."

"Sure," Boyd said. "Anyhow, they might have set the three of them up as patsies, just in case we stumbled on to this mess. We can't overlook this possibility."

"Right," Malone said. "It's faint, but it is a possibility. In other words, the agency behind the flashes might be Russian, and it might not be Russian."

"That clears that up nicely," Boyd said. "Next question?"

"The next one," Malone said grimly, "is, what's behind the flashes? Some sort of psionic power is causing them, that much is obvious."

"I'll go along with that," Boyd said. "I have to go along with it. But don't think I like it."

"Nobody likes it," Malone said. "But let's go on. O'Connor isn't any help; he washes his hands of the whole business."

"Lucky man," Boyd said.

"He says that it can't be happening," Malone said, "and if it is we're all screwy. Now, right or wrong, that isn't an opinion that gives us any handle to work with."

"No," Boyd said reflectively. "A certain amount of comfort, to be sure, but no handles."

"Sir Lewis Carter, on the other hand—" Malone said. He fumbled through some of the piles of paper until he had located the ones the president of the Psychical Research Society had sent. "Sir Lewis Carter," he went on, "does seem to be doing some pretty good work. At least, some of the more modern stuff he sent over looks pretty solid. They've been doing quite a bit of research into the subject, and their theories seem to be all right, or nearly all right, to me. Of course, I'm not an expert."

"Who is?" Boyd said. "Except for O'Connor, of course."

"Well, somebody is," Malone said. "Whoever's doing all this, for instance. And the theories do seem okay. In most cases, for instance, they agree with O'Connor's work, though they're not in complete agreement."

"I should think so," Boyd said. "O'Connor wouldn't recognize an astral plane if TWA were putting them into service."

"I don't mean that sort of thing," Malone said. "There's lots about astral bodies and ghosts, ectoplasm, Transcendental Yoga, theosophy, deros, the Great Pyramid, Atlantis, Mu, norms, and other such ridiculous pets. That's just silly, as far as I can see. But what they have to say about parapsychology and psionics as such does seem to be reasonably accurate."

"I suppose so," Boyd said tiredly.

"Okay, then," Malone said. "Did anybody notice anything in that pile of stuff that might conceivably have any bearing whatever on our problems?"

"I did," Boyd said. "Or I think I did."

"You both did," Her Majesty said. "And so did I, when I looked through it. But I didn't bother with it. I dismissed it."

"Why?" Malone said.

"Because I don't think it's true," she said. "However, my opinion is really only an opinion." She smiled around at the others.

Malone picked up a thick sheaf of papers from one of the piles of his desk. "Let's get straight what it is we're talking about," he said. "All right?"

"Anything's all right with me," Boyd said. "I'm easy to please."

Malone nodded. "Now, this writer-what's his name?" he said. He glanced at the copy of the cover page. "Minds and Morons," he read. "By Cartier Taylor."

"Great title," Boyd said. "Does he say which is which?"

"Let's get back to serious business," Malone said, giving Boyd a single look. There was silence for a second, and then Malone said, "He mentions something, in the book, that he calls 'telepathic projection.' As far as I understand what he's talking about, that's some method of forcing your thoughts on another person." He glanced over at the Queen. "Now, Your Majesty," he said, "you don't think it's true-and

that may only be an opinion, but it's a pretty informed one. It seems to me as if Taylor makes a good case for this 'telepathic projection' of his. Why don't you think so?"

"Because," Her Majesty said flatly, "it doesn't work."

"You've tried it?" Boyd put in.

"I have," she said. "And I have had no success with it at all. It's a complete failure."

"Now, wait a minute," Boyd said. "Just a minute."

"What's the matter?" Malone said. "Have you tried it, and made it work?"

Boyd snorted. "Fat chance," he said. "I just want to look at the thing, that's all." He held out his hand, and Malone gave him the sheaf of papers. Boyd leafed through them slowly, stopping every now and again to consult a page, until he found what he was looking for. "There," he said.

"There what?" Malone said.

"Listen to this," Boyd said. "For those who draw the line at demonic possession, I suggest trying telepathic projection. Apparently, it is possible to project one's own thoughts directly into the mind of another—even to the point of taking control of the other's mind. Hypnotism? You tell me, and we'll both know. Ever since the orthodox scientists have come around to accepting hypnotism, I'm been chary of it. Maybe there really is an astral body or a soul that a person has stashed about him somewhere—something that he can send out to take control of another human being. But I, personally, prefer the telepathic projection theory. All you have to do is squirt your thoughts across space and spray them all over the other fellow's brain. Presto-bingo, he does pretty much what you want him to do."

"That's the quote I was thinking of," Malone said.

"Of course it is," Her Majesty said. "But it really doesn't work. I've tried it."

"How have you tried it?" Malone said.

"There were many times, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said, "when I wanted someone to do something particular for me or for some other person. After all, you must remember that I was in a hospital for a long time. Of course, that represents only a short segment of my life-span, but it seemed long to me."

Malone, who was trying to view the years from age fifteen to age sixty-odd as a short segment of anybody's lifetime, remembered with a shock that this was not Rose Thompson speaking. It was Queen Elizabeth I, who had never died.

"That's right, Sir Kenneth," she said kindly. "And in that hospital, there were a number of times when I wanted one of the doctors or nurses to do what I wanted them to. I tried many times, but I never succeeded."

Boyd nodded his head. "Well—" he began.

"Oh, yes, Sir Thomas," Her Majesty said. "What you're thinking is certainly possible. It may even be true."

"What is he thinking?" Malone said.

"He thinks," Her Majesty said, "that I may not have the talent for this particular effect-and perhaps I don't. But, talent or not, I know what's possible and what isn't. And the way Mr. Taylor describes it is simply silly, that's all. And unladylike. Imagine any self-respecting lady 'squirting' her thoughts about in space!"

"Well," Malone said carefully, "aside from its being unladylike—"

"Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said, "you are not telepathic. Neither is Sir Thomas."

"I'm nothing," Boyd said. "I don't even exist."

"And it is very difficult to explain to the non-telepath just what Mr. Taylor is implying," Her Majesty went on imperturbably. "Before you could inject any thoughts into anyone else's mind, you'd have to be able to see into that mind. Is that correct?"

"I guess so," Malone said.

"And in order to do that, you'd have to be telepathic," Her Majesty said. "Am I correct?"

"Correct," Malone said.

"Well, then," Her Majesty said with satisfaction, and beamed at him.

A second passed.

"Well, then, what?" Malone said in confusion.

"Telepathy," Her Majesty said patiently, "is an extremely complex affair. It involves a sort of meshing with the mind of this other person. It has nothing, absolutely nothing, in common with this simple 'squirting' of thoughts across space, as if they were orange pips you were trying to put into a wastebasket. No, Sir Kenneth, I cannot believe in what Mr. Taylor says."

"But it's still possible," Malone said.

"Oh," Her Majesty said, "it's certainly possible. But I should think that if any telepaths were around, and if they were changing people's minds by 'squirting' at them, I would know it."

Malone frowned. "Maybe you would at that," he said. "I guess you would."

"Not to mention," Boyd put in, "that if you were going to control everything we've come across like that you'd need an awful lot of telepathic operators."

"That's true," Malone admitted. "And the objections seem to make some sense. But what else is there to go on?"

"I don't know," Boyd said. "I haven't the faintest idea. And I'm rapidly approaching the stage where I don't care."

"Well," Malone said, heaving a sigh, "let's keep looking."

He bent down and picked up another sheaf of copies from the Psychological Research Society.

"After all," he said, without much hope, "you never know."

* * * *

Malone looked around the office of Andrew J. Burriss as if he'd never seen it before. He felt tired, and worn out, and depressed; it had been a long night, and here it was morning and the head of the FBI was giving him instructions. It was, Malone told himself, a hell of a life.

"Now, Malone," Burriss said, "this is a very ticklish situation. You've got to handle it with great care."

"I can see that," Malone said apprehensively. "It certainly looks ticklish. And unusual."

"Well, we don't want any trouble," Burriss said. "We have enough trouble now."

"Sometimes I think we have too much," Malone said.

"That's our job," Burriss said, looking grim.

Malone blinked. "What is?" he said.

"Having trouble," Burriss said.

There was a short silence. Malone broke it. "Anyhow," he said, "you feel we have enough trouble, so we're trying to make things easy for everybody."

Burriss nodded. "I've talked with the president," he said, "and he feels this is the best way to handle matters."

Malone tried to imagine Burriss explaining the incredible complexities of the situation to the president, and was torn between relief that he hadn't been there and a curious wish to have heard the scrambled conversation that must have taken place. "The way it seems to me," he said cautiously, "shipping those spies back to Russia is a worse punishment than sending them to the federal pen."

"Maybe it is," Burriss said. "Maybe it is. How would you feel if you were being sent to jail?"

"Innocent," Malone said instantly.

"But that isn't the point," Burriss went on. "You see, Malone, we don't really have much damaging evidence against those spies, except for their confessions. During all the time we were watching them, we took care that they never did come up with anything dangerous; we weren't fishing for them but for their superiors, for the rest of the network."

"There doesn't seem to be any more network," Malone said. "Not in this country, anyhow."

"Sure," Burriss said. "We know that now, thanks to the confessions, and to Her Majesty. But we can't prosecute on that sort of evidence. You know what a good defense attorney could do with unsupported confessions-and even if we wanted to take the lid off telepathy for the general public, it would be absolute hell bringing it into court."

"So," Malone said, "we can't put them in prison, even if we want to."

"Oh, I didn't say that," Burris said hastily. "We could probably win, even against a good defense. But they wouldn't get much time in prison, and we'd only end up deporting them in any case."

Malone fished for a cigarette, lit it and blew out smoke. "So we're going to save the taxpayers some money," he said. "That'll be nice for a change."

"That's right," Burris said, beaming. "We're going to save Federal funds by shipping them back to their motherland now. After all, they did take out their naturalization papers under false names, and their declarations are chockfull of false information. So all it takes is a court order to declare their citizenships null and void, and hand all three of them back to the Soviets."

"A nice, simple housecleaning," Malone said. "All open and above-board. And the confessions will certainly stand up in a deportation hearing."

"No question of it," Burris said. "But the reason I called you here, Malone, is that there's still one thing bothering me."

Malone blew out some more smoke, thought wistfully about cigars, and said: "What? Everything seems simple enough to me."

Burris frowned and leaned back in his chair. "It's this notion of yours, Malone," he said.

"Notion?"

"About going over there," Burris said. "Now, I can understand your wanting some facts on Moscow, current background and all that sort of thing. So far, everything makes sense."

"Fine," Malone said warily.

"But, after all, Malone," Burris said, "we do have such a thing as the Central Intelligence Agency. They send us reports. That's what they're for. And why you want to ignore the reports and make a trip over there to walk around and see for yourself—"

"It's because of everything that's happening," Malone said.

Burris looked puzzled. "What?" he said.

"Because of all the confusion," Malone said. "Frankly, I can't trust the CIA, or any other branch of the government. I've got to see for myself."

Burris considered this for a second. "It's going to look very peculiar," he said.

Malone shrugged. "Everything looks peculiar," he said. "A little more won't hurt anything. And if I do turn up anything we can use, the whole trip will be worth it."

"But sending an FBI man along with Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch is a little strange," Burris said. "Not to mention Her Majesty."

"There is that," Malone said. "I wonder what our Red friends are going to think of the Queen."

"God knows," Burris said. "If they take her seriously, they're liable to call her some sort of capitalist deviationist."

"And if they don't take her seriously?" Malone said.

"Then they're going to wonder why she's pretending to be a capitalist deviationist," Burris said.

Malone flicked his cigarette at an ashtray. "You can't win," he said.

"Frankly," Burris said, "I wouldn't allow Her Majesty to go along under any circumstances—except that there is an excuse for having an older woman around."

"There is?" Malone said.

Burris nodded. "As a chaperone," he said.

"Now, wait a minute," Malone said. "Brubitsch, Borbitsch and what's-his-name don't need a chaperone."

"I didn't say it was for them," Burris said.

"Me?" Malone asked in a tone of absolute wonder. "Now, Chief, I don't need a chaperone. I'm a grown man. I know my way around. And the idea of having Her Majesty along to chaperone me is going to make everything look even stranger. After all, Chief—"

"Malone," Burris said, in a voice of steel.

"Sorry," Malone mumbled. "But, really, I'm not some young, innocent girl in a Victorian novel."

"No," Burris said, a trifle sadly, "you're not. But there is one going along on the trip with the rest of you."

"There is?" Malone said. "Who is she? Rebecca?"

"Her name's Luba," Burris said. "Luba Garbitsch."

"Garbitsch's wife?" Malone said.

Burris shook his head. "His daughter," he said. "And don't tell me there isn't any such name as Luba. I know there isn't. But what would you pick to go with Garbitsch?"

"Wastepaper basket," Malone said instantly. "Grapefruit rinds. Lemon peels. Coffee grounds."

"Damn it, Malone," Burris said, "this is serious."

"Well," Malone said, "it doesn't sound serious. What are we doing, deporting the entire family?"

"I suppose we could," Burris said, "if we really wanted to get complicated about it. What with Garbitsch's false declaration, I haven't the faintest idea what his daughter's status would be—but she was born here, Malone, and as far as we can tell she's perfectly loyal to the United States."

"Fine," Malone said. "So you're sending her to Russia. This is making less and less sense, you know."

Burriss rubbed a hand over his face. "Malone," he said in a quiet, patient voice, "why don't you wait for me to finish? Then everything will make sense. I promise."

"Well, all right," Malone said doubtfully. "Luba Garbitsch is going along to Russia, in spite of the fact that she's perfectly loyal."

"True," Burriss said. "You see, Malone, she loves her traitorous old daddy just the same. Family affection. Very touching."

"And if he's going to Moscow—"

"She wants to go along," Burriss said. "That's right."

"And you're going to send her along," Malone said, "out of the goodness of your kindly old heart. Just like Santa Claus. Or the Easter bunny."

Burriss looked acutely uncomfortable. "Now, Malone," he said. "It's not exactly that, and you know it."

"It isn't?" Malone said, trying to look surprised.

Burriss shook his head. "If we send Luba Garbitsch along," he said, "that gives us a good excuse for Her Majesty. As a chaperone."

"Are you sure," Malone asked slowly, "that anybody with a name like Luba Garbitsch could plausibly need a chaperone? Even in a den of vice? Because somehow it doesn't sound right: Luba Garbitsch, chaperoned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I."

"Well," Burriss said, "it won't be the Queen. I mean, she won't be known as the Queen."

"Incognito?" Malone said.

Burriss shrugged. "In away," he said. "What do you think would be a good name for her to travel under?"

Malone considered. "I don't know," he said at last. "But no more Lubas."

"I was thinking," Burriss said carefully. "How about Rose Thompson?"

There was a long silence.

"I don't know whether she'll go for the idea," Malone said. "But I'll try it."

"You can do it, Malone," Burriss said instantly. "I know you can. I just know it." "Your faith," Malone said with a sigh, "is going to be too much for me one of these days."

Burriss shrugged. "Just take it easy, Malone," he said. "You said you wanted to have Her Majesty over there to read a few minds, and you've got her. But remember, don't get involved in anything complicated. Don't start any fireworks."

"I hope not," Malone said.

"Stay out of political arguments," Burris said.

Malone blinked. "What do you think I'm going to do?" he said. "Bring along a soapbox?"

"You never know," Burris said. "Just keep quiet, and don't go prowling around where you're not wanted."

"That," Malone said decisively, "would keep me out of Russia entirely."

"Damn it," Burris said, "you know what I mean. We don't want any international incidents, understand?"

"Yes, sir," Malone said.

Burris nodded. "All right, then," he said. "Your plane leaves from the airport in an hour. You'd better go and talk to Her Majesty first."

"Right," Malone said.

"And I hope you know what you're doing," Burris said.

So do I, Malone thought privately. Aloud, he said, "I just want to get the feel of things over there, that's all, sir. I won't cause any more trouble than an ordinary tourist."

"Malone," Burris said, "don't be an ordinary tourist. They're empty-headed morons and they do make trouble. Be an invisible tourist. Be nice to everybody. Be polite and kind. Don't step on any toes, no matter whose and no matter why."

"Yes, sir," Malone said.

"Remember, they're going to know who you are," Burris said.

"It's not as if we could keep it a secret."

"Yes, sir," Malone said. "I'll remember."

"All right," Burris extended his hand. "Good luck, Malone," he said, with a deeper feeling of sincerity than Malone had experienced from him in months.

Malone shook the hand. "Thank you, sir," he said.

* * * *

A little less than an hour later, Malone sat on the steps of the landing ramp that led up to the open door of the big Air Force transport plane on the runway. The plane was waiting, and so was Malone. He didn't feel confident, or even excited. He felt just a little bit frightened. Burris' complicated warnings had had some effect, and Malone was fighting down a minor case of the shakes.

Next to him, her face wreathed in happy smiles, sat a smartly-dressed grey-haired woman in her sixties. She wore an unobtrusive tailored suit and a light jacket, and she looked as if she might be one of the elder matrons of the society set, very definitely an upper-crust type. In spite of the normality of her clothing, Her Majesty looked every inch a Queen, Malone thought.

"And that, Sir Kenneth, is only natural," she said sweetly. "Even when traveling incognito, one must retain one's dignity. And I don't object at all to using the name of Rose Thompson in a good cause; it was used for so many years it almost feels like part of me."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," Malone said mildly.

A voice from above and behind him interrupted his worried thoughts. "Mr. Malone!" it said. "Mr. Malone?"

Malone screwed his head around and looked up. An Air Force colonel was standing in the doorway of the plane, looking down with a stern, worried expression. "Yes?" Malone said. "What is it?"

"Takeoff, Mr. Malone," the colonel said. "We're due to go in fifteen minutes, and our clearance has been established."

"Fine," Malone said.

"But your passengers," the colonel said. "Where are they?"

Malone tried to look calm, cool and collected. "They'll be here," he said. "Don't worry about a thing." Privately, he hoped he was right. Boyd hadn't shown up yet, and Boyd was bringing the musical-comedy spy trio. It wasn't, Malone thought, that Boyd was usually late. But with Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch in tow, almost anything could happen, he thought. He hoped fervently that it wouldn't.

"It won't," Her Majesty said. "At least, it hasn't so far. They're all in a car, and they're driving right here. Boyd is thinking that he ought to be here within five minutes." Malone nodded, wiping his forehead. "Five minutes, Colonel," he called back to the figure at the door. The colonel nodded efficiently at him, turned and disappeared inside the plane. Malone looked at his watch. The second hand was going around awfully fast, he thought. He wondered if it were possible for time to speed up while he waited, so that by the time Boyd arrived he would be an old, old man. He felt about eight years older already, he told himself, and a minute hadn't even passed.

He forced his eyes away from the moving second hand. Looking at it, he knew, would only make him more nervous. Maybe there was some scenery around that he could stare at. He raised his eyes and looked out toward the gates that led to the interior of the air terminal.

Scenery, he told himself in sudden wonder, was no word for it.

He stared. He wanted to blink, but at the same time he felt that it would be a shame to close his eyes for even a tenth of a second. He held his eyelids apart by main force and went right on staring.

The girl walking toward him across the field was absolutely beautiful. She seemed to make everything light up and start singing. Malone was sure that, somewhere, he could hear birds plugging their favorite numbers, and the soft rustle of the wind through pine branches. He could feel the soft caress of the wind on his face, and he could smell the odor of lilacs and honeysuckles and violets and whatever all those other flowers were. They had all different colors and shapes, and he couldn't remember many of their names, but he could tell they were all around him. They had to be all around him. Especially all the red ones.

The girl had red hair that tossed gently in the wind. The bottom two-thirds of her figure, Malone was

happy to note, was not only as good as the top third but a good deal better. It took him several seconds to reach this conclusion, because at first he was willing to swear that he had never seen such a beautiful girl before.

But, he told himself with a shade of apprehension, he had.

As she approached, he stood up. "Well, well," he said brightly. "If it isn't the Lady That's Known as Lou. Did the Psychological Research Society give you the day off, or are you here to see about a misplaced broom?"

The girl beamed at him. "My, my," she said. "How are you?"

"Fine," Malone said. "And—"

"And how are the others?" she said.

Malone blinked. "Others?" he said.

She nodded. "Grumpy, Sleepy, Happy, Dopey, Bashful and Doc," she said.

Malone opened his mouth, shut it again, and thought for a second. "Now, wait a minute," he said at last. "That's not fair. I—"

"Oh," she said. "And I nearly forgot. I owe you one from last time: gesundheit."

"And many happy returns," Malone said. "Seriously, what are you doing out here?"

"Talking," the girl said. "To you. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"I mean in general," Malone said desperately.

"In general," she said agreeably, "I'm here to take a little trip."

"Oh," Malone said. "By plane?"

She smiled sweetly and shook her head. "Not at all," she said. "I'm waiting for the next scheduled broomstick."

Malone took a deep breath. "When does your plane leave?" he said doggedly.

"In ten minutes or so," she said.

"Then you'd better hurry and get on," he said.

She nodded. "That's what I thought," she said.

A second passed.

"Did you want to say something?" Malone said uncomfortably.

She shook her head. "Not particularly," she said.

"Well, then—"

"The time is growing short," she said.

"Isn't it, though?" Malone said, feeling a little mystified. "Well, now. Goodbye. I'll see you soon."

"Goodbye," she said.

Another second passed.

"Your plane—" Malone started.

"How about yours?" she said.

"I'm all right," Malone said nervously. "But if your plane's leaving in ten minutes you'd better get on it."

"I intend to," she said, without moving.

"Well—" Malone started.

"As soon as you quit blocking the ramp," she said. "Would you mind terribly if I climbed over your head? Because I do have to get on board."

"Now wait a minute," Malone said. "This isn't your plane."

"How do you know?" she said. "Do you own it? Are you flying it away?"

"Well," Malone said helplessly, "it's my plane, and there's nobody going on it but—"

He paused. A great light seemed to burst in his mind, shedding a perfectly horrible glow over the wreck of his mental processes. "You know," he said in a tentative tone, "we never have been properly introduced. I only know your name is Lou."

"That's what people call me," the girl said. "For short. I'm Luba Garbitsch."

"And I'm Kenneth Malone," Malone said. "Kenneth J. Malone. Of the FBI."

She nodded. "Yes," she said. "I know."

"Your father—"

"My father is going to Russia," she said, "and I am going along with him."

"Oh," Malone said. "Sure. Sure. Oh."

There was a longer silence.

"Can I get on board now?" Luba said.

"There isn't any hurry," Malone said. "We're still waiting for-for passengers. And this is one of them." He

turned and indicated the Queen. "This is Her-Rose Thompson. She'll be traveling along with us."

Her Majesty was wearing a broad, broad grin, Malone noticed nervously as he turned. Undoubtedly she had been tuned in to the whole conversation, and knew just what had gone on in both minds. But she only said, "I'm very pleased to meet you, my dear."

Lou blinked, smiled and stretched out her hand. "Well, then," she said. "Hello. And let's all have a happy trip."

"By all means," Malone said. "And the trip seems to be about to start."

He could hear the tramping of a lot of feet coming across the field toward them. He looked and saw that the feet were all neatly attached to bodies, two to a body. There were Thomas Boyd's feet, the assorted twelve feet of six FBI agents, and three pairs that belonged to Alexis Brubitsch, Ivan Borbitsch and Vasili Garbitsch. Brubitsch looked even fatter than ever, Borbitsch even thinner. Garbitsch was of an indeterminate middling shape; he had grey hair and a pair of pince-nez, and he walked a trifle unevenly, like a duck, with his hands clasped low in front of him. He was looking down at the ground as the crowd shoved him along.

When the crowd neared the steps, Luba went over to him. Garbitsch looked up, with a pleasant, somehow wistful smile on his face. "Hello, Luba, my child," he said.

Luba smiled, too. "Hello, Dad," she said. "All ready to go?"

"Certainly I am ready," he said. "I am all packed. We take off in a few minutes. And you, Luba, my child?"

"Fine, Dad," she said.

She looked down. "They've got handcuffs on you," she said. "Why, that's—"

Garbitsch shrugged. He looked even more wistful. "A formality," he said. "It makes no difference."

"Okay," Boyd said suddenly. "We've got to get out of here pretty soon, and you'll be taking off. Let's break it up. Miss Thompson, you and Luba go aboard. Malone, you follow with the others."

Malone rounded up Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch and followed the ladies aboard.

He came back to the door then, and stuck his head out. "The keys," he said.

Boyd stared. "What?"

"The keys to the handcuffs," Malone said. "I'll need 'em."

"You're going to take them off when they get to Russia?" Boyd said.

Malone shook his head. "No," he said. "Now."

"But—"

"I think we'll have plenty of warning if they decide to try anything, Tom," Malone said quietly. "Her

Majesty, after all, is keeping them under surveillance."

Without another word, Boyd tossed up the keys. Malone caught and pocketed them. "I'll be back as soon as possible," he said. "Meanwhile, you can keep digging on other stuff-what we've discussed and anything it seems to lead into."

"Right," Boyd said. "Stay out of trouble, Ken. So long."

Malone nodded and ducked back into the plane. He unlocked the handcuffs, and Brubitsch and Borbitsch immediately went and sat down mournfully together at the back of the plane. Malone looked for Lou, but she was already seated-with Her Majesty, naturally. He sighed briefly and sat down, at last, next to the wistful Garbitsch.

"It will be nice to see Russia again," Garbitsch said. "I hardly hoped to do so."

The plane shuddered, roared and took off. Then it settled down to its normal state of unnatural quiet. Malone sat back and tried to relax.

It was impossible.

CHAPTER 7

Red Square was, somehow, disappointing. It was crowded with men and women, all looking very Russian in an undefined sort of way, and the big glass windows sparkled from every side. "I know it's silly," Luba said in a baffled voice, "but, somehow, I always expected Red Square to be red."

"And why should that be?" the MVD man next to her said. He was a burly man with a sour expression, as if he had eaten too many onions the day before.

"Well," Malone said, "it is Red Square, after all."

"But red is symbolic only," the MVD man said surlily. "Is not color. Only symbol of glorious Russia."

"I suppose so," Luba said. "But it's still disappointing."

"You expect, perhaps, that we recruit our glorious Red Army from American Indian tribes?" the MVD man said sourly. "You are literal-minded bourgeois intellectual. This is not good thing to be."

"Somehow," Malone mused, "I didn't think it was."

"But this is different," Luba said. "The Red Army is made up of Russians. But this is just a square. You could paint it."

"After all," Malone offered, "the White House is white, isn't it?"

"White is cowardly color," the MVD man pointed out with satisfaction.

"Never mind that," Malone said. "We call it a white house, and it is a white house. You call this a red square, and it isn't even pink. Not even a little bit pink. It's just-just—"

"Just building-colored," Luba put in. Malone turned to her and executed a small bow.

"Thank you," he said.

"Think nothing of it," Luba said.

"Oh, don't worry," Malone said. "I will."

The MVD man hissed like a teakettle and both heads swung round to look at him again. Her Majesty, who had been admiring some dresses in a shop window, also turned. "My goodness," she said. "That's a terrible wheeze. Do you take something for it?"

"Is not wheeze," the MVD man said. "Is noise representing impatience with arrogance and stupidity of capitalist warmonger conversation."

"Arrogance?" Luba said.

"Stupidity?" Malone said.

Her Majesty drew herself to her full height. "We do not monger war," she said. "Not in the least. We are not mongers."

The MVD man looked at her, blinked, sighed and looked away. "This color discussion," he said, "it is very silly. Look at the Blue Ridge Mountains, in your country. Are they blue?"

"Well—" Malone said.

"What color, for example, is the Golden Gate Bridge?" the MVD man continued, with heavy sarcasm. "Is not even a gate. Is a bridge. Is not golden. But you say we disappoint No. You disappoint."

There seemed to be no immediate answer to that, so Malone didn't try for one. Instead, he went back to looking at the Square, and beyond it to where the inverted turnips of the Kremlin gleamed in the moonlight. The turnips were very pretty, if a little odd for building-tops. But Red Square, in spite of all its historic associations, seemed to be a little dull. The buildings were just buildings, and the streets were filled with Russians. They were not bomb-throwing Russians, bearded Russians or even "Volga Boatman"-singing Russians. They were just ordinary, dull Russians of every sort, shade, race, color and previous condition of servitude.

It was just about what he'd expected after the trip. That hadn't been exciting either, he told himself. There had been no incident of any kind. None of the three spies seemed to be exactly overjoyed about being sent back to good old Mother Russia, but none seemed inclined to make much fuss about the matter, either. Malone had blandly told them that they were being deported, instead of tried, because there was no evidence that was worth the expense of a trial. And, besides that, he had particularly emphasized that the FBI did not believe any of the stories the three men had told.

"They just don't match up," he said. "You all told different stories, and there's too much disagreement between them. Frankly, we don't believe any of them-not yet, we don't. But mark my words. We'll find out the truth some day."

He'd thought it was a good speech, and Her Majesty had agreed with him. It had its desired effect, since the plane was the first place the three had had a chance to meet since their arrest. "Each one knows that

he told the truth," Her Majesty said, "but nobody knows what the other two said."

"That's what I figured," Malone said. "They didn't have a chance to talk to each other."

"And so each one is lying his head off to the others," Her Majesty said, "and telling them all about how he, too, lied gloriously and bravely in defense of the Motherland. It's really very funny."

"Well," Malone said, "it makes them happy. And why not?"

Luba, too, had chatted with her father quite a lot of the time. Her Majesty reported that none of this conversation could possibly be understood as dangerous or harmful. It was just simple conversation.

Of course, Luba and her father hadn't talked all the time, and Malone did have a chance to get a few words in edgewise. Her Majesty made no report on those conversations, but Malone was comfortably aware that they did not belong in the harmless class. His relationship with the girl seemed, he told himself happily, to be improving slightly. Now and again, he even won a round from her.

As the American plane crossed the border, it was picked up by an escort of Russian fighter craft, which stuck with them all the way into Moscow. The fighters didn't do anything; they were just there, Malone figured, for insurance. But they made him nervous when he looked out the window. The trip from the border to Moscow seemed to take a long time.

Then, at the airfield, a group of MVD men had almost elbowed the American Embassy delegation out of the way in greeting the disembarking little band. There was a lot of palaver, in Russian, English and various scrambled mixtures which nobody understood. The American delegation greeted Malone, Luba and Her Majesty formally, and the MVD concentrated on Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch. The three spies were hustled away, apparently to MVD Headquarters, without much fuss. Luba said goodbye to her father calmly enough, and Vasili Garbitsch seemed almost entirely unaffected by his surroundings. As the plane touched ground, he had said: "Ah, the soil of Mother Russia," but, outside of a goodbye or two, those were his last words before leaving.

One MVD man stayed behind, even after the American delegation had left. His name, he explained, was Vladimir Josefovitch Petkoff. "It will be my pleasure to show your group the many historic and interesting sights of Moskva," he announced to Malone.

"Pleasure?" Malone said. Petkoff was tall and heavy, and wore a row of medals that strung out across his chest like a newspaper headline.

"My duty," Petkoff said flatly, "is my pleasure. That is how we arrange matters in Russia."

And so the tour had started, with Red Square. Malone told himself he didn't really mind if it weren't red, but he did think it could at least look sinister. Unfortunately, the Square did not seem particularly willing to oblige.

"So this is Red Square," Malone said, after a long silence.

"You do not sound interested," Petkoff said in what sounded like a vaguely ominous voice. "Because it is not painted in capitalistic and obvious colors, it bores you?"

"Not exactly," Malone said. "But when you've seen one Square, you've seen them all, is how I feel about it. There must be somewhere else to sight-see."

"Somewhere?" Petkoff said. "There is everywhere. This is Moskva, the capital and the greatest city in Mother Russia. That is what we are told to say." He lowered his voice. "Personally," he added, "I come from Leningrad. I prefer it. But in Moskva one talks only of Moskva."

"I know just how you feel," Malone assured him. "I've been to San Francisco."

"Well, then," Petkoff said, almost smiling at him. "What is there you would like to see?"

Malone fished in his pocket for an American cigarette. He'd brought a carton with him, having once tried Russian makes. They seemed to be mostly cardboard, both the long filter and the tobacco. He lit the cigarette and thought for a second. "I don't suppose," he said cautiously, "that we could take a look around inside the Kremlin, could we?" "Aha," Petkoff said. "I see what is in your mind."

"You do?" Malone said, startled.

"Naturally," Petkoff said. "You wish to see the tomb of Lenin. It is famous throughout the world."

Malone considered that for a minute. "Somehow," he said cautiously, "the coffin of Lenin doesn't exactly sound like a gay start for sight-seeing."

Petkoff looked pleased instantly. "I understand," he said. "Truly I understand. You, too, feel sad over the death of the great Lenin. How beautiful! How cultured!"

Malone wondered whether or not to disillusion the man, and decided against it. "Well, something like that," he said vaguely.

"I'll tell you what: is there a restaurant around here where we could get something to eat?"

"To eat?" Petkoff said, still looking pleased. "You wish to eat?"

"Well," Malone said, "I'm rather hungry, and I guess the ladies must be, too."

"What?" Luba said, returning to the group. She had joined Her Majesty in viewing the display of dresses. The Queen came scurrying over, too, through the silent and jostling Russian crowds.

"I was suggesting a restaurant," Malone said.

"Best idea anybody's had all day," Lou said. Her Majesty graciously consented to agree, and Petkoff beamed like the rising sun.

"My friends," he said. "My very fine friends-although you are capitalistic bourgeois intellectuals, thrown aside by the path of progress-in Moskva we have the finest restaurants in all the world."

"How about ... oh, Leningrad?" Malone said in a low voice.

"In Leningrad," Petkoff admitted, "the restaurants are better. But in Moskva, the restaurants are very good indeed. Much better than one might expect, if one knows Leningrad."

"Well," Malone said, "I suppose we've just got to put up with Moscow."

They went back to the corner, and hailed the long, black, sleek-looking limousine that had brought them in from the airport. The two silent men in the front seat of the gleaming Volga sedan were waiting patiently. Malone, Her Majesty and Lou got into the back, Petkoff in front. The two men were as still as statues-and rather unpleasant-looking statues, Malone thought-until Petkoff snapped something in Russian. Then one of them, at the wheel, said: "Da, Tovarishch."

The car started down the Moscow streets.

Her Majesty was silent and somewhat abstracted during the ride, just as she had been during the entire trip so far. She was, Malone knew, prying into every mind she could touch. He smiled inwardly when he thought about that.

The MVD, all unbeknownst to itself, was busily carrying around and protecting the single most dangerous spy in Moscow.

Nobody else spoke, either, until the car was moving along at a good clip. Petkoff began some small talk then, but it wasn't very interesting until he finally managed to edge it around to the subject he really wanted to talk about.

"By the way, Mr. Malone," he said, in a voice that sounded as if Petkoff were trying to establish an offhand manner, and not succeeding in the least. "It was thoughtful, very thoughtful, of American government, to return to us those men. Very kind."

Malone's expression conveyed nothing but the sheerest good will. "Well, you know how it is," he said. "Anything we can do to preserve peace and amity between our countries-we'll do it. You know that. Getting along, coexistence, that sort of thing. Oh, we're glad to oblige."

"I am sure," Petkoff said darkly. "You realize, of course, that they are criminals? Deserters from Red Army, embezzlers. Embezzlers of money."

Wondering vaguely what else you could be an embezzler of, Malone nodded. "That's what your ambassador in Washington said, when we told him about the deportation order."

"But Dad's not an embezzler," Luba broke in. "Or a deserter, either. He—"

"We have the records," Petkoff said.

"But—"

"Ordinarily, Mr. Malone," Petkoff said pointedly, "we do not find it the policy of the American government to send back political refugees."

"Now, listen," Lou said. "If you think you can shut me up—"

"That is exactly what I think," Petkoff said. "Let me assure you that no offense has been intended."

Lou opened her mouth and started to say something. Then she shut it again. "Well," she said, "I guess this isn't the time to argue about it. I'm sorry, Mr. Petkoff."

The MVD man beamed back at her. "Call me Vladimir," he said.

Malone broke in hastily. "You see, Major," he said, "these men are all embezzlers, as you've said yourself. We have the word of your government on that."

Petkoff took his eyes off Lou with what seemed real reluctance. "Oh," he said. "Yes. Of course you do."

"Therefore," Malone said smoothly, "the three are criminals and not political refugees."

"Indeed," Petkoff said blandly. "Very interesting. Your government has done a good deal of thinking in this matter."

"Sure we have," Malone said. "After all, we don't want to cause any trouble."

"No," Petkoff said, and frowned. "Of course not."

"Naturally," Malone said.

After that, there was silence for almost a full minute. Then Major Petkoff turned to Malone again with a frown. "Wait," he said.

"Wait?" Malone said.

"The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," Petkoff said, "has no extradition treaty with your capitalist warmongering country."

"We're not warmongers," Her Majesty put in. Both men ignored her.

"True," Malone admitted.

"Then there was no reason to send these men back to us," Petkoff said.

"Oh, no," Malone said. "There was a very good reason. You see, we didn't want them in our country, either."

"But—"

"And when we found that they'd lied on their naturalization papers, why, naturally, we took immediate steps. The only steps we could take, as a matter of fact."

"The only steps?" Petkoff said. "You could have preferred charges. This was not done. Why was it not done?"

"That," Malone said, sidestepping neatly, "is a matter of governmental policy, Major Petkoff. And I can't provide any final answer."

"Ah?" Petkoff said.

"But, after all, a trial would not make sense," Malone said, now busily attacking from the side. "You see, at first we thought they were espionage agents."

"A foolish conclusion," Petkoff said uneasily.

Malone nodded. "That's what we finally realized," he said. "We questioned them, but their stories were nonsense, absolute nonsense. Of course, we had no idea of what foreign government might have employed them."

"Of course not," Petkoff said, shifting slightly in his seat. The car took a wide curve and swayed slightly, and Malone found himself nearly in Lou's lap. The sensation was so pleasant that all conversation was delayed for a couple of seconds, until the car had righted itself.

"So," Malone went on when he had straightened out, "we decided to save ourselves the expense of a trial."

"Very natural," Petkoff said. The slight delay had apparently allowed him to recover his own mental balance. "The capitalist countries think only of money."

"Sure," Malone said agreeably. "Well, anyhow, that's the way it was. There was no point, really, in putting them in prison-what for? What good could it do us?"

"Who knows?" Petkoff said.

"Exactly," Malone said. "So, since all we wanted to do was get rid of them, and since we had an easy way to do that, why, we took it, that's all, and shipped them here."

"I see," Petkoff said. "And the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is properly grateful."

"My goodness," Her Majesty put in, apparently out of an irrepressible sense of fun. "Maybe we'll get medals."

"Medals," Petkoff said sternly, "are not given to capitalist agitators."

"We are not agitated," Her Majesty said, and folded her hands in her lap, looking quite satisfied with herself.

Petkoff thought for a second. "And why," he said, "did you feel that such elaborate precautions were necessary in returning these men to us?"

Malone shrugged. "Well, we couldn't have them just running around all over the world, could we?" he said. "We felt that here they'd be properly housed and fed, in their own homeland, even if they didn't get a job."

"They will be properly taken care of," Petkoff prophesied darkly.

"Now, wait a minute—" Lou began, and then stopped. "Sorry," she said.

Malone felt sorry for her, but there was nothing he could say to make things any better. "Exactly," he told Petkoff with what he hoped was a smile.

"Ah, well," Petkoff said. "My friend and colleague, we should cease this shoptalk. Shoptalk?"

"Quite correct," Malone said.

"I have studied English a long time," Petkoff said. "It is not a logical language."

"You're doing very well," Malone said. Petkoff gave him a military duck of the head.

"I appreciate your compliments," he said. "But I fear we are boring the ladies."

The major had timed his speech well. At that moment, the ornate Volga pulled up to a smooth stop before a large, richly decorated building that glowed brightly under the electric lights of a large sign. The sign said something incomprehensible in Cyrillic script. Under it, the building entrance was gilded and carved into fantastic rococo shapes. Malone stared at the sign, and was about to ask a question about it when Petkoff spoke.

"Trotkin's," he said. "The finest restaurant in all the world-in Moskva, this is what they say of it."

"I understand," Malone said.

"Come," Petkoff said grandly, and got out of the car. One of the two silent men leaped out and opened the back door, and Her Majesty, Lou and Malone climbed out and stood blinking on the sidewalk under the sign.

Petkoff leaned over and said something to the driver. The second silent man got back into the car, and it drove away down the street, turned a corner and disappeared. The party of four started toward the entrance of the restaurant.

The door swung open before Major Petkoff reached it. A doorman was holding it, and bowing to each of the four as they passed. He was dressed in Victorian livery, complete to knee-breeches and lace, and Malone thought this was rather odd for the classless Russian society. But the doorman was only the opening note of a great symphony.

Inside, there were tables and chairs-or at least, Malone told himself, that's what he thought they were. They were massive wood affairs, carved into tortuous shapes and gilded or painted in all sorts of colors that glittered madly under the barrage of several electric chandeliers.

The chandeliers hung from a frescoed ceiling, and looked much too heavy. They swayed and tinkled in time to the music that filled the room, but for a second Malone looked past them at the ceiling. It appeared to represent some sort of Russian heaven, at the end of the Five-Year Plan. There were officers and ladies eating grapes, waltzing, strolling on white puffy clouds, singing, drinking, making love. There was an awful lot of activity going on up on the ceiling, and it wasn't until Malone lowered his gaze that he realized that none of this activity had been exaggerated.

True, there were no white puffy clouds, and he couldn't immediately locate a bunch of grapes anywhere. But there were the musicians, in the same Victorian outfits as the doorman: three fiddlers, a cellist, and a man who played piano. "Just like in night-clubs in bourgeois Paris," Petkoff said, following Malone's gaze with every evidence of pride.

Between the musicians and Malone were a lot of tables and chairs and ancient, proud-looking waiters who appeared to have been hired when Trotkin's had opened-and that, Malone thought, had been a long, long time ago. He felt like those two ladies, whose names he couldn't remember, who said they'd slipped back in time. Officers and their ladies, the men in glittering uniforms, the ladies in ball dresses of every imaginable shade, cut, material and degree of exposure, were waltzing around the room looking very polite and old-world. Others were sitting at the tables, where candles fluttered, completely useless in

the electric glare. The noise was something terrific, but, somehow, it was all very well-bred.

The headwaiter was suddenly next to them. He hadn't walked there, at least not noticeably; he appeared to have perfected the old-world manner of the silent servant. Or, of course, Malone thought, the man might be a teleport.

"Ah, Major Petkoff," he said, in a silken voice. "It is so good to see you again. And your friends?"

"Americans," Petkoff said. "They have come to see the glorious Soviet Union."

"Ah," the headwaiter said. "Your usual table, Major?"

Petkoff nodded. The headwaiter led the party through the dancers, snaking slowly along until they reached a large table near the musicians and at the edge of the dance floor. Her Majesty automatically took the seat nearest the musicians, which she imagined to be the head of the table. Lou sat at her left hand, and Malone at her right, his back against a wall. Petkoff took the foot of the table, called a waiter over, and ordered for the party. He did a massive job of it, with two waiters, at last, taking down what seemed to be his entire memoirs, plus the list of all soldiers in the Red Army below the rank of Grand Exalted Elk, or whatever it might have been. Malone had no idea what the major was ordering, except that it sounded extensive and very, very Russian.

Finally the waiter went on his way. Major Petkoff turned to Malone and smiled. "Naturally," he said, "we will begin with vodka, nyet?"

Malone considered saying nyet, but he didn't feel that this was the time or the place. Besides, he told himself grimly, it would be a sad day when a Petkoff could drink a Malone under the table. His proudest heritage from his father was an immense capacity, he told himself. Now was his chance to test it.

"And, naturally, a little caviar to go with it," Petkoff added.

"Certainly," Malone said, as if caviar were the most common thing in the world in his usual Washington saloons.

It wasn't long before the waiter reappeared, bringing four glasses and three bottles of vodka chilled in an ice-bucket, like a bouquet of champagne. Petkoff bowed him out after one bottle had been opened, set the glasses up and began to pour.

"Oh, goodness," Her Majesty started to say.

"None for me, thanks," Lou chimed in.

"Oh, yes," Her Majesty said. "I don't think I'll have any either. An old lady has to be very careful of her system, you know."

"You do not look like an old lady," Petkoff said gallantly. "Middle-aged, perhaps, to be cruel. But certainly not old. Not over ... oh, perhaps forty."

Her Majesty smiled politely at him. Malone began to wonder if it had been gallantry, after all. From what he'd seen of the Russian women, it was likely, after all, that Petkoff really thought Her Majesty wasn't much over forty at that.

"You're very flattering, Major," Her Majesty said. "But I assure you that I'm a good deal older than I look."

Malone tried to tell himself that no one else had noticed the stifled gulp that had followed that remark. It had been his own stifled gulp. And his face, he felt sure, had aged one hundred and twelve years within a second or so. He waited for Her Majesty to tell Major Petkoff just how old she really was...

But she said nothing else. After a second she turned and smiled at Malone.

"Thanks," he said.

"Oh, you're quite welcome," she said.

Petkoff frowned at both of them, shrugged, and readied the bottle. "Well, then," he said. "It seems as if the drinking will be done by men-and that is right. Vodka is the drink for men."

He had filled his own glass full of the cold, clear liquid. Now he filled Malone's. He stood, glass in hand. Malone also climbed to his feet.

"To the continued friendship of our two countries!" Petkoff said. He raised his glass for a second, then downed the contents. Malone followed suit. The vodka burned its merry way into his stomach. They sat.

A waiter arrived with a large platter. "Ah," Petkoff said, turning. "Try some of this caviar, Mr. Malone. You will find it the finest in the world."

Malone, somehow, had never managed to develop a taste for caviar. He was willing to admit, if pressed, that this made him an uncultured slob, but caviar always made him think of the joke about the country bumpkin who thought it was marvelous that you could soften up buckshot just by soaking it in fish oil.

Now, though, he felt he had to be polite, and he tried some of the stuff. All things considered, it wasn't quite as bad as he'd thought it was going to be. And it did make a pretty good chaser for the vodka.

Her Majesty also helped herself to some caviar. "My goodness," she said. "This reminds me of the old days."

Malone waited, once again, with bated breath. But, though Her Majesty may have been crazy, she wasn't stupid. She said nothing more.

Petkoff, meanwhile, refilled the glasses and looked expectantly at Malone. This time it was his turn to propose the toast. He thought for a second, then stood up and raised his glass.

"To the most beautiful woman in all the world," he said, feeling just a little like a character in War and Peace. "Luba Vasilovna Garbitsch."

"Ah," Petkoff said, smiling approvingly. Malone executed a little bow in Lou's direction and followed Petkoff in downing the drink. Two more glasses of vodka wended their tortuous ways into the interior.

"Tell me, colleague," Petkoff said as he spooned up some more caviar, "how are things in the United States?"

Malone shot a glance at Her Majesty, but she was concentrating on something else, and her eyes

seemed far away. "Oh, all right," he said at last.

"Of course, you must say so," Petkoff murmured. "But, as one colleague to another, tell me: how much longer do you think it will be before the proletarian uprising in your country?"

There were a lot of answers to that, Malone told himself. But he chose one without too much difficulty. "Well, that's hard to judge," he said. "I'd hate to make any prediction. I don't have enough information."

"Not enough information?" Petkoff said. "I don't understand."

Malone shrugged. "Since our proletariat," he said, "have shown no sign of wanting any rebellion at all, how can I predict when they're going to rebel?"

Petkoff gave him an unbelieving smile. "Well," he said. "We must have patience, eh, colleague?"

"I guess so," Malone said, watching Petkoff pour more vodka.

By the time the meal came, Malone was feeling a warm glow in his interior, but no real foggiess. The dance floor had been cleared by this time, and a group of six costumed professionals glided out and took places. The musicians broke out into a thunderous and bumpy piece, and the dancers began some sort of Slavic folk dance that looked like a combination of a kazotska and a shivaree. Malone watched them with interest. They looked like good dancers, but they seemed to be plagued with clumsiness; they were always crashing into one another. On the other hand, Malone thought, maybe it was part of the dance. It was hard to tell.

The dinner was as extensive as anything Malone had ever dreamed of: borscht, beef Stroganoff, smoked fish, vegetables in gigantic tureens, ices and cheeses and fruits. And always, between the courses, during the courses and at every available moment, there was vodka.

The drinking didn't bother him too much. But the food was too much. Unbelieving, he watched Petkoff polish off a large red apple, a pear and a small wedge of white, creamy-looking cheese at the end of the towering meal. Her Majesty was staring, too, in a very polite manner. Lou simply looked glassy-eyed and overstuffed. Malone felt a good deal of sympathy for her.

Petkoff finished the wedge of cheese and ripped off a belch of incredible magnitude and splendor. Malone felt he should applaud, but managed to restrain himself. Her Majesty looked startled for a second, and then regained her composure. Only Lou seemed to take the event as a matter of course, which set Malone to wondering about her home-life. Somehow he couldn't picture her wistful little father ever producing a sound of such awesome magnitude.

"My dear colleague," Petkoff was saying. Malone turned to him and tried to look interested. "There is one thing I have wondered for many years."

"Really?" Malone said politely.

"That is right," Petkoff said. "For years, there has never been a change of name in your organization of secret police."

"We're not secret police," Malone said.

Petkoff gave a massive shrug. "Naturally," he said, "one must say this. But surely, one tires of being

called FBI all the time."

"One does?" Malone said. "I don't know. It gives a person a sort of sense of security."

"Ah," Petkoff said. "But take us, for instance. We pride ourselves on our ability to camouflage ourselves. GPU, and then OGPU-which were, I understand, subject for many capitalist jokes."

Malone tried to look as if he couldn't imagine such a thing. "I suppose they might have been," he said.

"Then we were NKVD," Petkoff said, "and now MVD. And I understand, quite between us, Mr. Malone, that there is talk of further change."

There was a sudden burst of applause. Malone wondered what for, looked at the dance floor and realized that the six Slavic dancers were taking bows. As he watched, one of them slipped and nearly fell. The musicians obliged with a final series of chords and the dancers trotted away. A waltz began, and couples from the tables began crowding the floor.

"How can you manage the proletariat," Petkoff asked, "if you do not keep them confused?"

"We don't, exactly," Malone said. "They more or less manage us."

"Ha," Petkoff said, dismissing this with a wave of his hand. "Propaganda." And then he, too, turned to watch the dancers. The waltz was finishing, and a fox-trot had begun. "With your permission, Mr. Malone," he said, rising, "I should like to ask so-lovely Miss Garbitsch to dance with me."

Malone glanced at the girl. She gave him a quick smile, with just a hint of nervousness or strain in it, and turned to Petkoff. "I'd be delighted, Major," she said. Malone shut his own mouth. As the girl rose, he got to his feet and gave the couple a small, Victorian bow. Petkoff and Lou walked to the floor, and Malone, sitting down again, watched enviously as he took her in his arms and began to guide her expertly across the floor in time to the music.

Malone sighed. Some men, he told himself, had all the luck. But, of course, Lou had to be polite, too. She didn't really like Petkoff, he told himself; she was just being diplomatic. And he had made some progress with her on the plane, he thought.

He looked over at Her Majesty, but the Queen was staring abstractedly at a crystal chandelier. Malone sighed again, took a little caviar and washed it down with vodka. The vodka felt nice and warm, he thought vaguely. Vodka was good. It was too bad that the people who made such good vodka had to be enemies. But that was the way things were, he told himself philosophically.

Terrible. That's how things were.

The fox-trot went to its conclusion. Malone saw Petkoff, chatting animatedly with Lou, lead her off to a small bar at the opposite side of the room. "Some people," he muttered, "have too much luck. Or too much diplomacy."

Her Majesty was tugging at his arm. That, Malone thought, was going to be more bad news.

It was.

"Sir Kenneth," she said softly, "do you realize that this place is full of MVD men? Of course you don't; I

haven't told you yet."

Malone opened his mouth, shut it again, and thought in a hurry. If the place were full of MVD men, that meant they probably had it bugged. And that meant several things, all of them unpleasant. Her Majesty shouldn't have said anything-she shouldn't have shown any nervousness or anxiety in the first place, she shouldn't have known there were so many MVD men in the second place-because there was no way for her to know, except through her telepathy, a little secret Malone did not want the Russians to find out about. And she should definitely, most definitely, not have called him "Sir Kenneth."

"Oh," Her Majesty said. "I am sorry, Sir-er-Mr. Malone. You're quite right, you know."

"Sure," Malone said. "Well. My goodness." He thought of something to say, and said it at once. "Of course there are MVD men here. This is just the place for good old MVD men to come when they go off duty. A nice, relaxing place full of fun and dancing and food and vodka..." And he was thinking, at the same time: Are they doing anything odd?

"Russian, you know," Her Majesty said, almost conversationally, "is an extremely difficult language. It takes a great deal of practice to learn to think in it really fluently."

"Yes, I should think it would," Malone said absently. You mean you haven't been able to pick up what these people are thinking?

"Oh, one can get the main outlines," Her Majesty went on, "but a really full knowledge is nearly impossible. Though, of course, it isn't quite as bad as all that. A man who speaks both languages, like our dear Major Petkoff, for instance-so charming, so full of joie de vivre-could be an invaluable assistant to anyone interested in learning exactly how Russians really think." She smiled nervously. Her face was suddenly set and strained. "I find that—"

She stopped then, very suddenly. Her eyes widened, and her right hand reached out to grasp Malone's arm more strongly than he had thought she ever could. "Sir Kenneth!" Her voice, all restraint gone, was a hissing whisper. Malone started to say something, but Her Majesty went on, her eyes wide. "Do something quickly!" she said.

"What?" Malone said.

"They've put something in Lou's drink!" Her Majesty hissed.

Malone was on his feet before she'd finished, and he took a step across the room.

"She's already swallowed it!" the Queen said. "Do something! Quickly!"

The dancers on the floor were no concern of his, Malone told himself grimly. He didn't decide to move; he was on his way before any thought filtered through into his mind. Officers and their ladies looked after him with shocked stupor as he plowed his way across the dance floor, using legs, elbows, shoulders and anything else that allowed him free passage. Sometimes the dancers managed to get out of his way. Sometimes they didn't. It was all the same to Kenneth J. Malone.

Her Majesty followed in his wake, silent and stricken, scurrying after him like a small destroyer following a battleship, or like a ball-carrying grandmother following up her interference.

Malone caught sight of Lou, standing at the bar. In that second, she seemed to realize for the first time

that something was wrong. She pushed herself violently away from the bar, and looked frantically around, her mouth opening to call. Petkoff was a blur next to her; Malone didn't look at him clearly. Lou took a step...

And two men with broken, lumpy faces came through a door somewhere in the rear of the restaurant, closer to her than Malone. Petkoff suddenly swam into sight; he was standing very still and looking entirely baffled.

Malone pushed through a pair of dancers, ignored their glares and the man's hissed insult, which he didn't understand anyhow, and found his view suddenly blocked by a large expanse of dark grey.

It was somebody's chest, in a uniform. Malone shifted his gaze half an inch and saw a row of gold buttons. He looked upward.

There, towering above him, was a face. It stared down, looking heavy and cruel and stupid. Malone, his legs still carrying him forward, bounced off the chest and staggered back a step or two. He heard a hissed curse behind him, and realized without thinking about it that he had managed to collide with the same pair of dancers again. He didn't look around to see them. Instead, he looked ahead, at the giant who blocked his path.

The man was about six feet six inches tall, a great Mongol who weighed about a sixth of a ton. But he didn't look fat; he looked strong instead, and enormously massive. Malone sidestepped, and the Mongol moved slightly to block him. To one side, Malone saw Her Majesty scurrying by. The Mongol was apparently more interested in Malone than in trying to stop sweet little old ladies. Malone saw Her Majesty heading for the bar, and forgot about her for the second.

The Mongol shifted again to block Malone's forward progress.

"What seems to be such great hurry, Tovarishch?" he said in a voice that sounded like an earthquake warning. "Have you no culture? Why you run across floor in such impolite manner?"

The man might have been blocking his way because of Lou, or might simply want to teach an uncultured Amerikanski a lesson. Malone couldn't tell which, and it didn't seem to matter. He whirled and reached for a glass of vodka standing momentarily unattended on a nearby table.

He tossed the vodka at the giant's eyes, and scooted around the mountain of flesh before it erupted with a volcanic succession of Russian curses that shook the room with their volume and sincerity.

But Lou and Her Majesty were nowhere in sight. Major Petkoff was staring, and Malone followed his line of sight.

A door in the rear of the restaurant was just closing. Behind it Malone saw Her Majesty and Lou, disappearing from sight.

Malone knocked over a waiter and headed for Petkoff. "What's going on here?" he bellowed over the crash of dishes and the rising wave of Russian profanity.

Petkoff shrugged magnificently. "I have no ideas, colleague," he said. "I have no ideas."

"But she—"

"Miss Garbitsch was taken suddenly ill," Petkoff said.

"Damn sudden," Malone growled.

"Her friend, Miss Thompson, has taken her to the ladies' room," Petkoff said. He gestured, narrowly missing a broken, lumpy face Malone had seen before.

"You are under arrest," the face said. Its partner peered over Petkoff's shoulder.

"I?" Petkoff said.

"Not you," the face said. "Him." He started for Malone and Petkoff threw out both arms.

"Hold!" he said. "My orders are to see that this man is not molested."

The guests had suddenly and silently melted away. Malone backed off a step, looking for something to stage a fight with.

"On the other hand, Comrade," one of the lumpy-faced men said, "we have orders also."

"My orders—" Petkoff began.

"Your orders do not exist," the other lumpy man said. "We are to arrest this man. Our orders say so."

"You are fools," Petkoff said. He spread his arms wider, blocking both of them. Malone edged back against the bar, feeling behind him for a bottle or maybe a bungstarter. Instead, his hand touched a sleeve.

A voice behind him bellowed: "Cease!"

The two lumpy-faced men goggled. Petkoff did not move.

Malone turned, and saw a tall, thin civilian with dark glasses. "Cease," the civilian repeated. "It is the girl we are to arrest! The girl!"

"This is not a girl," one of the lumpy men said. "Sir. We are to arrest this man. Our orders say distinctly—"

"Never mind your orders!" Petkoff said. "Go and reduce your orders to shreds and stuff them up your nostrils and die of suffocation! My orders say—"

"The girl!" the civilian said. "Where is the girl?"

Malone darted forward. Petkoff caught him neatly with one arm as he went by. "Until we decide what to do," the MVD man said, "you stay here." Malone bucked against him, but could get nowhere.

"Meanwhile," Petkoff said, "I am for letting you go."

"I appreciate it," Malone said through his teeth. "How about proving it?"

"If you let him go," a lumpy man said, "you will answer to our group head."

Petkoff tightened his hold protectively. Meanwhile, the civilian was climbing up into a stratospheric rage.

"You are dolts, imbeciles, worms without brains and walking bellies filled with carrion!" he said magnificently. "I have orders which I am sworn to carry out!"

"You are not alone," Petkoff said.

Malone took another try at a getaway, and failed.

"We take precedence," a lumpy man said. "We can talk later. Arrest comes first."

"But who?" the civilian snapped. "I insist—"

"There shall be no arrest!" Petkoff screamed. "No one is to be arrested at all!"

"I swear by the bones of Stalin that my orders state—" the tall man began.

"The bones of Stalin are with us!" a lumpy man said. "Go and die in a kennel filled with fleas and old newspaper! Go and freeze to the likeness of an obscene statue of a bourgeois deity! Go and hang by the ears from a monument four thousand feet high in the center of the great desert!"

Inspired, the other lumpy man screamed "Charge!" and came for Petkoff and the civilian. Petkoff whirled, letting go of Malone in order to beat back this wave of maddened attackers, and Malone took the advantage. He ducked free under Petkoff's left arm and started around the gesticulating, screaming, fighting group for the door at the back of the restaurant. He took exactly four steps.

Then he stopped. The Mongol, his eyes red with a combination of vodka and bull-roaring rage, was charging toward him, his hands outflung and his fingers grasping at the air. "Warmonger!" he was shouting. "Capitalist slave-owner! Leprous and ancient cannibal without culture! You have begun a war you can not finish!"

"Ha!" Malone said, feeling inadequate to the occasion. As the Mongol charged, he felt a wave of intense pragmatism come over him. He reached back toward the bar, grabbed a bottle of vodka and tossed several glassfuls into the giant's face. The Mongol, deluged and screaming, clawed wildly at his eyes and spun round several times, cursing Malone and all his kin for the next twenty-seven generations, and grabbing thin air in his attempt to reach the Amerikanski.

All of the customers appeared to have discovered urgent engagements elsewhere. There was little for the Mongol to collide with except empty tables and chairs. But he did manage to swipe one of the lumpy-faced men on the side of the head with one flail of his arms. The lumpy-faced man said "Yoop!" and went staggering away into Petkoff, who spun him around and threw him away in the general direction of the bandstand. The diversion provided Malone with just enough time to start moving again.

Four uniformed men were making their way toward the ladies' room from the opposite side of the restaurant. They were carrying a stretcher, which seemed pitifully inadequate for the carnage Malone had just left.

He blocked their path. "Where are you going?" he said.

"You are American?" one of them said. "I speak English good, no?"

Behind him, Malone heard a yowl and a crunch, as of a body striking wood. It sounded as if somebody had fetched up against the bar. "You speak English fine," he said, feeling wildly out of place. "Have you been taking lessons?"

"Me?" the man said. "It is no time for talk. We got to get lady for hospital."

"Lady?" Malone said. "For hospital?"

"Miss Garbitsch her name is," the stretcher-man said, trying to get past Malone. The FBI agent shifted slightly, blocking the path. "We wait outside one revolution—"

"One what?"

"When hands revolve once," the man said. "One hour. Now we get call so we take her to hospital."

It sounded suspicious to Malone. He heard more yells behind him, and they sounded a little closer. The sound of running men came to his ears. "Well," he said happily, "goodbye all."

The stretcher-bearer said, "Vot?" Malone shoved him backward into the approaching mob, grabbed the stretcher away from the other three men, who were acting a little dazed, and swung it in a wide arc. He caught an MVD man in the stomach, and the man doubled up with a weird whistling groan, turned slightly in agony, and hit another MVD man with his bowed head. The second man fell; Malone heard more crashes and screaming, but he didn't find out any details. Instead, he threw the stretcher at the milling mob and turned, already in motion, racing for the ladies' room.

He had no notion of what he was going to do when he got there, or what he was going to find. Her Majesty and Lou were in there, all right, but how were they going to get out without being arrested, clubbed, disemboweled or taken to a Russian hospital for God alone knew what novel purposes?

His mind was still a little foggy from the vast amounts of vodka he had poured down, and he wasn't in the least sure that teleportation would even work. He tried to figure out whether Her Majesty had already carried Lou off that way-but he doubted it. Lou was quite a burden for the old woman. And besides, he wasn't at all sure whether it was possible to teleport a human being. A lump of inanimate matter is one thing; an intelligent woman with a mind of her own is definitely something else.

It seemed to take forever for him to reach the door, and he was panting heavily when he reached for it. Suddenly, another hand shot in front of his, turning the doorknob. Malone looked up.

It was impossible to figure out where she had come from, or what she thought she was doing, but a bulging, slightly intoxicated Russian matron with bluish hair piled high on her head, a rusty orange dress and altogether too many jewels scattered here and there about her ample person, stood regarding him with a mixture of scorn, surprise and shock.

Malone crowded her aside without a thought and jerked the door open. Behind her he could see the melee still continuing, though it looked by now as if the Russians weren't very sure who they were supposed to be fighting. The Mongol's great head rose for a second above the storm, shouting something unintelligible, and dropped again into the crowd.

Malone focused on the matron, who was standing with her mouth open staring at him.

"Madam," he said with stern dignity, "wait your turn!"

He ducked inside and slammed the door behind him. There was a small knob to bolt the door with, and he used it. But it wasn't going to hold long, he knew. If the mob outside ever got straightened out, the door would go down like a piece of cardboard, bolt or no bolt. Undoubtedly the gigantic Mongol could do the job with one hand tied behind his back.

Malone turned around and put his own back to the door. Women were looking up and making up their minds whether or not to scream. Time stood absolutely still, and nobody seemed to be moving-not even the two directly before him: a frightened-looking little old lady, who was trying to hold up a semiconscious redhead.

And, somewhere behind him, he knew, was a howling mob of thoroughly maddened Russians.

CHAPTER 8

The door rattled against Malone's back as a hand twisted the knob and shook it. He braced himself for the next assault, and it came: the shudder of a heavy body slamming up against it. Miraculously, the door held, at least for the moment. But the roars outside were growing louder and louder as the second team came up.

Where was the Mongol? he wondered. But there was no time for idle contemplation. The scene inside the room demanded his immediate attention.

He was in the anteroom, a gilded and decorated parlor filled with overstuffed chairs and couches. There was a door at the far side of the room, and a woman suddenly came out of it holding a pocketbook in one hand and a large powder-puff in the other. She saw Malone and reacted instantly.

Her scream seemed to be a signal. The two other women sitting on couches screamed, too, and jumped up with their hands to their faces. Malone shouted something unintelligible but very loud at them and brandished a fist menacingly. They shrieked again and ran for the interior room.

Malone heard the roaring outside, and pressed his back tighter against the door. Then, suddenly, he broke away from it and ran over to Her Majesty and Lou. He looked down. Lou was apparently completely unconscious by this time, and there was a peaceful look on her face. The Queen looked down at her, then up at Malone.

"I'm sorry, Sir Kenneth," she said, "but we really haven't time for romantic thoughts just now."

Malone passed a hand over his brow. "We haven't got time for anything," he said. "You can see what's going on outside."

"My goodness," Her Majesty said. "Oh, yes. My goodness, yes."

"Okay," Malone said. "We've got to teleport out, if we can-and if we can take Lou with us."

"I don't know, Sir Kenneth," the Queen said.

"We've got to try," Malone said grimly, looking down. There was a crash as something hit the door. It shuddered, creaked, and held. Malone took a breath. Lou was too beautiful to leave behind, no matter what.

"I'll mesh my mind with yours," Her Majesty said, "so we'll be synchronized."

"Right," Malone said. "The plane. Let's go."

There was another crash, but he hardly heard it. He closed his eyes and tried to visualize the interior of the plane that was waiting for them at the airfield. He wasn't sure he could do it; the vodka might have clouded his mental processes just enough to make teleporting impossible. He concentrated. The crash came again, and a shout. He almost had it ... he almost had it...

The last sound he heard was the splintering of the door, and a great shout that was cut off in the middle.

Malone opened his eyes.

"We made it," he said softly. "And I wonder what the MVD is going to think."

Her Majesty took a deep breath. "My goodness," she said. "That was exciting, wasn't it?"

"Not half as exciting as it's going to be if we don't hurry now," Malone said. "If you know what I mean."

"I do," Her Majesty said.

"That's good," Malone said at random. "I don't." He helped the Queen ease the unconscious body of Luba Garbitsch into one of the padded seats, and Malone pushed a switch. The seat gave a tiny squeak of protest, and then folded back into a flat bedlike arrangement. Lou was arranged on this comfortable surface, and Malone took a deep breath. "Take care of her for a minute, Your Majesty," he said.

"Of course," the Queen said.

Malone nodded. "I'm going to see who's up front," he said. He walked through the corridors of the plane and rapped authoritatively on the door of the pilot's cabin. A second passed, and he raised his hand to knock again.

It never reached the door, which opened very suddenly. Malone found himself facing a small black hole.

It was the muzzle and the bore of the barrel of an M-2 .45 revolver, and it was pointing somewhere in the space between Malone's eyes. Behind the gun was a hard-eyed air force colonel with a grim expression.

"You know," Malone said pleasantly, "they're good guns, but they really can't compare to the .44 Magnum."

The pilot blinked, and his gun wavered just a little. "What?" he said.

"Well," Malone said, "if you'd only join the FBI, like me, you'd have a .44 Magnum, and you could compare the guns."

The pilot blinked again. "You're—"

"Malone," Malone said. "Kenneth J. Malone, FBI. My friends call me Snookums, but don't try it. Why not let's put the gun away and be friends?"

"Oh," the colonel said weakly. "Mr.-sure. I'm sorry, Mr. Malone. Didn't recognize you for a second there."

"Perfectly all right," Malone said. The gun was still pointing at him, and in spite of the fact that he felt pleasantly like Philip Marlowe, or maybe the Saint, he was beginning to get a little nervous. "The gun," he said.

The colonel stared at it for a second, then reholstered it in a hurry. "I am sorry," he said. "But we've been worried about Russians coming aboard. I've got my copilot and navigator outside, guarding the plane, and they were supposed to let me know if anybody came in. When they didn't let me know, and you knocked, I assumed you were Russians. But, of course, you—"

Conversation came to a sudden dead stop.

"About these Russians—" Malone said desperately. But the pilot's eyes got a little glazed. He wasn't listening.

"Now, wait a minute," he said. "Why didn't they notify me?"

"Maybe they didn't see me," Malone said. "I mean us."

"But—"

"I'm not very noticeable," Malone said hopefully, trying to look small and undistinguished. "They could just have ... not noticed me. Okay?" He gave the pilot his most friendly smile.

"They'd have noticed you," the pilot said. "If they're still out there. If nothing's happened to them." He leaned forward. "Did you see them, Malone?"

Malone shrugged. "How would I know?" he said.

"How would you—" The pilot seemed at a loss for words. Malone waited patiently, trying to look as if everything were completely and perfectly normal. "Mr. Malone," the pilot said at last, "how did you get aboard this aircraft?"

He didn't wait for an answer, and Malone was grateful for that. Instead, he stepped over to a viewport and looked out. On the field, two air force officers were making lonely rounds about the plane. Fifty yards farther away, a squad of Russian guards also patrolled the brightly-lit area. There was nothing else in sight.

"There isn't any way you could have done it," the pilot said without turning.

"That's the FBI for you," Malone said. "We've got our little trade secrets, you know." Somehow, the pilot's back looked unconvinced. "Disguise," Malone added. "We're masters of disguise."

The pilot turned very slowly. "Now what the hell would you disguise yourself as?" he said. "A Piper Cub?"

"It's a military secret," Malone said hurriedly.

The pilot didn't say anything for what seemed a long time. "A military secret?" he asked at last, in a hushed voice. "And you can't tell me? You're a civilian, and I'm a colonel in the United States Air Force, and you can't tell me a military secret?"

Malone didn't hesitate a second. "Well, Colonel," he said cheerfully, "that's the way things are."

The pilot threw up his hands. "It's none of my business," he said loudly. "I'm not even going to think about it. Because if I do, you'll have a mad pilot on your hands, and you wouldn't like that, would you?"

"I would hate it," Malone said sincerely, "like hell. Particularly since I've got a sick woman aboard."

"Disguised," the pilot offered, "as Lenin, I suppose."

Malone shook his head. "I'm not kidding now," he said. "She is sick, and I want a doctor for her."

"Why didn't you bring one with you?" the pilot said. "Or wasn't the disguise big enough for three?"

"Four," Malone said. "We've got three now; me and Miss Garbitsch and Miss Thompson. Lou-Miss Garbitsch is the one who's sick. But I want a doctor from the American Embassy."

"I think we could all use one," the pilot said judiciously. "But you'd better tell me what's the matter with the girl."

Malone gave him a brief and highly censored version of the melee at Trotkin's, particularly omitting the details of the final escape from the MVD men.

When he had finished, the pilot gave a long, low whistle. "You have been having fun," he said. "Can I go on your next adventure, or is it only for accredited Rover Boys?"

"You have to buy a pin and a special compass that works in the dark," Malone said. "I don't think you'd like it. How about that doctor?"

The pilot nodded wearily. "I'll send my navigator over to the airfield phone," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'll tell him to tell the doctor I'm the one who's sick, so the Russians don't get suspicious. It may even be true."

"Just so he gets here," Malone said. The pilot was flagging his navigator through the viewport as Malone went out, closing the door gently behind him. He went back down the plane corridor to Her Majesty and Lou.

Lou was still lying on the makeshift bed, her eyes closed. She looked more beautiful and defenseless than ever, and Malone wanted to do something big and terrible to all the Russians who had tried to take her away or dope her. With difficulty, he restrained himself. "How is she?" he asked.

"She seems to be all right," the Queen said. "The substance they put in her drink doesn't appear to have had any other effect than putting her to sleep and making her a little sick-and that was a good thing."

"Oh, sure," Malone said. "That was fine."

"Well," Her Majesty said, "she did get rid of quite a bit of the drug in the ladies' room." She smiled, just a trifle primly. "I think she'll be all right," she said.

"There's a doctor on the way, anyhow," Malone said, staring down at her. He tried to think of something he could do for her-fan her, or bring her water, or cool her fevered brow. But she didn't look very fevered. She just looked helpless and beautiful. He felt sorry for all the nasty things he had said to her, and all the nasty things she had said to him. If she got well-and of course she was going to get well, he told himself firmly-things would be different. They'd be sweet and kind to each other all the time, and do nice things for each other.

And she was definitely going to get well. He wouldn't even think about anything else. She was going to be fine again, and very soon. Why, she was hardly hurt at all, he told himself, hardly hurt at all.

"Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "I've been thinking: while we were about it, why didn't we just teleport all the way back home?"

Malone turned. "Because," he said, "we'd have had the devil of a time explaining just how we managed to do it."

"Oh," she said. "I see. Of course."

"This teleportation gimmick is supposed to be a secret," Malone went on. "We don't want to let out anything more about it than we have to. As it is, there's going to be some fierce wondering among the Russians about how we got out of that restaurant."

"Obviously," the Queen said, entirely unexpectedly, "a bourgeois capitalistic trick."

"Obviously," Malone agreed. "But we don't want to start up any more questions than we have to."

"And how about the plane itself?" Her Majesty went on. "Do you think they'll let us take off?"

"I don't know how they can stop us," Malone said.

"You don't?"

"Well, they don't want to cause any incidents now," Malone said. "At least, I don't think they do. If they could have captured us-me, or Lou, or both of us, depending on which side of the argument you want to take-anyhow, if they could have grabbed us on their own home grounds, they'd have had an excuse. Lou got sick, they'd say, and they just took her to the hospital. They wouldn't have to call it an arrest at all."

"Oh, I see," Her Majesty said. "But now we're not on their home grounds."

"Not so long as we stay in this plane, we're not," Malone said. "And we're going to stay here until we take off."

Her Majesty nodded.

"I wish I knew what they thought they were doing, though," Malone mused. "They certainly couldn't have held us for very long, no matter how they worked things."

"I know what was on their minds," Her Majesty said. "At least partly. It was all so confused it was difficult to get anything really detailed or complete."

"There," Malone said fervently, "I agree with you."

"The whole trouble was," the Queen said, "that nobody knew about anybody else."

"I'd gathered something like that," Malone said. "But what exactly was it all about?"

"Well," the Queen said, "Major Petkoff was supposed to tell Lou, in effect, that if she didn't agree to do espionage work for the Soviet Union, things would go hard with her father."

"Nice," Malone said. "Very friendly gentleman."

"Well," the Queen continued, "he was supposed to tell her about that at the bar, when he had her alone. But she got that drugged drink before he could begin to say anything."

"Then who drugged it?" Malone said. "Lou?"

The Queen shrugged. "Someone else," she said. "Major Petkoff didn't know anything about the drugged drink."

"A nice surprise for him, anyhow," Malone said.

"It was a surprise for everybody," the Queen said. "You see, the drugged drink was meant to get her to the hospital, where they'd have her alone for a long time and could really put some pressure on her."

"And then," Malone said, "there were the men who wanted to arrest me. And the ones who wanted to take Lou to jail. And the mad Mongol who just wanted to fight, I guess."

"There were so many different things, all going on at once," the Queen said.

Malone nodded. "There seems to be quite a lot of confusion in the Soviet Union, too," he said. "That does not sound to me like an efficient operation."

"It wasn't, very," the Queen said. "You see, they have Garbitsch now, but they can't do anything to him because they can't get to Lou. And it doesn't do them any good to do anything to her father, unless she knows about it first."

"It sounds," Malone said, "as if the USSR is going along the same confused road as the good old United States."

The Queen nodded agreement. "It's terrible," she said. "I get those same flashes of telepathic static, too."

"You do?" Malone said, leaning forward.

"Just the same," the Queen said. "Whatever is operating in the United States is operating over here, too."

Malone sat down in a seat on the aisle. "Everything," he announced, "is now perfectly lovely. The United States is being confused and mixed up by somebody, and the Somebody looked like a Russian spy. But now Russia is being confused, too."

"Do you think there are some American spies working here?" the Queen said.

"If they're using psionics," Malone said, "as they obviously are-and I don't know about them, Burris doesn't know about them, O'Connor doesn't know about them and nobody else I can find knows about them-then they don't exist. That's flat."

"How about outer space?" the Queen said. "I mean, spies from outer space trying to take over the Earth."

"It's a nice idea," Malone said sourly. "I wish they'd hurry up and do it."

"Then you don't think—"

"I don't know what to think," Malone said. "There's some perfectly simple explanation for all this. And somewhere, in all the running around and looking here and there I've been doing, I've got all the facts I need to come up with that answer."

"Oh, my," the Queen said. "That's wonderful."

"Sure it is," Malone said. "There's only one trouble, as a matter of fact. I don't know what the explanation is, and I don't know which facts are important and which ones aren't."

There was a short silence.

"I wish Tom Boyd were here," Malone said wistfully.

"Really?" the Queen said. "Why?"

"Because," Malone said, "I feel like hearing some really professional cursing."

* * * *

Three-quarters of an hour passed, each and every minute draped in some black and gloomy material. Malone sat in his seat, his head supported by both hands, and stared at the back of the seat ahead of him. No great messages were written on it. The Queen, respecting his need for silent contemplation, sat and watched Lou and said nothing at all.

It was always possible, of course, Malone thought, that he would fall asleep and dream of an answer. That kind of thing kept happening to detectives in books. Or else a strange man in a black trenchcoat would sidle up to him and hand him a slip of paper. The words: "Five o'clock, watch out, the red snake, doom," would be written on the paper and these words would provide him with just the clues he needed to solve the whole case. Or else he would go and beat somebody up, and the exercise would stimulate his brain and he would suddenly arrive at the answer in a blinding flash.

Wondering vaguely if a blinding flash were anything like a dungeon, because people kept being in them and never seemed to come out, Malone sighed. Detectives in books were great, wonderful people who never had any doubts or worries. Particularly if they were with the FBI. Only Kenneth J. Malone was different.

Maybe someday, he thought, he would be a real detective, instead of just having a few special gifts that he hadn't really worked for, anyhow. Maybe someday, in the distant future, he would be the equal of Nick Carter.

Right now, though, he had a case to solve. Nick Carter wasn't around to help.

And Kenneth J. Malone, FBI, was getting absolutely nowhere.

Finally, his reverie was broken by the sounds of argument outside the plane door. There were voices speaking both English and Russian, very loudly. Malone went to the door and opened it. A short, round, grey-haired man who looked just a little like an over-tired bear who had forgotten to sleep all winter almost fell into his arms. The man was wearing a grey overcoat that went nicely with his hair, and carrying a small black bag.

Malone said: "Oog," replaced the man on his own feet and looked past him at the group on the landing ramp outside. The navigator was there, arguing earnestly with two men in the uniform of the MVD.

"Damn it," the navigator said, "you can't come in here. Nobody comes in but the doctor. This is United States territory."

The MVD men said something in Russian.

"No," the navigator said. "Definitely no."

One of the MVD men spat something that sounded like an insult.

The navigator shrugged. "I don't understand Russian," he told them. "All I know is one word. No. Nyet. Definitely, absolutely irrevocably nyet."

"Sikin sin Amerikanyets!"

The MVD men turned, as if they'd been a sister act, and went down the steps. The navigator followed them, wiping his forehead and breathing deeply. Malone shut the door.

"Well, well, well," the doctor said, in a burbling sort of voice. "Somehow, we thought it might be you. Anyhow, the ambassador did."

"Really?" Malone said, trying to sound surprised.

"Oh, yes," the doctor assured him. "You have raised something of a stench in and around good old Moscow, you know."

"I'm innocent," Malone said.

The doctor nodded. "Undoubtedly," he said judiciously. "Who isn't? And where, by the way, is the girl?"

"Over there." Malone pointed. News apparently traveled with great speed in Moscow, MVD and censorship notwithstanding. At any rate, he thought, it traveled with great speed to the ears of the Embassy staff.

The doctor lifted Lou's limp wrist to time her pulse, his lips pursed and his eyes focused on a far wall.

"What have you heard?" Malone said.

"The MVD boys are extremely worried," the doctor said. "Extremely." He didn't let go of the wrist, a marvel of which Malone had never grown tired. Doctors always seemed to be able, somehow, to examine a patient and carry on a conversation about totally different things, without even showing the strain. This one was no exception. Malone watched in awe.

"According to the reports we got from them," the doctor said, "you wandered off from Trotkin's without your escort."

"Well," Malone said at random, "I didn't think to leave them a farewell note. I hope they don't think I disliked their company."

"Officially," the doctor said, lifting Lou's left eyelid and gazing thoughtfully into the blue iris thus exposed, "they're afraid you're lost, and they were apologetic as all hell about it to the ambassador." The iris appeared to lose its fascination; the doctor dropped the eyelid and fished in his black bag, which he had put on the seat next to Lou.

"And unofficially?" Malone asked.

"Unofficially," the doctor said, "we've got news of a riot at Trotkin's tonight, in which you seem to have been involved. Mr. Malone, you must be quite a barroom brawler when you're at home."

"Frankly," Malone said, "I'm a little out of practice. And I hope I never have the chance to get back into practice."

The doctor nodded, removing a stethoscope from the bag and applying it to Lou's chest. He waited a second, frowned and then took the plugs out of his ears. "I know just what you mean," he said. "You might be interested to know the first unofficial score of that little match."

"Score?" Malone said.

The doctor nodded again. "Three concussions," he said, "one possible skull fracture, a broken arm, two bitten hands, and a large and varied assortment of dental difficulties and plain hysteria. No dead, however. I really don't understand why not."

"Well," Malone said, "nobody wanted to create an international incident."

"Hmf," the doctor said. "I see. Or I think I do, which is as far as I care to go in the matter. The Russians suspect, by the way, that you've managed to get aboard the plane. They do know, of course, about the girl, and when the pilot called for me they put two and two together. In spite of his story about being sick. What they can't figure out is how you managed to get aboard the plane."

"Neither can I," Malone said at random. The doctor gave him a single bright stare.

"Well," he said at last, "I suppose you know your own business best. By the way, my examination accords pretty well with our unofficial information about the girl-that she was given some sort of drug in a drink. Is that what happened?"

Malone nodded. "As far as we know," he said. "She did get rid of a lot of it within a few minutes, though."

"Good," the doctor said. "Very sensible."

"Sense had nothing to do with it," Malone said.

"In any case," the doctor went on doggedly, "there can't be too much left in her system. Her pulse is good, she's breathing easily and there don't seem to be any complications, so I should doubt strongly that there's been much damage done. Besides all which, of course, the Russians would hardly have wanted to hurt her; what they gave her would probably have done little more harm even if she'd ingested it all, and kept it down."

"Good," Malone said sincerely.

"I'll give you some pills," the doctor said, fishing in his bag again, "and you can give them to her when she wakes up."

"Is that all?" Malone said, vaguely disappointed.

The doctor eyed him keenly. "Well," he said, "I could give her an injection, but I'd be a little afraid to. If it had a synergistic action with the drug, she might be worse off than before."

"Oh," Malone said. "By all means. Just the pills."

"I'm glad you agree," the doctor said. "Oh, and about leaving—"

"Yes?" Malone said. "We want to get out of here in a hurry, if we can."

"I think you can," the doctor said. "The ambassador mentioned that he'd try to arrange it with the Russians. I don't know what he'll tell them-but then, that's why he's an ambassador, and I'm a doctor." He straightened up and handed Malone an envelope containing three green capsules. "Give her these if she wakes up with a headache," he said. "If she feels all right, just forget all about them."

"Sure," Malone said. "And thanks, Doctor. Tell the ambassador we'd appreciate it if he got us out of here as soon as possible."

"Certainly," the doctor said. "After all, I might as well take on the job of a diplomatic courier."

Malone nodded. "Well," he said, "goodbye, Mr. Courier."

The doctor went to the door, opened it and turned.

"Absolutely," he said, "Mr. Ives."

CHAPTER 9

Lou didn't wake up until the plane was dropping toward the Washington airfield, and when she did awaken it was as if she had merely come out of an especially deep sleep. Malone was standing over her, which was far from a coincidence; he had been waiting and watching virtually every minute since takeoff.

During his brief periods of rest, Her Majesty had taken over, and she was now peacefully asleep at the back of the plane, looking a little more careworn, but just as regal as ever. She looked to Malone as if she had weathered a small revolution against her rule, but had managed to persuade the populace (by

passing out cookies to the children, probably) that all was, in the last analysis, for the best in this best of all possible worlds. She looked, he thought, absolutely wonderful.

So did Lou. She blinked her eyes open and moved one hand at her side, and then she came fully awake. "Well," she said. "And a bright hello to you, Sleuth. If it's not being too banal, where am I?"

"It is," Malone said, "but you're in an airplane, coming into Washington. We ought to be there in a few minutes."

Lou shook her head slowly from side to side. "I have never heard any news that sounded better in my entire life," she said. "How long ago did we leave Moscow?"

"Our trip to Beautiful Moskva," Malone said, "ended right after they tried to get you to the hospital, by giving you a drugged drink. Do you remember that?"

"I remember it, all right," she said. "I'm never going to forget that moment."

"How do you feel?" Malone said.

"Fine," Lou said. "And how are you?"

"Me?" Malone said. "I'm all right. I've been all right. Don't worry about me."

"Well, one never knows," Lou said. "With your cold and all."

"I think that's better," Malone said hastily. "But you're sure you feel fine?"

Lou nodded. "A little tired, maybe, but that's all." She paused. "I remember Miss Thompson taking me to the ladies' room. I got pretty sick. But from there on, I'm not sure what happened."

"I came in," Malone said, "and got you out."

"How brave!" Lou said.

"Not very," Malone said casually. "After all, what could happen to me in a ladies' room?"

"You'd be surprised," Lou murmured. "And you came and got me, and took me to the plane and all. And I—" She hesitated, and for a second she looked very small and wistful. "Do you-do you think they'll do anything to Dad?" she said.

"I don't see why," Malone said confidently. "After all, the only thing he did wrong was to get caught, and that's an occupational risk if you're in the spy business. Lots of people get caught. Happens all the time. Don't worry about it."

"I-all right," she said. "I won't, then."

"Good," Malone said. He fished in his pocket. "I've got some pills here," he said, "in case you have a headache. The doctor said I could give them to you if you had a headache, but otherwise I should just forget about them."

Lou smiled. "I think you'd better just forget about them," she said.

Malone's hand came out of his pocket empty. "I just want to make sure you're okay," he said.
"Probably very silly. Of course you're okay."

"Of course I am," she said. "But I don't think you're silly." She smiled again, a very warm smile. Malone took a deep breath and discovered that he hadn't been breathing at all regularly for several minutes. Lou's smile increased a trifle in intensity and he stopped breathing all over again. "All things considered," she said, "I think you're pretty wonderful, Ken."

Malone's voice sounded to him as if it were coming from a great distance. He wondered if the strange feeling in his stomach were the pangs of love, or the descent of the plane. Then he realized that he didn't care. "Well, well," he said airily. "Well, well, well. Frankly, Lou, I'm inclined to agree with you. Though I'm not sure about the qualification."

"Fine thing," she said. "Tell a man he's wonderful and he just nods his head as if he knew it all along."

Malone swallowed hard. "Maybe I did," he said. "And how did you come to this startling conclusion?"

It was Lou who broke the light mood of their speech first. "Look, Ken," she said seriously, "I'm the daughter of an enemy spy. You know that. You're an FBI agent."

"So what?" he said.

"So," she said, "you don't treat me like the daughter of a spy. You treat me just like anybody else."

"I do not," Malone said instantly.

"All right," she said, and shrugged. "But I'm sure none of this is in the FBI manual for daughters of convicted spies."

"Now, you look," Malone said. "Just what do you think this is? The McCarthy era? Any way I treat you, it has nothing to do with your father. He's a spy, and we caught him and we sent him back to Moscow. That's our job. But all this about the sins of the fathers being visited on the heads of the children, even unto the seventh generation-this is just plain silly. You're you; you're not your father. You haven't done anything-why should I treat you as if you have?"

"How do you know I'm not a spy, too?" she said.

"Because," Malone said flatly, "I know."

"Really?" she said softly. "Do you really?"

Malone opened his mouth, shut it and then started again. "Strictly speaking," he said carefully, "I don't know. But we're in the United States now, where a person is considered innocent until proven guilty."

"And that," Lou said, "is all you're going on, I suppose."

"Not all," Malone said.

"I didn't think so," Lou said, still smiling.

"Don't ask me how," Malone said, "but we're pretty sure you knew nothing about your father's activities. Forget it."

Lou looked suddenly slightly disappointed. Malone wondered why. Of course, there was one more reason, and maybe she'd thought of that. "It does make it easier," he said, "that you happen to be a beautiful girl."

She smiled again, and started to say something, but she never got the chance. The landing gear of the aircraft bumped gently against the runway, and the ship rolled slowly in to a stop.

A second passed. From the back of the plane a voice said: "Are we back in Washington, S-Mr. Malone?"

"That's right, Miss Thompson," Malone told the Queen.

"And Miss Garbitsch—"

"I'm fine, Miss Thompson," Luba said. She swung her feet around to the deck.

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "Do you think you ought to get up?"

Lou's smile seemed to reduce him to small, very hot ashes. "Ken," she said, "the doctor said I was fine, so what are you worrying about? I can get up. I'll be all right."

"Oh, okay," he said, and stepped back. Her Majesty had already left the plane. Lou got up, and wavered just a little. Malone held out his arms, and found her in them before he had thought about it.

A long time seemed to pass. Malone wasn't sure whether he was standing still because he wanted to, or because he was absolutely incapable of motion. Lou didn't seem in any hurry to break away, either.

Then she put her arms around his neck.

"Sleuth," she said, "don't you ever follow up a hint?"

"Hint?" Malone said.

"Damn it," Lou said in a soft, sweet voice, "kiss me, Ken."

Malone had no answer to that—at least, no verbal answer.

One didn't seem to be needed.

When he finally came up for air, he said: "Lou..."

"Yes, Ken?"

"Lou, where are you going from here?"

Lou stepped back a pace. "What?" she said.

"I mean, back to New York?" Malone said. "Or someplace else? I mean—well, what are you going to

do?"

"Oh," Lou said. "Oh, yes. I'll be going back to New York. After all, Ken, I do have a living to make, such as it is, and Sir Lewis is expecting me."

"I don't know," Malone said, "but it still sounds funny. A girl like you working for-well, for the Psychological Research people. Ghosts and ectoplasm and all that."

Lou stepped back another pace. "Now, wait a minute," she said. "You seemed to need their information, all right."

"But that was-oh, well," Malone said. "Never mind. Maybe I'm silly. It really doesn't matter."

"I guess it doesn't, now," she said. "Except that it does mean I've got to leave for New York almost at once."

"Can you cut out that 'almost'?" Malone said. "Because I've got to be there myself, and right away. If you hurry, we can get the same plane."

"That would be great," she said.

"Okay, then," Malone said. "Don't you worry about a thing, I'll take care of reservations and everything."

"My, my," Lou said. "What it must be like to have all that pull and influence."

"What?" Malone said.

Lou grinned. "Nothing," she said. "Nothing."

"Then it's all settled. I'll take care of the reservations, and we'll go in together," Malone said.

"Fair enough," Lou said, "my fine feathered Fed."

* * * *

Actually, it took Malone nearly three hours to get everything set in Washington for his New York departure. He had to make a verbal report to Andrew J. Burris first, and that consumed quite a lot of time, since Burris was alternately shocked, horrified, gleeful and confused about the whole trip, and spent most of his time interrupting Malone and crying out for God's vengeance, mercy, justice or understanding.

Then Malone had to dictate a longer report for the written record. This didn't take quite as long, since there were no interruptions, but by the time it was over he felt as if he were going out to become a Carthusian monk. He felt, as he rubbed his raw throat, that it wouldn't be a bad idea at all to take a nice vow of silence for awhile. He could write people little notes, and they would all treat him kindly and gently. He would be pointed out to strangers, and people would try to do him favors.

Unfortunately, he couldn't take the vow at once. During his absence, his desk log showed, several calls had come in, all of which had to be taken care of at once. Some of them dealt with evidence or statements from old cases, some were just nuisances. The most urgent was from Dr. O'Connor at Yucca Flats.

"If you're not too busy," O'Connor said in his icily polite tone, "I would like to have Miss Thompson back as soon as possible." He sounded as if Malone had borrowed his scalpel.

"I'll see what I can do," Malone said carefully.

"There is a new series of tests," O'Connor said, "on which I am now at work; the assistance of Miss Thompson would be invaluable to me at this time."

After he'd hung up, Malone called Her Majesty at her Washington hotel. She was very glad of the chance to return to Yucca Flats, she said. There, Malone knew, she would be able to return to her accustomed dignity as Queen of the Greater English Commonwealth, a district which, in her mind, seemed to include the greater part of the Western world. On her present mission, she was plain Miss Thompson and, though the idea of going about incognito had its charms, it became a little dull after awhile. The adventuring was fine, although a little rougher than she'd thought it would be; the sight of the Queen's Own FBI in action was still a powerful attraction for Her Majesty. But the peace and quiet and dignity of Her Own Royal Palace won out without too much trouble.

"Of course," Malone said, "you'll be on call in case I need you."

"I am always in touch with my subjects," Her Majesty said with dignity, "and most especially with you, Sir Kenneth. I shall so remain."

And then there was a little paperwork to take care of. By the time Malone had finished, he would have been glad to teleport to New York on his own. But on reflection he decided that he would much rather travel with Lou, and hurried down to the airport.

By the time the plane landed at La Guardia, and they'd taken a 'copter to the East Side Terminal and a taxi to the big blue-aluminum-and-glass Ravell Building, Malone had reached a new decision. It would be nothing short of wonderful, he felt, as if he could spend the rest of his life traveling around with Luba Garbitsch.

Of course, that name was something of a handicap. It was hardly a romantic one. He wondered, very briefly, whether or not "Luba Malone" were an improvement. But he buried the thought before it got any further. Enough, he told himself firmly, was enough.

"It's been a nice trip," Lou said. She, too, sounded subdued, as if she were thinking about something terribly serious.

"Great," Malone said happily. "A wonderful trip."

"I enjoyed being with you," Lou said.

"Me, too," Malone said. He paid off the taxi-driver and they got out at the corner. Malone went to the newsstand there and picked up a copy of the Post.

"That," Lou said over his shoulder, "is one whole hell of a headline."

It filled the entire page, four lines of thick black capitals:

JUDGE DROPS UNION SUIT!

"Well, well," Malone said. "Let's see what this is all about." He flipped to page three. Lou craned her neck over his shoulder and they read the start of the story together.

DISTRICT COURT RULES UNION HAS NO CASE

New York [AP], August 23. Judge James Lefkowitz of the New York Supreme Court ruled today that the International Truckers' Brotherhood had no grounds for their suit against the United Transport Corp. and its officers. The action, a bitterly fought contest, involved a complaint by the Brotherhood that UTC had violated their contract with the Brotherhood by hiring "unqualified drivers" to work for the corporation.

In a statement made immediately after the ruling, Judge Lefkowitz said: "It is obvious that a man with a state-certified chauffeur's license is not an 'unqualified driver.'"

Effects of this ruling are thought to be far-reaching. Comment from the international Truckers' Brotherhood...

There was more to it, a lot more, but Malone didn't feel like reading it. It sounded just as confused as he expected news to sound these days, but it also sounded a little dull. He could feel Lou's breathing against his ear as he read, and he lost interest in the paper almost at once.

"My, my," she said. "And I expected a real exposé of a story, after that headline."

"This is an exposé," Malone said. "But I'm not sure what of."

"It sounds pretty confused," Lou said.

"Everything seems to, these days," Malone said. "Including any story of what's been happening during the last little while."

"Agreed," Lou said. "Without argument."

"Listen," Malone said suddenly. "Would it help if I went up and told Sir Lewis that there's no mark against your record?"

"Mark?" Lou said. "Against my record?"

"Well," Malone said, "I mean-well, he isn't the sort of man who'd fire somebody, because of-because of something like this?"

"You mean because I know an FBI man?" Lou said.

"I—"

"Never mind," she said. "I know what you mean. And he won't. He'll understand." She came round to face him, and patted his cheek. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks a lot, anyway."

"If there's anything I can do—"

"There won't be," Lou said. "You'll call me, though, about tonight?"

"Sure I will," Malone said. He hoped that the tentative date he'd made with her for that evening wouldn't be broken up because of a sudden onslaught of work. "I'll let you know before five, for sure."

"Fine," Lou said. "I'll wait to hear from you."

She turned to walk away.

"Hey," Malone said. "Wait a minute."

"What?" she said, turning again.

Malone looked judicious. "I think," he said weightily, "that, considering all the fun we've had, and all the adventuring and everything else, the least you could do would be to kiss me goodbye."

"On Fifth Avenue?"

"No," Malone said. He tapped his lips. "Here."

She laughed, bent closer and pecked him on the cheek. Then, before he could say anything else, she was gone.

CHAPTER 10

On the way to FBI Headquarters on 69th Street, he read the Post a little more carefully. The judge and his union suit weren't the only things that were fouled up, he saw. Things were getting pretty bad all over.

One story dealt with the recent factional fights inside the American Association for the Advancement of Medicine. A new group, the United States Medical-Professional Society, appeared to be forming as a competitor to the AAAM, and Malone wasn't quite so sure, when he thought about it, that this news was as bad as it appeared on the surface. Fights between doctors, of course, were reasonably rare, at least on the high hysterical level the story appeared to pinpoint. But the AAAM had held a monopoly in the medical field for a long time; maybe it was about time some competition showed itself. From what he could find out in the story, the USMPS seemed like a group of fairly sensible people.

But that was one of the few rays of light Malone could discern amid the encircling bloom of the news. The gang wars had reached a new high; the Post was now publishing what it called a Daily Scoreboard, which consisted in this particular paper of six deaths, two disappearances and ten hospitalizations. The six deaths were evenly scattered throughout the country: two in New York, one each in Chicago and Detroit, and two more in San Francisco. The disappearances were in Los Angeles and in Miami, and the hospitalizations were pretty much all over.

The unions had been having trouble, too. Traditional forms of controversy appeared to have gone out the window, in favor of startling disclosures, beatings, wild cries of foul and great masses of puzzling evidence. How, for instance, Malone wondered, had the president of Local 7574 of the Fishermen's Fraternal Brotherhood managed to mislay a pile of secret records, showing exactly how the membership was being bilked of dues, on a Boston subway train? But, somehow, he had, and the records were now causing shakeups, denials and trouble among the fishermen.

Of course, the news was not all bad. There were always the comic strips. Pogo was busily staving off an approaching wedding between Albert Alligator and a new character named Tranquil Portly, who

appeared to be a brown bear. He was running into some resistance, though, from a wolflike character who planned to abscond with Albert's cigars while Albert was honeymooning. This character, Don Coyote by name, looked like a trouble-maker, and Malone vowed to keep a careful eye on him.

And then there were other headlines:

FUSION POWER SOON COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE SAYS AEC HEAD Sees Drastic Cut
in Power Rates

UN POLICE CONTINGENT OKAYED: MILLION MEN TO FORM 1ST GROUP Member
Countries Pledge \$20 Billion in Support Moneys

OFFICIAL STATES: "WE'RE AHEAD AFTER 17 YEARS!" US Space Program Tops Russian
Achievements

ARMED FORCES TO TOUGHEN TRAINING PROGRAM IN 1974 Gen. Foote: "Our aim is to
train fighting men, not to run a country club."

GOVERNMENT TO SAVE \$1 BILLION ANNUALLY? Senator Hits Duplication of Effort in
Government, Vows Immediate Reform

Malone read that one a little more carefully, because it looked, at first sight, like one of the bad-news items. There had been government-spending reforms before, almost all of which had resulted in confusion, panic, loss of essential services-and twice as many men on the payroll, since the government now had to hire useless efficiency experts, accountants and other such supernumerary workers.

But this time, the reform looked as if it might do some good. Of course, he told himself sadly, it was still too early to tell.

The senator involved was Deeks, of Massachusetts, who was also in the news because of a peculiar battle he had had with Senator Furbisher of Vermont. Congress, Malone noted, was still acting up. Furbisher claimed that the moneys appropriated for a new Vermont dam were really being used for the dam. But Deeks had somehow come into possession of several letters written by a cousin of Furbisher's, detailing some of the graft that was going on in the senator's home state. Furbisher was busily denying everything, but his cousin was just as busy confessing all to anybody who would listen. It was building up into an extremely interesting fracas, and, Malone thought, it would have been even funnier than Pogo except that it was happening in the Congress of the United States.

He heaved a sigh, folded up the paper and entered the building that housed the New York contingent of the FBI.

Boyd was waiting in his office when he arrived.

"Well, there, Kenneth," he said. "And how are all our little Slavic brothers?"

"Unreasonable," Malone said, "and highly unpleasant."

"You refer, no doubt," Boyd said, "to the Meeneestyerstvoh Vnootrenikh Dyehl?"

"Gesundheit," Malone said kindly.

"The MVD," Boyd said. "I've been studying for days to pull it on you when you got back."

Malone nodded. "Very well, then," he said in a stately, orotund tone. "Say it again."

"Damn it," Boyd said, "I can't say it again."

"Cheer up," Malone said. "Maybe some day you'll learn. Meantime, Thomas, did you get the stuff we talked about?"

Boyd nodded. "I think I got enough of it," he said. "Anyhow, there is a definite trend developing. Come on into the private office, and I'll show you."

There, on Boyd's massive desk, were several neat piles of paper.

"It looks like enough," Malone said. "As a matter of fact, it looks like too much. Haven't we been through all this before?"

"Not like this, we haven't," Boyd said. "Information from all over, out of the everywhere, into the here." He picked up a stack of papers and handed them to Malone.

"What's this?" Malone said.

"That," Boyd said, "is a report on the Pacific Merchant Sailors' Brotherhood."

"Goody," Malone said doubtfully.

Boyd came over, pulling at his beard thoughtfully, and took the top few sheets out of Malone's hands. "The report," he said, looking down at the sheets, "includes the checks we made on the office of the president of the Brotherhood, as well as the Los Angeles local and the San Francisco local."

"Only two?" Malone said. "That seems as if you've been lying down on the job."

"They're the top two in membership," Boyd said. "But listen to this: the president and three of his underlings resigned day before yesterday, and not quite in time. The law-by which I mean us, and a good many other people-is hot on their tails. It seems somebody accidentally mixed up a couple of envelopes."

"Sounds like a case for the Post Office," Malone said brightly.

"Not these envelopes," Boyd said. "There was a letter that was supposed to go to the head of the San Francisco local, dealing with a second set of books-not the ones used for tax purposes, but the real McCoy. The letter didn't get to the San Francisco man. Instead, it went to the attorney general of the state of California."

"Lovely," Malone said. "Meanwhile, what was San Francisco doing?"

Boyd smiled. "San Francisco was getting confused," he said. "Like everybody else. The San Francisco man got a copy of an affidavit dealing with merchant-ship tonnage. That was supposed to go to the attorney general."

"Good work," Malone said. "So when the Frisco boys woke up to what was happening—"

"They called the head man, and he put two and two together, resigned and went into hiding. Right now, he's probably living an undercover life as a shoe salesman in Paris, Kentucky."

"And, after all," Malone added, "why not? It's a peaceful life."

"The attorney general, of course, impounded the second set of books," Boyd went on. "A grand jury is hearing charges now."

"You know," Malone said reflectively, "I almost feel sorry for the man. Almost, but not quite."

"I see what you mean," Boyd said. "It is a hell of a thing to happen."

"On the other hand—" Malone leafed through the papers in a hurry, then put them back on Boyd's desk with a sigh of relief. "I've got the main details now," he said. "I can go through the thing more thoroughly later. Anything else?"

"Oh, lots," Boyd said. "And all in the same pattern. The FPM, for instance, literally dropped one in our laps."

"Literally?" Malone said. "What was the Federation of Professional Musicians doing in your lap?"

"Not mine," Boyd said hastily. "Not mine. But it seems that some secretary put a bunch of file folders on the windowsill of their second-floor offices, and they fell off. At the same time, an agent was passing underneath, slipped on a banana peel and sat down on the sidewalk. Bingo, folders in lap."

"Wonderful," Malone said. "The hand of God."

"The hand of something, for sure," Boyd said. "Those folders contain all the ammunition we've ever needed to get after the FPM. Kickbacks, illegal arrangements with nightclubs, the whole works. We're putting it together now, but it looks like a long, long term ahead for our friends from the FPM."

And Boyd went to his desk, picked up a particularly large stack of papers. "This," he said, "is really hot stuff."

"What do you call the others?" Malone said. "Crime on ice?"

"The new show at the Winter Garden," Boyd said blithely. "Don't miss it if you can."

"Sure," Malone said. "So what's so hot?"

Boyd smiled. "The police departments of seven major cities," he said. "They're all under attack either by the local prosecuting attorney or the state's attorney general. It seems there's a little graft and corruption going on."

"This," Malone said, "is not news."

"It is to the people concerned," Boyd said. "Four police chiefs have resigned, along with great handfuls of inspectors, captains and lieutenants. It's making a lovely wingding all over the country, Ken."

"I'll bet," Malone said.

"And I checked back on every one," Boyd went on. "Your hunch was absolutely right, Ken. The prosecuting attorneys and the attorneys general are all new men—all the ones involved in this stuff. Each one replaced a previous incumbent in a recent election. In two cases, the governor was new, too—elected last year."

"That figures," Malone said. "What about the rest?"

Boyd's grandiose wave of a hand took in all the papers on the desk. "It's all the same," he said. "They all follow a pattern, Ken, the pattern. The one you were looking for."

Malone blinked. "I'll be damned," he said. "I'll be doubly damned."

"And how about the Russians?" Boyd said.

"You mean the Meeneestyerstvoh Vnootrenikh Dyehl?" Malone said.

"Now," Boyd said, "I'll be damned. And after I practiced for days."

"Ah," Malone said. "But I was there. The Russians are about as mixed up as a group of Transylvanian villagers with two vampires to track down and not enough flambeaux for all. Here, for instance, is just one example: the conflicting sets of orders that were given about me and Her Majesty and L-Miss Garbitsch."

Briefly, he outlined what had happened.

"Sounds like fun," Boyd said.

"They were so busy arguing with each other," Malone finished, "that I have a feeling we hardly needed the teleportation to escape. It would just have taken longer, that's all." He paused. "By the way, Tom, about the stakeout—"

"Luba Garbitsch is being protected as if she were Fort Knox," Boyd said. "If any Soviet agent tries to approach her with a threat of any kind, we'll have him nabbed before he can say Ivan Robinovitch."

"Or," Malone suggested, "Meeneestyerstvoh—"

"If we waited for that one," Boyd said, "we might have to wait all day." He paused. "But who's doing it?" he went on. "That's still the question. Martians? Venerians? Or is that last one Venusians?"

"Aphrodisiacs," Malone suggested diplomatically.

"Thank you, no," Boyd said politely. "I never indulge while on duty."

"Thomas," Malone said, "you are a Rover Boy First-Class."

"Good," Boyd said. "But, meanwhile, who is doing all this? Would you prefer Evil Beings from the Planet Ploor?"

"I would not," Malone said firmly.

"But I have a strange feeling," Boyd said, "that, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, you do not

hold with the Interplanetary Alien Theory."

"Frankly," Malone said, "I'm not sure of anything. Not really. But I do want to know why, if it's interplanetary aliens doing this stuff, they're picking such a strange way of going about it."

"Strange?" Boyd said. "What's strange about it? You wouldn't expect Things from Ploor to come right out and tell us what they want, would you? It's against custom. It may even be against the law."

"Well, maybe," Malone said. "But it is pretty strange. The difference between what's happening in Russia and what's happening here—"

"What difference?" Boyd said. "Everybody's confused. Here, and over there. It all looks the same to me."

"Well, it isn't," Malone said. "Take a look at the paper, for instance." He tossed the Post at Boyd, who caught it with a spasmodic clutching motion and reassembled it slowly.

"Why throw things?" Boyd said. "You sore or something?"

"I guess I am," Malone said. "But not at you. It's-somebody or something. Person or persons unknown."

"Or Ploorians," Boyd said.

"Whatever," Malone said. "But take a look at the paper and see if you see what I see." He paused. "Does that mean anything?" he said.

"Probably," Boyd said. "We'll figure it out later." He leafed through the newspaper slowly, pulling thoughtfully at his beard from time to time. Malone watched him in breathless silence.

"See it?" he said at last.

Boyd looked up and, very slowly, nodded. "You're right, Ken," he said in a quiet voice. "You're absolutely right. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"And that," Malone said, "sounds like an insult. It's much plainer than that. Suppose you tell me."

Boyd considered. "Over here," he said at last, "there are a lot of confused jerks and idiots. Right?"

"Correct," Malone said.

"And in Russia," Boyd went on, "there's a lot of confusion. Right?"

"Sure," Boyd said. "It's perfectly clear. I wonder why I didn't see it before."

"That's it!" Malone cried. "That's the difference!"

"Sure," Boyd said. "It's perfectly clear. I wonder why I didn't see it before."

"Because you weren't looking for it," Malone said. "Because nobody was. But there's one more check I want to make. There's one area I'm not sure of, simply because I don't have enough to go on."

"What area is that?" Boyd said. "It seems to me we did a pretty good job—"

"The Mafia," Malone said. "We know they're having trouble, but—"

"But we don't know what kind of trouble," Boyd finished. "Right you are."

Malone nodded. "I want to talk to Manelli," he said. "Can we set it up?"

"I don't see why not," Boyd said. "The A-in-C can give us the latest on him. You want me with you?"

"No," Malone said after some thought. "No. You go and see Mike Sand, heading up the International Truckers' Union. We know he's tied up with the Syndicate, and maybe you can get some information from him. You know what to dig for?"

"I do now," Boyd said. He reached for the intercom phone.

* * * *

Cesare Antonio Manelli was a second-generation Prohibition mobster, whose history can most easily be described by reference to the various affairs of State which coincided with his development. Thus:

When Cesare was a small toddler of uncertain gait and chubby visage, the Twenty-First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States canceled out not only the Eighteenth Amendment, but the thriving enterprises conducted by Manelli, Sr., and many of his friends.

When Cesare was a young schoolboy, poring over the multiplication tables, his father and his father's friends were busy dividing. They were dividing, to put it more fully, husbands from families as a means of requesting ransom, and money from banks as a means of getting the same cash without use of the middleman, or victim. This was the period of the Great Readjustment, and the frenzied search among gangland's higher echelons for a substitute for bootlegging.

And when Cesare was an innocent high-schooler, sporting a Paleolithic switchblade knife and black leather jacket, his father and his father's friends had reached a new plateau. They consolidated into a Syndicate, and began to concentrate on gambling and the whole, complex, profitable network of unions.

And then World War II had come along, and it was time for Cesare to do his part. Bidding a fond farewell to his father and such of his father's friends as had survived the disagreements of Prohibition, the painful legal processes of the early Thirties and the even more painful consolidations of the years immediately before the war, young Cesare went off to foreign lands, where he distinguished himself by creating and running the largest single black-market ring in all of Southern Europe.

Cesare had followed in his father's footsteps. And, before his sudden death during a disagreement in Miami, Giacomo "Jack the Ripper" Manelli was proud of his son.

"Geez," he often said. "Whattakid, huh? Whattakid!"

At the war's end, young Cesare, having proven himself a man, took unto himself a nickname and a shotgun. He did not have to use the shotgun very much, after the first few lessons; soon he was on his way to the top.

There was nowhere for Cesare "Big Cheese" Antonio Manelli to go, except up.

Straight up.

Now, in 1973, he occupied a modestly opulent office on Madison Avenue, where he did his modest best to pretend to the world at large that he was only a small cog-indeed, an almost invisible cog-in a large advertising machine. His best was, for all practical purposes, good enough.

Though it was common knowledge among the spoil-sport law enforcement officers who cared to look into the matter that Manelli was the real owner of the agency, there was no way to prove this. He didn't even have a phone under his own name. The only way to reach him was by going through his front man in the agency, a blank-faced, truculent Arab named Atif Abdullah Aoud.

According to the agent-in-charge of the New York office, Malone had his choice of two separate methods of getting to Manelli. One, more direct, was to walk in, announce that he was an agent of the FBI, and insist on seeing Manelli. If he had a search warrant, the A-in-C told him, he might even get in. But, even if he did, he would probably not get anything out of Manelli.

The second and more diplomatic way was to call up Atif Abdullah Aoud and arrange for an appointment.

Malone made his decision in a flash. He flipped on the phone and punched for a PLaza exchange.

The face that appeared on the screen was that of a fairly pretty, if somewhat vapid, brunette. "Rodger, Willcoe, O'Vurr and Aoud, good afternoon," she said.

Malone blinked.

"Who is calling, please?" the girl said. She snapped gum at the screen and Malone winced and drew away.

"This is Kenneth J. Malone," he said from what he considered a safe distance. "I want to talk to Mr. Aoud."

"Mr. Aoud?" she said in a high, unhelpful whine.

"That's right," Malone said patiently. "You can tell him that there may be some government business coming his way."

"Oh," she said. "But Mr. Aoud isn't in."

Mr. Aoud wasn't in. Mr. Aoud was out. Malone turned that over in his mind a few times, and decided to try and forget it just as quickly as possible. "Then," he said, "let me talk to one of the other partners."

"Partners?" the girl said. She popped her gum again. Malone moved back another inch.

"You know," he said. "The other people he works with. Rodger, or Willcoe, or O'Vurr."

"Oh," the girl said. "Them."

"That's right," Malone said patiently.

"How about Mr. Willcoe?" the girl said after a second of deep and earnest thought. "Would he do?"

"Why not let's try him and see?" Malone said.

"Okay," the girl said brightly. "Let's." She flashed Malone a dazzling smile, only slightly impeded by the gum, and flipped off. Malone stared at the blank screen for a few seconds, and then the girl's voice said, invisibly: "Mr. Willcoe will speak to you now, Mr. Melon. Thank you for waiting."

"I'm not—" Malone started to say, and then the face of Frederick Willcoe appeared on the screen.

Willcoe was a thin, wrinkle-faced man with very pale skin. He seemed to be in his sixties, and he looked as if he had just lost an all-night bout with Count Dracula. Malone looked interestedly for puncture marks, but failed to find any.

"Ah," Willcoe said, in a voice that sounded like crinkled paper. "Mr. Melon. Good afternoon."

"I'm not Mr. Melon," Malone said testily.

Willcoe looked gently surprised, like a man who has discovered that his evening sherry contains cholesterol. "Really?" he said. "Then I must be on the wrong line. I beg your pardon."

"You're not on the wrong line," Malone said. "I am Mr. Melon in a way." That didn't sound very clear when he got it out, so he added: "Your secretary got my name wrong. She thinks I'm Mr. Melon-Kenneth J. Melon."

"But you're not," Willcoe said.

Malone resisted an impulse to announce that he was really Lamont Cranston. "I'm Kenneth J. Malone," he said.

"Ah," Willcoe said. "Quite amusing. Imagine my mistaking you for a Mr. Melon, when you're really Mr. Malone." He paused, and his face got even more wrinkled. "But I don't know you under either name," he said. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to Mr. Manelli," Malone said.

"But Mr. Aoud—"

"Mr. Aoud," Malone said, wondering if it sounded as silly to Willcoe as it did to him, "isn't in. So I thought you might be able to arrange an appointment for this afternoon."

Willcoe bit his lip. "Mr. Manelli isn't in just now," he said.

"Yes," Malone said. "I didn't think he would be. That's why I want to arrange an appointment for later, when he will be in."

"Does Mr. Manelli know you?" Willcoe said suspiciously, the wrinkles deepening again.

"He knows my boss," Malone said carefully. "You just tell him that this is something that ought to be worth time and money to him. His time, and his money."

"Hmm," Willcoe said. "I see. Would you wait a moment, Mr. Mel-Mr. Malone?"

The screen blanked out immediately. The wait this time was slightly longer.

And the next face that appeared on the screen was that of Cesare "Big Cheese" Antonio Manelli, the nearly invisible cog.

For a cog, the face was not a bad one. It was strong and well-muscled, and it had dark, wavy hair running along the top. At the sides of the face, the hair was greying slightly, and behind the grey two large ears stuck out. Manelli's nose was a long, faintly aquiline affair and his eyes were very pleasant and candid. They were light grey.

"Aha," Manelli said. "You are Mr. Malone, right?" His voice was guttural, but it was obvious that he was trying for control. "I regret announcing that I was out, Mr. Malone," he said. "But a man in my position-I like privacy, Mr. Malone, and I try to keep privacy for myself. Let me request you to answer a question, Mr. Malone: do I know you, Mr. Malone?"

"Not personally," Malone said. "I—"

"But I'm supposed to know your boss," Manelli said. "I don't know him, either, so far."

Malone shrugged. "I'm sure you do," he said, and dropped the name almost casually: "Andrew J. Burris."

Manelli raised his eyebrows. "So that's who you are," he said. "I ought to have known, Mr. Malone. And you want to talk to me a little bit, right?"

"That's right," Malone said.

"But this is no way to act, Mr. Malone," Manelli said reproachfully. "After all, we understand each other, you and me. What you should do, you should come in through channels, in the correct way, so everything it would be open and above the board."

"Through channels?" Malone said.

Manelli regarded him with a pitying glance. "You must be new on your job, Mr. Malone," he said. "Because there is an entire system built up, and you don't know about it. The way things work, we sit around and we don't see people. And then somebody comes and presents his credentials, you might say-search warrants, for instance, or subpoenas. And then we know where we are."

Malone shook his head. "This isn't that kind of call," he said. "It's more a friendly type of call."

"Mr. Malone," Manelli said. The reproach was stronger in his voice. "You must be very new at your job."

"Nevertheless," Malone said.

Manelli hesitated only a second. "Because I like you," he said, "and to teach you how things operate around here, I could do you a favor."

"Good," Malone said patiently.

"In an hour," Manelli said. "My place. Here."

The screen blanked out before Malone could even say goodbye.

Malone got up, went out to the corridor, and decided that, since he had time to kill, he might as well walk on down to Manelli's office. That, he told himself, would give him time to decide what he wanted to say.

He toyed at first with the idea of a nice bourbon and soda in a Madison Avenue bar, but he discarded that idea in a hurry. It was always possible for him to get into a tight spot and have to teleport his way out, and he didn't want to be fuzzy around the edges in case that happened. Trotkin's had showed him that, under enough stress, he could manage the job with quite a lot of vodka in him. But there was absolutely no sense, he told himself sadly, in taking chances.

He started off downtown along Fifth. Soon he was standing in front of the blue-and-crystal tower of the Ravell Building.

That made up his mind for him. He checked his watch, mentally flipped a coin and then cheated a little to make the answer come out right. He went inside and stepped into an elevator.

"Six," he said with decision.

Lou was sitting at the Psychical Research Society desk, talking to the tweedy Sir Lewis Carter. Malone waved at Carter, decided that conversation with Lou was out, and started to walk away. Then he realized that he couldn't have Carter thinking he was crazy. He had to figure out something to tell the man-and in a hurry, too.

Carter smiled and gestured to him. "Ah, Mr. Malone," he said. "I'm glad you brought our Lou home safely. I've heard a little about your-ah-escapade. Astounding, really."

"Not for the FBI," Malone said modestly. "We've been through too much."

"But—"

"No, really," Malone said. "We never call anything astounding any more."

"I can well imagine," Carter said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Malone thought fast. He had to have something, and he didn't have much time. "Why-uh—" he said, and then it came to him. "Yes, as a matter of fact you can," he said.

"Glad to be of service," Carter said. "I'm sure we can do anything you request."

"Have you got any more data on telepathic projection?" Malone said.

Sir Lewis Carter frowned. "Telepathic projection?" he said.

"The stuff-the phenomenon Cartier Taylor mentioned," Malone said, "in Minds and Morons. I think it was page eighty-four."

"Oh," Carter said. "Oh, yes. Of course. Well, Mr. Malone, we'll see what we can do for you."

Malone sighed. "Thanks," he said mournfully. "I guess-I guess that's all, then." He smiled at Lou, and turned the smile into a terrifying scowl when his eye caught Carter's. "Oh," Malone said. "So long. So long, everybody."

"Ken—"

This was not, he told himself sadly, either the time or the place. "Goodbye, Sir Lewis," he said. "Goodbye, Lou."

The elevator opened its doors and received him.

* * * *

Exactly fifty-nine minutes after Cesare Manelli had hung up on him, Malone showed up in the stately and sumptuous suite that belonged, for a stiff fee every month, to the firm of Rodger, Willcoe, O'Vurr and Aoud. The girl at the desk was his old Spearmint friend.

"Mr. Manelli," Malone said. "I've got an appointment. My name is Malone and his is Manelli. He works here." That, he told himself, was an understatement; but at least he had a chance of getting his point across.

"Oh," the girl said. Her gum popped. "Certainly. Right away, Mr. Maloney."

Malone opened his mouth, then shut it again. It just wasn't worth the trouble, he thought.

The girl did things with a switchboard, then turned to him again. "Mr. Manelli's office is right down there in back," she said, pointing vaguely. "Think you can find it, Mr. Maloney?"

"I'll try," Malone promised. He went down the long corridor and stopped at an unmarked door. It was at least an even chance, he told himself, and opened the door.

The room inside appeared to be mostly desk. The gigantic slab of wood sat against the far wall of the room, in the right-hand corner and spreading over toward the center. It appeared, in the soft half-light of the room, to be waiting for somebody to walk into its lair. Malone was sure, at first sight, that this desk ate people; it was just the type: big and dark and glowering and massive.

There wasn't anybody seated behind it, which reinforced his belief. The desk had eaten its master. Now it was out of control and they would have to have it shot. Malone took a deep breath and tried not to veer.

Then he heard a voice.

"Sit down, Mr. Malone," the voice said. "How about you having a drink while we talk? If this is going to be so friendly."

The voice didn't belong to the desk. It belonged, unmistakably, to Big Cheese himself. Malone turned and saw him, sitting in the left-hand corner of the room behind a low table. There was another empty chair facing Manelli, and Malone went over and sat in it.

"A drink?" he said. "Okay. Sure."

"Bourbon and soda, isn't it?" Manelli said. He stood up.

"Your research department gets fast answers," Malone said. "Bourbon and soda it is."

"After all," Manelli said, shrugging slightly, "a person in my position, he has to make sure he knows what is what, and all the time. It's routine, what you call S. O. P. Standard Operating Procedure, they call it."

"I'm sure they do," Malone murmured politely.

"And besides," Manelli said, "you are a well-known type. I thought I knew the name when old Fred mentioned it, or I would never talk to you. You know how it is."

Malone nodded. "Well," he said, as Manelli went over to a small portable bar at the back of the room and got busy, "we're being frank, anyway."

"And why shouldn't we be frank, Mr. Malone?" Manelli said. "It's a nice, friendly conversation, and what have we got on our minds?"

For the first time, as he turned, Malone got a glimpse of something behind the structured and muscular face. There was panic there, just a tiny seed under iron control, but it showed in the eyes and in the muscles of the cheek.

"Just a nice, friendly conversation," Malone said. Manelli brought the drinks over and set them on the table.

"Take your pick," he said. "That's not what a good host should do, ask the guest to pick one, like a game; but I got into the habit. People get nervous about arsenic in the drinks. Which is silly."

"Sure it is," Malone agreed. He picked up the left-hand glass and regarded it carefully. "If you wanted to kill me, you'd need a motive and an opportunity, and you don't have either at the moment. Besides, you'd make sure to be far away when it happened." He hoped he sounded confident. He took a sip of the drink, but it tasted like bourbon and soda.

"Mr. Malone," Manelli said, "you say these things about me, and it hurts. It hurts me, right here." He pressed a hand over the checkbook side of his jacket. "I'm a legitimate businessman, and no different from any other legitimate businessman. You can't prove anything else."

"I know I can't," Malone said. "But I want to talk to you about your real business."

"This is my real business," Manelli said. "The advertising agency. I work here. Advertising is in my blood. And I don't understand the least little bit why you have to do things to me all the time."

"Do things?" Malone said. "What did I do?"

"Now, Mr. Malone," Manelli said. He took a swallow of his drink. "You said let's be frank, so I'm frank. Why not you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Malone said, telling part of the truth.

Manelli took another swallow of his drink, fished in a jacket pocket and brought out two cigars. "Smoke, Mr. Malone?" he said. "The very best, from Havana, Cuba. Cost me a dollar and a half each."

Malone looked with longing at the cigar. But it was okay for Manelli to smoke cigars, he thought bitterly. Manelli was a gangster, and who cared how he looked? Malone was an FBI man, and FBI men didn't smoke cigars. Particularly Havana cigars. That, he told himself with regretful firmness, was that.

"No, thanks," he said. "I never smoke on duty."

Manelli shrugged and put one cigar away. He lit the other one and dense clouds of smoke began to rise in the room. Malone breathed deeply.

"I understand you've been having troubles," he said.

Manelli nodded. "Now, you see, Mr. Malone?" he said. "You tell me you don't know what's happening, but you know I got troubles. How come, Mr. Malone? How come?"

"Because you have got troubles," Malone said. "But I have nothing to do with them." He hesitated, thought of adding: "Yet," and decided against it.

"Now, Mr. Malone," Manelli said. "You know better than that."

"I do?" Malone said.

Manelli sighed, took another swallow of his drink and dragged deeply on the cigar. "Let's take a for-instance," he said. "Now, you understand my business is advertising, Mr. Malone?"

"It's in your blood," Malone said, involuntarily.

"Right," Manelli said. "But I think about things. I like to figure things out. In a sort of a theoretical way, like a for-instance. Understand?"

"What sort of theoretical story are you going to tell me?" Malone said.

Manelli leaned back in his chair. "Let's take, for instance, some numbers runners who had some trouble the other day, got beat up and money taken from them. Maybe you read about it in the papers."

"I haven't been following the papers much," Malone said.

"That's all right," Manelli said grandly. "Maybe it wasn't in the papers. But anyhow, I figured out maybe that happened. I had nothing to do with this, Mr. Malone; you understand that? But I figured out how maybe it happened."

"How?" Malone said.

Manelli took another puff on his cigar. "Maybe there was an error at a racetrack-we could say Jamaica, for instance, just for laughs. And maybe two different totals were published for the pari-mutuel numbers, and both got given out. So the numbers runners got all fouled up, so they got beat up and money taken from them."

"It could have happened that way," Malone said.

"I figure maybe the FBI had something to do with this," Manelli said.

"We didn't," Malone said. "Frankly."

"And that's not all," Manelli said. "Let's say at Jamaica one day there was a race."

"All right," Malone said agreeably. "That doesn't require a whole lot of imagination."

"And let's say," Manelli went on, "that the bookies-if there are any bookies in this town; who knows?-that they got the word about who came in, win, place and show."

"Sounds natural," Malone said.

"Sure it does," Manelli said. "But there was a foul-up someplace, because the win animal was disqualified and nobody heard about it until after a lot of payoffs were made. That costs money." He stopped. "I mean it would cost money, if it happened," he finished.

"Sure," Malone said. "Certainly would."

"And you tell me it's not the FBI?" Manelli said.

"That's right," Malone said. "As a matter of fact, we're investigating things like these confusions and inefficiencies all over."

Manelli finished his drink in one long, amazed swallow. "Now, wait a minute," he said. "Let's say for a joke, like, for laughs, that I am some kind of a wheel in these things, in bookies and numbers boys and like that."

"Let's call it a syndicate," Malone said. "Just for laughs."

"Okay, then," Manelli said, with a suspicious gaze at Malone. "Whatever you call it, a man like me today, he wouldn't be some two-bit chiseler without brains. He would be a businessman, a smooth-operating smart businessman. Right?"

"Right," Malone said. "And what I want to know is: how's business?"

"You're kidding?" Manelli said.

"I'm not kidding," Malone said. "I mean it. The FBI's investigating mix-ups just like the ones you're telling me about. We want to stop them."

Manelli blinked. "You know, Mr. Malone," he said softly, "I heard about government interference in private enterprise, but don't you think this is a little too far out?"

Malone shrugged. "That's what I'm here for," he said. "Take it or leave it."

"Just so it's understood," Manelli said, "that we're talking about imaginary things. Theoretical."

"Sure," Malone said. "Imagine away."

"Well," Manelli said slowly, "you heard about this wrecked night-club in Florida? It happened maybe a month ago, in Miami?"

"I heard about it," Malone said.

"This is just a for-instance, you know," Manelli said. "But suppose there was a roulette wheel in that club. Just a wheel."

"Okay," Malone said.

"And suppose the wheel was rigged a little bit," Manelli said. "Not seriously, just a little bit." "Fine," Malone said. "This is going to explain a wrecked club?"

"Well, sure," Manelli said. "Because something went wrong with the machinery, or maybe the operator goofed up. And number seven came up eight times in a row."

"Good old lucky seven," Malone said.

"So there was a riot," Manelli said. "Because some people had money on the number, and some people got suspicious, and like that. And there was a riot."

"And the club got wrecked," Malone said. "That's what I call bad luck."

"Luck?" Manelli said. "What does luck have to do with roulette? Somebody goofed, that's all."

"Oh," Malone said. "Sure."

"And that's the way it's been going," Manelli said. He puffed on his cigar, put it in a nearby ashtray, and blew out a great Vesuvian spout of smoke.

"Too bad," Malone said sympathetically.

"It's all over," Manelli said. "Mistakes and people making the mistakes, goofing up here and there and everywhere. There have been guys killed because they made mistakes, and nobody can afford guys being killed all the time."

"It does run into expense," Malone said.

"And time, and hiring guys to do the killing, and then they goof up, too," Manelli said. "It's terrible. Some guys have even been killed without they made any mistakes at all. Just by accident, sort of."

"Well," Malone said carefully, "you can depend on the government to do everything in its power to straighten things out."

Manelli frowned. "You mean that, Mr. Malone?"

"Of course I do," Malone said honestly. He hadn't, he reminded himself, promised to help Manelli. He had only promised to straighten things out. And he could figure out what that might mean later, when he had the time.

"All I say is, it's funny," Manelli said. "It's crazy."

"That's the way it is," Malone said.

Manelli looked at him narrowly. "Mr. Malone," he said at last, "maybe you mean it at that. Maybe you do."

"Sure I do," Malone said. "After all, the government is supposed to help its citizens."

Manelli shook his head. "Mr. Malone," he said, "you can call me Cesare. Everybody does."

"No, they don't," Malone said. "They call you Cheese. I've got a research staff too."

"So call me Cheese," Manelli said. "I don't mind."

"There's only one little trouble," Malone said. "If I called you Cheese, you'd call me Ken. And word would get around."

"I see what you mean," Manelli said.

"I don't think either one of us wants his associates to think we're friends," Malone said.

"I guess not," Manelli said. "It would cause uneasiness."

"And a certain lack of confidence," Malone said. "So suppose I go on calling you Mr. Manelli?"

"Fine," Manelli said. "And I'll call you Mr. Malone, like always."

Malone smiled and stood up. "Well, then," he said, "good-bye, Mr. Manelli."

Manelli rose, too. "Goodbye, Mr. Malone," he said. "And good luck, if you really mean what you said."

"Oh, I do," Malone said.

"Because things are terrible," Manelli said. "And they're getting worse every day. You should only know."

"Don't worry," Malone said. "Things will be straightened out pretty soon." He hoped, as he went out the door and down the corridor, that he was telling the truth there, at least. He'd sounded fairly confident, he thought, but he didn't feel quite so confident. The secretary was busy on the switchboard when he came out into the anteroom, and he went by without a greeting, his mind busy, churning and confused.

He felt as if his head were on just a little crooked. Or as if, maybe, he had a small hole in it somewhere and facts were leaking out onto the sidewalk.

If he only looked at the problem in the right way, he told himself, he would see just what was going on.

But what was the right way?

"That," Malone murmured as he hailed a cab for the ride back to 69th Street, "is the big, sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. And how much time do I have for an answer?"

"Boyd?" the agent-in-charge said. "He went out to talk to Mike Sand down at the ITU a while ago, and he hasn't come back yet."

"Fine," Malone said. "I'll be in my office if he wants me."

The agent-in-charge picked up a small package. "A messenger brought this," he said. "It's from the Psychological Research Society, and if it's ghosts, they're much smaller than last time."

"Dehydrated," Malone said. "Just add ectoplasm and out they come, shouting boo at everybody and dancing all over the world."

"Sounds wonderful," the agent-in-charge said. "Can I come to the party?"

"First," Malone said judiciously, "you'd have to be dead. Of course, I can arrange that—"

"Thanks," the agent-in-charge said, leaving in a hurry. Malone went on down to his office and opened the package. It contained more facsimiles from Sir Lewis Carter, all dealing with telepathic projection. He spent a few minutes looking them over and trying to make some connected sense out of them, and then he just sat and thought for awhile.

Finally he picked up the phone. In a few minutes he was talking to Dr. Thomas O'Connor, at Yucca Flats.

"Telepathic projection?" O'Connor said when Malone asked him the question he'd thought of. "Well, now. I should say that-no. First, Mr. Malone, tell me what evidence you have for this phenomenon."

Malone felt almost happy, as if he had done all his homework before the instructor called on him. "According to what I've been able to get from the PRS," he said, "ordinary people-people who aren't telepaths-occasionally receive some sort of messages from other people."

"I assume," O'Connor said frostily, "that you are speaking of telepathic messages?"

Malone nodded guiltily. "I didn't mean the phone," he said, "or letters or things like that. Telepathic messages, or something very like it."

"Indeed," O'Connor said. "Mr. Malone, I believe you will find that such occurrences, when accurately reported, are confined to close relatives or loved ones of the person projecting the message."

Malone thought back. "That's right," he said.

"And, further," O'Connor went on, "I think you'll find that the-ah-message so received is one indicating that the projector of such a message is in dire peril. He has, for instance, been badly injured, or is rapidly approaching death, or else he has narrowly escaped death."

"True," Malone said.

"Under such circumstances," O'Connor said coldly, "it is possible that the mind of the person projecting the communication might be capable of generating immense psionic power, thereby forcing even a non-telepath to recognize the content of the message."

"Good," Malone said. "That's wonderful, Doctor, and I—"

"But," O'Connor said sharply, "the amount of psionic energy necessary for such a feat is tremendous. Usually, it is the final burst of energy, the outpouring of all the remaining psionic force immediately before death. And if death does not occur, the person is at the least greatly weakened; his mind, if it ever does recover, needs time and rest to do so."

Malone let that sink in slowly. "Then a person couldn't do it very often," he said.

"Hardly," O'Connor said.

Malone nodded. "It's like-like giving blood to a blood bank. Giving, say, three quarts of blood. It might not kill you. But if it didn't, you'd be weak for a long time."

"Exactly," O'Connor said. "A good analogy, Mr. Malone."

Malone hated himself for it, but he felt pleased when O'Connor praised him. "Well," he said, "that winds up Cartier Taylor's theory pretty thoroughly."

"I should think so," O'Connor said. "I am surprised, Mr. Malone, that you would put any credence whatever in that man's theories. His factual data, I will admit, is fairly reliable. But his theories are—well, they are hardly worth the time it takes to read them."

"I see," Malone said. "It did seem like a good answer, though."

"It undoubtedly is a good one," O'Connor said. "It is clever and has the advantage of being simple. It is contradicted, Mr. Malone, only by the facts."

"Sure," Malone said sadly. "But—hey. Wait a minute."

"Yes?" O'Connor said.

"One person couldn't do this alone, at least, not very often and not without serious harm to himself. Right?"

"That is what I said," O'Connor agreed. "Yes, Mr. Malone."

"But how about several people?" Malone said. "I mean, well, let's look at that blood bank again. You need three quarts of blood. But one person doesn't have to give it. Suppose twelve people gave half a pint each. Suppose twenty-four people gave a quarter of a pint each. Suppose—"

"There is," O'Connor said, "a point of diminishing returns. But I do see your point, Mr. Malone." He thought for a second. "It might just be possible," he said. "At least theoretically. But it would take a great deal of mental co-ordination among the participants. They would have to be telepathic themselves, for one thing."

"Why?" Malone said, feeling stupid.

"Because they would have to mesh their thoughts closely enough to direct them properly and at the correct time." O'Connor nodded. "But, given that, I imagine that it could be done."

"Wonderful," Malone said.

"However," O'Connor said, apparently glad to throw even a little cold water on the notion, "it could not be done for very long periods of time, you realize."

"Sure," Malone said happily.

"By the way, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said. "Does this have anything to do with the hypothesis you presented to me some time ago? Mass hypnotism, as I recall—"

"No," Malone said. "I've given that idea up for good. I think this is being done on an individual basis—working on one person at a time." Then another idea hit him. "You say these people would have to be telepaths?"

"That's right," O'Connor said.

"Then wouldn't Her Majesty know about them? If they're telepaths? Or is there some kind of a mind shield or something that a telepath could work out?"

"Mind shield?" O'Connor said. "Ah, yes. Miss Thompson might be fooled by such a shield. It would have to be an exceptional one, but such things do seem to be possible. They belong to the realm of mental disciplines, of course, rather than psionics."

"Sure," Malone said. "But there could be that kind of shield?"

"There could," O'Connor said. "The mind which created the shield for itself would have to be of tremendous power and a really high order of control. A strong, sane mind might conceivably create such a block that even Miss Thompson, let us say, might believe that she was picking up a real mind, when she was only picking up surface thoughts, with the real thought hidden behind the telepathic block."

"Fine," Malone said. "Thanks. Thanks a lot, Dr. O'Connor."

"I am always happy to put my extensive knowledge of science at your disposal, Mr. Malone," O'Connor said.

Malone watched the image collapse without really seeing it. Instead, he was busily talking to himself, or rather to his other self.

"Well, now, Sir Kenneth," he said. "Let's pull all the facts together and see what happens."

"Indeed, Mr. Malone," said Sir Kenneth Malone, "it is time that we did. Proceed, Sirrah. I shall attend."

* * * *

"Let's start from the beginning," Malone said. "We know there's confusion in all parts of the country, in all parts of the world, I guess. And we know that confusion is being caused by carefully timed accidents and errors. We also know that these errors appear to be accompanied by violent bursts of psionic static-violent energy. And we know, further, that on three specific occasions, these bursts of energy were immediately followed by a reversal of policy in the mind of the person on the receiving end."

"You mean," Sir Kenneth put in, "that they changed their minds."

"Correct," Malone said. "I refer, of course, to the firm of Brubitsch, Borbitsch and Garbitsch, Spying Done Cheap."

"Indeed," Sir Kenneth said. "Then the operators of this force, whatever it may be, have some interest in allowing these spies to confess?"

"Maybe," Malone said. "Let's leave that for later. To get back to the beginning of all this: it seems to me to follow that the accidents and errors which have caused all the confusion through the United States and Russia are caused by somebody's mind being changed at exactly the right moment. A man does something just a little differently than he decided to-or else he forgets to do it at all."

"Correct," Sir Kenneth said. "And you feel, Mr. Malone, that a telepathic command is the cause of this confusion?"

"A series of them," Malone said. "But we also know, from Dr. O'Connor, that it takes a great deal of psychic energy to perform this particular trick-more than a person can normally afford to expend."

"Marry, now," Sir Kenneth exclaimed, "such a statement does not seem to have reason in it. Changing the mind of a man seems a small thing in comparison to teleportation, or psychokinesis, or levitation. And yet it takes more power than any of these?"

Malone thought for a second. "Sure it does," he said. "I'd say it was a matter of resistance. Moving an inanimate object is pretty simple-comparatively, anyhow-because inert matter has no mental resistance."

"And moving yourself?" Sir Kenneth said.

"There is some resistance there, probably," Malone said. "But you'll remember that part of the Fueyo training system for teleportation involved overcoming your own mental resistance to the idea."

"True," Sir Kenneth said. "Quite true. Then let us say that it requires enormous power to effect these changes. What is our next step, Mr. Malone?"

"Next, Sir Kenneth," Malone said, "We have to do a little supposing. This project must be handled by a fairly large group, since no individual can work it. This large group has to be telepathic, and not only for the precise timing O'Connor specified."

"There is another reason?" Sir Kenneth said.

"There is," Malone said. "They've also got to know exactly when to make their victim change his mind. Right?"

"Absolutely," said Sir Kenneth. "Now, Sirrah, where does all this leave us? We have had the orderly presentation of the case; where, Sirrah, is your summation?"

"Coming up," Malone said. "We've got to look for a widespread organization of telepaths, with enough mental discipline to hold a mental shield that Her Majesty can't crack, and can't even recognize the existence of. We thought she'd found all the telepaths. She said so, and she obviously thought so. But she didn't. These are strong, trained-and sane."

"Aha," said Sir Kenneth.

"Her Majesty," Malone said, "found us only the crazy telepaths, the weak ones, the nuts."

"Fine," said Sir Kenneth. "And this, Mr. Malone, leaves us with only one question. Her Majesty-may God bless her-stated that she first spotted these flashes of telepathic static by listening in on our minds."

"Our mind," Malone said. "I hope."

"Very well," Sir Kenneth said. "This means that some force is being directed in this way, toward us. And how do we know that all the deduction, all the careful case-building we have done, hasn't been influenced by this group? That might mean, of course, that we are miles, or even light-years, from the solution."

Malone said: "Yeep." The sound was echoed by Sir Kenneth, and the two halves of the coruscating mind of Kenneth J. Malone were once more one.

Your Majesty, the minds thought, I'd like to talk to you.

Nothing happened. Evidently, Her Majesty was temporarily out of mental contact with him.

"Hell," Malone said. "Not to mention od's blood." He flipped on the visiphone and dialed Yucca Flats.

The figure that appeared on the screen was that of a tall, solidly-built man with a red face and the uniform of a Beefeater. This Tower Warder had the British royal crest embroidered on his chest, and the letters: "E. R."

"Good evening, Sir Kenneth," he said politely.

Malone had sometimes wondered what it would be like to be on the Queen's permanent, personal staff. Evidently, it soaked in so thoroughly that one began to stay in character all the time. The little old lady's delusion was such a pleasant one that it was painlessly infectious.

"I'd like to speak to Her Majesty, Colonel Fairfax," Malone said.

"Her Majesty," Colonel Fairfax said with regret, "is asleep, sir. I understand that she has had rather a trying time, of late."

"Then I must ask you to wake her," Malone said. "I don't want to disturb her any more than you do, Colonel, but this is important."

"Her Majesty's rest," Colonel Fairfax said gently, "is also important, Sir Kenneth."

"This is more important," Malone said. "I know how you feel, but it's necessary to wake her."

The screen blanked out.

Malone sighed and began to sing softly to himself while he waited:

"The soldiers of the Queen are linked in friendly tether-And if she's off her bean, we'll all go nuts together..."

Her Majesty appeared at this point, dressed in a silken robe bearing her crest and initials (E. R., rather than R. T., of course), and wearing a silken Mother Hubbard cap on her head. "Oh, dear," she said

instantly. "Are you still worried about them?"

"The flashes?" Malone said. "That's right. You tuned in on my mind right away, didn't you?"

"As soon as I got your message," she said. "I like your little song, at least, I think I do."

Malone blushed faintly. "Sorry," he said.

"Oh, don't be, Sir Kenneth," Her Majesty said. "After all, I do allow my subjects a good deal of liberty; it is theirs to make use of." She smiled at him. "Actually, I should have told you, Sir Kenneth. But it seemed so natural that I-that I forgot it."

Oh, no, Malone thought.

"I'm afraid so," Her Majesty said. "When I told you about the interference, your mind quite automatically began to build what I think of as a-as a defense against it. A shield, so to speak."

Me? Malone thought.

"Most certainly," Her Majesty said. "You know, Sir Kenneth, you have a very strong mind."

"Oh, I don't know," Malone said aloud. "Sometimes I don't feel so bright."

"I'm not talking about intelligence," Her Majesty said. "The two properties are interconnected, of course, but they are not identical. After all ... well, never mind. But you have strength of will, Sir Kenneth, and strength of purpose. As a matter of fact, you have been building your strength in the last few days."

"Really?" Malone said, surprised.

"It's become more and more difficult," Her Majesty said, "to see into the depths of your mind, during the past few days. The surface of your mind is as easy to read as ever, but it's hard to see what's going on in the depths."

"I'm not doing it deliberately," Malone said.

"In any case," Her Majesty said, "this process has been going on ever since you knew that telepathy was possible, two years ago. But in the past forty-eight hours matters have accelerated tremendously."

"That sounds good," Malone said. "Does it mean these mind-changers I've been thinking about can't get through to me?"

"What mind-changers?" the Queen said. "Oh. I see." She paused. "Well, I can't be positive about this, Sir Kenneth; it's all so new, you know. All I can tell you is that there haven't been any flashes of telepathic energy in your mind in the last forty-eight hours."

"Well," Malone said doubtfully, "that's something. And I am sorry I had to wake you, Your Majesty."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right," she said. "I know you're working hard to restore order to the realm, and it is the duty of any Sovereign to give such aid as she can to her Royal subjects."

Malone cleared his throat. "I trust," he said, "Your Majesty will ever find me a faithful servant."

Her Majesty smiled. "I'm sure I shall," she said. "Good night, Sir Kenneth."

"Good night," he said, and flipped off. At once, the phone chimed again.

He flipped the switch on. "Malone here," he said.

Boyd's face appeared on the screen. "Ken," he said fervently, "I am very glad you're still in town."

"Thanks," Malone said politely. "But what about Mike Sand? Any information?"

"Plenty," Boyd said. "I damn near didn't believe it."

"What do you mean, you didn't believe it?" Malone said. "Isn't the information any good?"

"It's good, all right," Boyd said. "It's great. He practically talked his head off to me. Gave me all his books, including secret sets. And I've put him under arrest as a material witness-at his own request."

"It sounds," Malone said, "as if Mike Sand has had a sudden and surprising change of heart."

"Doesn't it, though," Boyd said. "We can crack the ITU wide open now, and I mean really wide open."

"Same pattern?" Malone said.

"Of course it is," Boyd said. "What does it sound like? Same pattern."

"Good," Malone said. "Get on up here. I'll talk to you later."

He cut off in a hurry, leaned back in his chair and started to think. At first, he thought of a cigar. Boyd, he figured, couldn't be back in the office for some time, and nobody else would come in. He locked the door, drew out the cigar-laden box he kept in his desk in New York, and lit up with great satisfaction.

When the cloud of smoke around his head was dense enough to cut with a knife, he went back to more serious subjects. He didn't have to worry too much about his mind being spied on; if Her Majesty couldn't read his deepest thoughts, and the mind-changers weren't throwing any bolts of static in his direction, he was safe.

Now, then, he told himself-and sneezed.

He shook his head, cursed slightly, and went on.

Now, then...

There was an organization, spread all over the Western world, and with secret branches, evidently, in the Soviet Union. The organization had to be an old one, because it had to have trained telepaths of such a high degree of efficiency that they could evade Her Majesty's probing without her even being aware of the evasion. And training took time.

There was something else to consider, too. In order to organize to such a degree that they could wreak the efficient, complete havoc they were wreaking, the organization couldn't be completely secret; there are always leaks, always suspicious events, and a secret society that covered all of those up would have

no time for anything else.

So the organization had to be a known one, a known group, masquerading as something else.

So far, everything made sense. Malone took another deep, grateful puff on the cigar, and frowned.

Where, he wondered, did he go from here?

He reached for a pencil and a piece of paper. He headed the paper: Organization. Then he started putting down what he knew about it, and what he'd figured out.

1. Large

2. Old

3. Disguised

It sounded just a little like Frankenstein's Monster, so far. But what else did he know about it?

After a second's thought, he murmured: "Nothing," and took another puff.

But that wasn't quite true.

He knew one more thing about the organization. He knew they'd probably be immune to the confusion everybody else was suffering from. The organization would be-had to be-efficient. It would be composed of intelligent, superbly cooperative people, who could work together as a unit without in the least impairing their own individuality.

He reached for the list again, put down:

4. Efficient

And looked at it. Now it didn't remind him quite so much of the Monster. But it didn't look familiar, either. Who did he know, he thought, who was large, old, disguised and efficient?

It sounded like an improbable combination. He set the list down again, clearing off some of the papers the PRS had sent him to make room for it.

Then he stopped.

The papers the PRS had sent him...

And he'd gotten them so quickly, so efficiently...

They were a large organization...

And an old one...

He tossed the cigar in the general direction of the ashtray, grabbed the phone and jabbed at buttons.

The girl who answered the phone looked familiar. She did not look very old, but she was large and she had to be disguised, Malone thought. Nobody could naturally have that many teeth.

"Psychical Research Society," she said. "Oh, Mr. Malone, good evening."

"Sir Lewis," Malone said. "Sir Lewis Carter. President. I want to talk to him. Hurry."

"Sir Lewis?" the girl said slowly. "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Malone, but the office is closed now for the day. And Sir Lewis has gone already. It's after six o'clock, Mr. Malone, and the office is closed."

"Home number," Malone said desperately. "I've got to."

"Well, I can do that, Mr. Malone," she said, "but it wouldn't do you any good, really. Because he went away on his vacation, and when he goes on his vacation he never tells us where. You know? He won't be back for two or three weeks."

"Oog," Malone said, and thought for less than a second. "Miss Garbitsch," he said. "Lou. Got to talk to her. Now."

"Oh, I can't do that, either, Mr. Malone," the toothy girl said. "All of the executive officers, they left already on their vacation. And that includes Miss Garbitsch, too. They just left a skeleton force here at the office."

"They're all gone?" Malone said hollowly.

"That's right," she said cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, I'm in charge now, and that's why I'm staying so late. To sort of catch up on things. You know?"

"It's very important," Malone said tensely. "You don't know where any of them went? You don't have any address?"

"None at all," she said. "I'm sorry, but that's how it is. Maybe it's strange, and maybe you'd ask questions, but I obey orders, and those're my orders. To take over until they get back. They didn't tell me where they went, and I didn't ask."

"Great," Malone said. He wanted to shoot himself.

Lou was one of them. Of course she was; that was obvious now, when he thought about it. Lou was one of the secret group that was sabotaging practically everything.

And now they'd all gone. For two weeks-or for good.

The girl's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Oh, Mr. Malone," she said, "I'm sorry, but I just remembered. They left a note for you."

"A note?" Malone said.

"Sir Lewis said you might call," the girl said, "and he left a message. If you'll hold on a minute I'll read it to you."

Malone waited tensely. The girl found a slip of paper, blinked at it and read:

"My dear Malone, I'm afraid you are perfectly correct in your deductions; and, as you can see, that leaves us no alternative. Sorry. Miss G. sends her apologies to you, as do I." The girl looked up. "It's signed by Sir Lewis," she said. "Does that mean anything to you, Mr. Malone?"

"I'm afraid it does," Malone said bleakly. "It means entirely too much."

CHAPTER 12

After the great mass of teeth, vaguely surrounded by a face, had faded from Malone's screen, he just sat there, looking at the dead, grey screen of the visiphone and feeling about twice as dead and at least three times as grey.

Things, he told himself, were terrible. But even that sentence, which was a good deal more cheerful than what he actually felt, didn't do anything to improve his mood. All of the evidence, after all, had been practically living on the tip of his nose for nearly twenty-four hours, and not only had he done nothing about it, but he hadn't even seen it.

Two or three times, for instance, he'd doubted the possibility of teleporting another human being. All his logic had told him it wasn't so. But, he'd thought, he and Her Majesty had teleported Lou, and so, obviously, his logic was wrong.

No, it wasn't, he thought now. There would be too much mental resistance, even if the person were unconscious. Teleportation of another human being would be impossible.

Unless, of course, the other human being was able to teleport on her own.

True, she had been no more than semiconscious. She probably couldn't have teleported on her own. But Malone and Her Majesty had, ever so kindly and ever so mistakenly, helped her, and Lou had managed to teleport to the plane.

And that wasn't all, he thought dismally. That was far from all.

"Let's take another for-instance," he said savagely, in what he thought was a caricature of the Manelli voice. In order for all three to teleport, there had to be perfect synchronization.

Otherwise, they'd have arrived either at different places, or at the same place but at different times.

And perfect synchronization on a psionic level meant telepathy. At least two of the three had to be telepathic. Her Majesty was, of course. Malone wasn't.

So Lou had to be telepathic, too.

Malone told himself bitterly to quit calling the girl Lou. After the way she'd deceived him, she didn't deserve it. Her name was Luba Garbitsch, and from now on he was going to call her Luba Garbitsch. In his own mind, anyway.

Facts came tumbling in on him like the side of a mountain, falling on a hapless traveler during a landslide. And, Malone told himself, he had never had less help in all of his ill-starred life.

Her Majesty had never, never suspected that Luba Garbitsch was anything other than the girl she

pretended to be. That was negative evidence, true, and taken alone it meant nothing at all. But when you added the other facts to it, it showed, with perfect plainness, that Luba Garbitsch was the fortunate possessor of a mind shield as tough, as strong and as perfect as any Malone, O'Connor or good old Cartier Taylor had ever even thought of dreaming up.

And then, very suddenly, another fact arrived, and pushed the rest out into the black night of Malone's bitter mind. He punched hard on the intercom button and got the desk of the agent-in-charge.

"Now what's wrong?" the A-in-C said. "Ghosts got loose? Or do you want some help with a beautiful blonde heiress?"

"What would I be doing," Malone snapped, "with a beautiful blonde heiress?"

The agent-in-charge looked thoughtful. It was obvious that he had been saving his one joke up for several hours. "You might be holding her," he suggested, "for ransom, of course."

"That's not funny," Malone said. "Nothing is funny any more."

"Oh, all right," the A-in-C said. "You Washington boys are just too good for the rest of us. What's on your mind?"

"You've got a twenty-four-hour watch on Luba Garbitsch, haven't you?" Malone said.

"Sure we have," the A-in-C said. "Boyd said—"

"Yes, I know what he said," Malone cut in. "Give me a check on those men. I want to find out where she is right now. Right this minute."

The agent-in-charge shrugged. "Sure," he said. "It's none of my business. Hang on a second."

The screen went blank, but it didn't go silent. Each of the agents, on a stakeout job like the Garbitsch one, would be carrying personal communicators, and Malone could hear the voice of the agent-in-charge as he spoke to them.

He couldn't make out all the words, and it wasn't important anyhow. He'd know soon enough, he kept telling himself; just as soon as the A-in-C came back and reported.

It seemed like about twelve years before he did.

"She's all right," he said. "Nothing to worry about; she's probably working late at her office, that's all. She hasn't gone home yet."

"Want to bet?" Malone snapped.

"Don't tempt me," the A-in-C said. "I wouldn't take your money-it's probably counterfeit, printed in Washington."

"I'll give you ten to one," Malone said.

"Ten to one, I'll take," the A-in-C said rapidly. "Ten to one is like taking candy from a traffic cop. I'm no amateur, even if I am stuck away in dull little old New York-and I know the boys I've got on stakeout."

I'll check, and—"

"Let me know when you do," Malone said. "I've got some long-distance calls to make."

* * * *

Forty-five minutes later, he had all the news he needed. Spot checks on PRS offices on the West Coast, where it wasn't closing time yet, showed that all the executive officers had suddenly felt the need of extended vacations to parts unknown.

That, if not exactly cheering news, was still welcome; Malone had more backing for his theory.

An overseas call to New Scotland Yard in London took a little more time, and several arguments with bored overseas operators who, apparently, had nothing better to do than to confuse the customers. But Malone finally managed to get Assistant Commissioner C. E. Teal, who promised to check on Malone's inquiry at once.

It seemed like years before he called back, and Malone leaped to the phone.

"Yes?" he said.

Teal, red-faced and apparently masticating a stick of gum, said: "I got C. I. D. Commander Gideon to follow up on that matter, Mr. Malone. It is rather late here, as you must realize—"

"Yes?" Malone said. "And they've all gone?"

"Why, no," Teal said, surprised. "A spot check shows that most of the executives of the London branch of the Psychological Research Society are spending quiet evenings in their homes. Our Inspector Ottermole actually spoke to Dr. Carnacki, the head of the office here."

"Oh," Malone said.

"They haven't skipped," Teal went on. "Is this in connection with anything serious, Mr. Malone?"

"Not yet," Malone said. "But I'll let you know at once if there are any further developments. Thanks very much, Mr. Teal."

"A pleasure, Mr. Malone," Teal said. "A pleasure." And then, still masticating, he switched off.

And that, Malone told himself, was definitely that. Of course the British PRS hadn't gone underground; why should they? The British police weren't on to them, as Scotland Yard showed. And, no matter what opinions Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I might hold in the matter, the FBI had absolutely no jurisdiction in the British Isles.

Malone buried his face in his hands, thought about a cigar and decided that even a cigar might make him feel worse. Where were they? What were they doing now? What did they plan to do?

Where had they gone?

"Out of the everywhere," he said in a hollow, sepulchral voice, "into the here."

But where was the here?

He tried to make up his mind whether or not that made sense. Superficially, it sounded like plain bad English, but he wasn't sure of anything any more. Things were getting much too confused.

There was a knock at the door.

Malone, without any hope at all, called: "Come in," and the door opened.

The agent-in-charge came in, and dropped a dollar on Malone's desk.

"So you checked," Malone said.

"I checked," the A-in-C said sadly. "The boys went through the entire damned building. Not a sign of her. Not even a trace."

"There wouldn't be one," Malone said, shoving the dollar back to waiting hands. "Take the money; I knew what would happen. It was a sucker bet."

"Well, I feel like the sucker, all right," the A-in-C said. "I don't know how she did it."

"I do," Malone said quietly. "Teleportation."

The A-in-C whistled. "Well," he said, "it was a great secret as long as it was FBI property. But now, friend, all hell is going to bust loose."

"It already has," Malone said hollowly.

"Great," the A-in-C said. "What now?"

"Now," Malone said, "I am going to go back to Washington. Take care of poor little old New York for me."

He closed his eyes, and vanished.

When he opened them, he was in his Washington apartment. He went over to the big couch and sat down, feeling that if he were going to curse he might as well be comfortable while he did it. But when the air was bright blue, some minutes later, he didn't feel any better. Cursing was not the answer.

Nothing seemed to be.

What was his next move?

Where did he go from here?

The more he thought about it, the more his mind spun. He was, he realized, at an absolute, total, dead end.

Oh, there were things he could do. Malone knew that very well. He could make a lot of noise and go through a lot of waste motion-that was what it would amount to. He could have all the homes of all the missing PRS members checked. That would result, undoubtedly, in the discovery that the PRS members involved weren't in their homes. He could have their files impounded, which would clutter everything with

a great many more pieces of paper, and none of the pieces of paper would do any good to him. In general, he could have the entire FBI chasing all over hell and gone-and finding nothing whatever.

No, it would be a waste of time, he told himself. That much was certain.

And, though he probably had enough evidence to get the FBI in motion, he had nowhere near enough to carry the case into court, much less make a try at getting the case to stand up in court. That was one thing he couldn't do, even if he wanted to: issue warrants for arrest on any basis whatever.

But Malone was an FBI agent, and his motto was: "There's always a way." No normal method of tracking down the PRS members, and finding their present whereabouts, was going to work. They'd been covering themselves for such an emergency, undoubtedly, for a good many years and, due to telepathy, they certainly knew enough not to leave any clues around, of any kind.

But nobody, Malone told himself, was perfect. There were clues lying around somewhere, he was sure of that; there had to be. The problem was, simply, to figure out where to look, and what to look for.

Somewhere, the clues were sitting quietly and waiting for him to find them. The thought cheered him slightly, but not very much. Instead, he went into the kitchen and started heating water for coffee. He thought there might be a long night ahead of him, and sighed gently. But there was no help for it. The work had to be done, and done quickly.

But when eight cigars had been reduced to ash, and what seemed like several gallons of coffee had sloshed their way into Malone's interior workings, his mind was as blank as a baby's. The lovely, opalescent dawn began to show in the East, and Malone swore at it. Then, haggard, red-eyed, confused, violently angry, and not one inch closer to a solution, he fell into a fitful doze on his couch.

* * * *

When he awoke the sun was high in the sky, and outside his window the cheerful sound of traffic floated in the air. Downstairs somebody was playing a television set too loudly, and the voice reached Malone's semi-aware mind in a great tinny shout:

"And now, the makers of Bon-Ton B-Complex Bolsters-the blanket of health-present Mother Kohler's Chit-Chat Hour!"

The invisible audience screamed and howled. Malone ripped out a particularly foul oath and sat up on the couch. "That," he muttered, "is a fine thing to wake up to." He focused his eyes, with only slight difficulty, on his watch. The time was exactly noon.

"But first," the announcer burred downstairs, "a word from Mother Kohler herself, about the brand new special B-Complex Irradiated Bolster you can get at your neighborhood stores..."

"Shut up," Malone said. He had wasted a lot of time doing nothing but sleeping, he told himself. This was no time to be listening to television. He got up and found, to his vague surprise, that he felt a lot better and more clear-headed than he'd been feeling. Maybe the sleep had done him some good.

He yawned, blinked and stretched, and then he padded into the bathroom, showered and shaved and put on fresh clothes. He thought about having a morning cup of coffee, but last night's dregs appeared to have taken up permanent residence in his digestive tract, and he decided against it at last. He swallowed some orange juice and toast and then, heaving a great sigh of resignation and brushing crumbs off his shirt, he teleported himself over to his office.

He was going to have to face Burris eventually, he knew.

And now was just as good, or as bad, a time as any.

Malone didn't hesitate. He punched the button on his intercom for Burris' office and then sat back, with his eyes closed, for the well-known voice.

It didn't come.

Instead, Wolf, the director's secretary, spoke up.

"Burris isn't in, Malone," he said. "He had to fly to Miami. I can get a call through to him on the plane, if it's urgent, but he'll be landing in about fifteen minutes. And he did say he'd call this afternoon."

"Oh," Malone said. "Sure. Okay. It isn't urgent." He was just as glad of the reprieve; it gave him one more chance to work matters through to a solution, and report success instead of failure. "But what's going on in Miami?" he added.

"Don't you read the papers?" Wolf asked.

Everybody, Malone reflected, seemed to be asking him that lately. "I haven't had time," he said.

"The governor of Mississippi was assassinated yesterday, at Miami Beach," Wolf said.

"Ah," Malone said. He thought about it for a second. "Frankly," he said, "this does not strike me as an irreparable loss to the nation. Not even to Mississippi."

"You express my views precisely," Wolf said.

"How about the killer?" Malone said. "I gather they haven't got him yet, or Burris wouldn't be on his way down."

"No," Wolf said. "The killer would be on his way here instead. They haven't got him, Malone. It seems Governor Flarion was walking along Collins Avenue when somebody fired at him, using a high-powered rifle with, I guess, a scope sight."

"Professional," Malone commented.

"It looks like it," Wolf said. "Nobody even heard the sniper's shot; the governor just fell over, right there in the street. And by the time his bodyguards found out what had happened, it was impossible even to be sure just which way he was facing when the shot had been fired."

"And, as I remember Collins Avenue—" Malone started.

"Right," Wolf said. "Out where Governor Flarion was taking his stroll, there's an awful lot of it to search. The boys are trying to find somebody who might have seen a man acting suspicious in any of the nearby buildings, or heard a shot, or seen anybody at all lurking or loitering anywhere remotely close to the scene."

"Lovely," Malone said. "Sounds like a nice complicated job."

"You don't know the half of it," Wolf said. "There's also the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce. According to them, Flarion died of a heart attack, and not even in Miami Beach. The bullet and the body are supposed to be written off as just coincidences, to keep the fair name of Miami Beach unsullied."

"All I can say," Malone offered, "is good luck. This is the saddest day in American history since the assassination of Huey P. Long."

"Agreed," Wolf said. "Want me to tell Burriss you called?"

"Right," Malone said. He flicked off.

Now, he asked himself, how did the assassination of Governor Nemours P. Flarion fit in with anything?

Granted, good old Nemours P. had been a horrible mistake, a paranoid, self-centered, would-be dictator whose talents as a rabble-rouser and a fearmonger had somehow managed to get him elected to a governorship. Certainly nobody felt particularly unhappy about his death. But he wouldn't fit into the pattern. Malone reminded himself that that was one more thing he had to find out when he got the chance.

The trouble lay in finding an opportunity, he thought-and then he corrected himself.

Not finding it-making it. Nobody was going to hand him anything on a silver serving salver.

He punched the intercom again and got the Records office.

"Yes, sir?" a familiar voice said.

"Potter?" Malone said. "This is Malone. I want facsimiles of everything we have on the Psychological Research Society, on Sir Lewis Carter, and on Luba Vasilovna Garbitsch. Both of those last are connected with the Society."

"Right," Potter said. "They'll be up at once."

Then he punched again, and asked for the latest copy of the Washington Post. He gave the article on Governor Flarion one quick glance, but it didn't contain anything in the way of facts that he hadn't already had from Wolf. After that, he left it and concentrated on the more prosaic, human-interest news, the smaller stories.

FIFTH SPLINTER GROUP FORMS IN DCA BATTLE

That was an interesting one, he thought. The Daughters of Colonial Americans had about reached the point of diminishing returns in their battle over the claims of Rose Carswell Elder, a descendant of a Negro freedman named William Elder who had lived in Boston in 1776 and fought on the side of the Colonies during the Revolution. One more splinter group, Malone thought, and there'd be as many splinters as members. Rose Carswell Elder was pressing her claim for membership, and the ladies were replying by throwing crockery and hard words at each other.

Then there was the Legion of American War Veterans. The headline on this one read:

LAWV OUSTS 'ROWDIES': AID MEETING CONTINUES

The "rowdies," Malone discovered, were a large minority group that wanted the good old days of electric canes, paper hats, whistles and pretty girls. "The Legion has grown up," a spokesman told them. "This convention is being held to discuss the possibility of increased technological aid to India and Africa. There is no place for tomfoolery or high jinks."

The expulsion order had been carried by a record majority.

And then there were two items, on different pages, that seemed to contradict each other. The first was a small headline on page fourteen:

RESIGNATIONS REACH NEW HIGH IN U.S. COLLEGE FACULTIES

Teachers were apparently resigning all over the place, in virtually every department of virtually every college. That made sense. And the other item, on page three, made just as much sense:

HIGHER TAXES VOTED THROUGHOUT U.S. FOR TEACHER INCOME RISE State and Federal Aid Also Promised in Drive to Raise Salaries Now

Apparently, teachers were resigning just as they were about to get more money than they'd ever seen before. But Malone could fit that into the pattern easily enough; it was perfectly obvious, once he thought about it.

Malone didn't have time to go through much more of the paper; the facsimile records he'd been waiting for arrived, and he put the Post aside and concentrated on them instead. Maybe somewhere in the records was the clue he desperately needed.

The PRS was widely spread, all right. It had branches in almost every major city in the United States, in Europe, South Africa, South America and Australia. There was even a small branch society in Greenland. True, the Communist disapproval of such non-materialistic, un-Marxian objectives as Psychological Research showed up in the fact that there were no registered branches in the Sino-Soviet bloc. But that, Malone thought, didn't really matter. Maybe in Russia they called themselves the Lenin Study Group, or the Better Borshcht League. He was fairly sure, from what he'd experienced, that the PRS had some kind of organization even behind the Iron Curtain.

Money didn't seem to be much of a problem, either. Malone checked for the supporters of the organization and found a microfilmed list that ran into the hundreds of thousands of names, most of them ordinary people who seemed to be interested in spiritualism and the like, and who donated a few dollars apiece each year to the PRS. Besides this mass of small donations, of course, there were a few large ones, from independently wealthy men who gave support to the organization and seemed actively interested in its aims.

It wasn't an unusual picture; it was just an exceptionally big one.

Malone sighed and went on to the personal dossiers.

Sir Lewis Carter himself was a well-known astronomer and mathematician. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, the Royal Astronomical Society and the Royal Mathematical Society. He had been knighted for his contributions in higher mathematics only two years before he had come to live in the United States. Malone went over the papers dealing with his entry into the country carefully, but they were all in order and they contained absolutely no clues he could use.

Sir Lewis' books on political and historical philosophy had been well-received, and he had also written a novel, *But Some Are More Equal*, which, for a few weeks after publication, had managed to reach the bottom of the best-seller list.

And that was that. Malone tried to figure out whether all this information did him any good at all, and he didn't have to think for very long. The answer was no. He opened the next dossier.

Luba Vasilovna Garbitsch had been born in New York. Her mother had been a woman of Irish descent named Mary O'Keefe, and had died in '68. Her father, of course, had now been revealed as a Russian agent, and was at present making his home, such as it probably was, in good old Moscow.

Malone sighed. Somewhere in the dossiers, he was sure, there was a clue, the basic clue that would tell him everything he needed to know. His prescience had never been so strong; he knew perfectly well that he was staring at the biggest, most startling and most complete disclosure of all. And he couldn't see it.

He stared at the folders for a long minute. What did they tell him? What was the clue?

And then, very slowly, the soft light of a prodigal sun illuminated his mind.

"Mr. Malone," Malone said gently, "you are a damned fool. There are times when it is necessary to discard the impossible after you have seen that the obscure is the obvious."

He wasn't sure whether that meant anything, or even whether he knew what he was saying. He was sure of only one thing: the final answer.

And it was obvious. Obvious as all hell.

CHAPTER 13

There was, of course, only one thing to do, and only one place to go. Malone went downstairs without even stopping to wave farewell to the agent-in-charge, and climbed into the big, specially-built FBI Lincoln that waited for him.

"Want a driver?" one of the mechanics asked.

"No, thanks," Malone said. "This one's a solo job."

That was for sure. He drove out onto the streets and into the heavy late afternoon traffic of Washington, D. C. The Lincoln handled smoothly, but Malone didn't press his luck among the rushing cars. He wasn't in any hurry. He had all the time in the world, and he knew it. They-and, for once, Malone knew just who "they" were-would still be waiting for him when he got there.

If he got there, he thought suddenly, dodging a combination roadblock consisting of a green Plymouth making an illegal turn, a fourteen-year-old boy on a bicycle and a sweet young girl pushing a baby carriage. He managed to get past and wiped his forehead with one hand. He continued driving, even more carefully, until he was out of the city.

It took quite a lot of time. Washington traffic was getting worse and worse with every passing month, and the pedestrians were as nonchalant as ever. As Malone turned a corner, a familiar face popped into view, practically in front of his car. He swerved and got by without committing homicide, and a cheerful

voice said: "Thanks, sorry."

"It's okay, Chester," Malone said. The big man skipped back to the sidewalk and watched the car go by. Malone knew him slightly, a private eye who did some work on the fringes of Washington crime; basically a nice guy, but a little too active for Malone's taste.

For a second he thought of asking the man to accompany him, but the last thing Malone needed was muscle. What he wanted was brains, and he even thought he might be developing some of those.

He was nearly sure of it by the time he finally did leave the city and get out onto the highway that went south into the depths of Virginia. And, while he drove, he began to use that brain, letting his reflexes take over most of the driving problems now that the Washington traffic tangle was behind him.

He took all his thoughts from behind the shield that had sheltered them and arrayed them neatly before him. Everything was perfectly clear; all he had to do now was explain it.

Malone had wondered, over the years, about the detectives in books. They always managed to wrap everything up in the last chapter-and that was all right. But they always had a whole crowd of suspects listening to them, too. And Malone knew perfectly well that he could never manage a set-up like that. People would be interrupting him. Things would happen. Dogs would rush in and start a fight on the floor. There would be earthquakes, or else somebody would suddenly faint and interrupt him.

But now, at long last, he realized, he had his chance.

Nobody, he thought happily, could interrupt him. And he could explain to his heart's content.

Because the members of the PRS were telepathic. And Malone, he thought cheerfully, was not.

Somebody, he was sure, would be tuned in on him as he drove toward their Virginia hiding place. And he hoped that that somebody would alert everybody else, so they could all tune in and hear his grand final explanation of everything.

And a hearty good afternoon to everybody, he thought. A very hearty and happy and sunny good afternoon to all-and most especially to Miss Luba Garbitsch. I hope she's the one who's tuned in-or that somebody has alerted her by now, because I'd rather talk to her than to anyone else I can think of out there.

Nothing personal, you understand. It's just that I'd like to show off a little. I don't need to hide anything from you-as a matter of plain, simple fact, I can't. Not with my shield down.

He paused then, and, in his imagination, he could almost hear Lou's voice.

"I'm listening, Kenneth," the voice said. "Go on." Well, then, he thought. He fished around in his mind for a second, wondering exactly where to start. Then he decided, in the best traditions of the detective story, not to mention Alice in Wonderland, to start at the beginning.

The dear old Psychological Research Society, he thought, had been going along for a good many years now-since the 1880's, as a matter of fact, or somewhere near there. That's a long time and a lot of research. A lot of famous and intelligent men and women have belonged to the Society. And in all that time, they've worked hard, and worked sincerely, in testing every kind of psychic phenomenon. They've worked impartially and scientifically to find out whether a given unusual incident was explicable in terms

of known natural laws, or was the result of some unknown force.

And it's hardly surprising that, after about a hundred years of work, something finally came of it.

"Not surprising at all," he imagined Lou's voice saying. "You're making things very clear, Kenneth."

Or had that been "Sir Kenneth"? Malone wasn't sure, but it didn't really matter. He spun the car around a curve in the highway, smiled gently to himself, and went on.

Naturally, to the average man in the street, the Society was just a bunch of crackpots, and the more respected and famous the people who belonged to it, the happier he was; it just proved his superiority to them. He didn't deal with crackpot notions, did he?

No, the Society did. And nobody except the members paid much attention to what was going on.

I remember one of the book facsimiles you gave me, for instance. Some man, whose name I can't recall, wrote a great "exposé" of the Society, in which he tried to prove that Sir Lewis Carter and certain other members were trying to take over the world and run it to suit themselves, making a sort of horrible dictatorship out of their power and position. At that, he wasn't really far from the truth, though he had it turned around a little. But the book shows that he has no knowledge whatever of what psionics is, or how it works. He seems to me to be just a little afraid of it, which probably adds to his ignorance. And, as a result, he got a twisted idea of what the PRS is actually doing.

He could almost hear Lou's voice again. "Yes," she was saying. "I remember the book. It was put in our reference library for its humorous aspects."

That's right, Malone thought. It would be only funny to you. But it would be frightening and terrible to an awful lot of people simply because they wouldn't understand what the Society was all about.

"All right," Lou's voice said helpfully. "And what is it all about?"

Malone settled back in the driver's seat as the car continued to spin along the road. It seems to me, he thought carefully, that any telepath has to go one of two ways. Either, like Her Majesty or the others we found when we discovered her two years ago, the telepath ends up insane-or perhaps commits suicide, which is simply one step further in retreat-or else he learns to understand and control his own powers, and to understand other human beings so well that, if he actually did control the world, everyone would benefit in the long run.

The difference between the two kinds is the difference between Her Majesty and the PRS.

"That's good thinking," he could hear Lou say.

No, it isn't, he thought; it's no more than guessing, and it could be just as wild as you please. But there is one thing I do know: the way to get a better world, or anyhow the first step, is to clear the road ahead. And that means getting rid of the fools, idiots, maniacs, blockheads, morons, psychopaths, paranoids, timidity-ridden, fear-worshipers, fanatics, thieves, criminals and a whole lot more.

"Get rid of them?" Lou's voice said.

Well, Malone thought, I don't mean they've got to be killed or driven out of the civilized world. You've just got to get them out of any place where their influence is heavily felt on society as a whole.

"All right," Lou's voice said pleasantly. "And how could we go about that? Do we write nasty letters to the editor?"

There's a much more effective way, Malone thought. There's no trouble in getting rid of a man if you can make him expose himself. And you've managed that pretty well. You've thwarted their idiotic plans, made them stumble over their own fumble-mindedness, played on their neuroses, concocted errors for them to fight and, in general, rigged things in any possible way so that they'd quit, or get fired, or lose elections, or get arrested, or just generally get put out of circulation somehow.

It's extremely effective-and it works very well.

Sometimes, you've only had to put the blocks to individuals. Sometimes whole nations have had to go. And sometimes it's been in-between, and you've managed to foul up whole organizations with misplaced papers missent messages, error, and changed minds and everything else you can think of.

As a matter of fact, it sounds like fun.

"Well," he imagined Lou saying, "it is fun, in away. But it's a deadly serious business, too."

Sure it is, Malone thought. I think the first time that came home to me was when I saw what was happening in Russia, and compared it to what had been going on over here. Tom Boyd saw that, too, when I pointed it out to him-as you probably know if you were spying on my mind at the time.

Not that I mind that in the least.

Come more often, by all means.

But Tom, in case you weren't listening, said: "Over here there are a lot of confused jerks and idiots ... And in Russia there's a lot of confusion."

Now, that's perfectly true, and it spells out the difference. Over here, you've been confusing the jerks and the idiots, getting rid of them so the system can work properly. Over in Russia, on the other hand, you've left the jerks and the idiots all alone to do their dirty work, and you've just added to the confusion where necessary, so that the system will break down of its own weight.

"But, after all," Lou said, "things look pretty bad over here, too. Look at the papers."

Everybody, Malone thought, has been telling me to go and look at the newspapers. And when I do look at them I find all sorts of evidence of confusion. Teachers resigning, senators and representatives goofing up bills on Congress, gang wars cluttering up the streets with cadavers and making things tough for the Sanitation Department, factional fights in various organizations. Now, all of that looks pretty horrible in the papers, but do you know something? It isn't horrible at all.

It's pretty damn good, as a matter of fact.

The teachers who are resigning, for instance, are the nincompoops who've got to be pruned out so that competent teachers can come in. And, with the higher salaries, more and more competent men and women are going to be attracted to the job. The universities are going to be freer and better places to work in; they won't be monopolies any more.

"Monopolies?" Lou said.

In restraint of knowledge, Malone thought. The old monopoly was in restraint of trade, and legal action helped to kill that kind. The monopoly in restraint of knowledge took a little more killing, but you're doing the job quite nicely. And not only in the schools.

The factional fights are having the same result. Look at the AAAM, for instance. That organization is a monopoly, pure and simple. Simple, anyhow. And what the factional fights are doing to it is just breaking up the monopoly and letting knowledge free again.

And then we come to Congress. Senators and representatives are having a terrible time, some of them. There's a fight going on between Furbisher and Deeks because Deeks has discovered some evidence against Furbisher. Who's having the terrible time?

All of them?

Nope. Furbisher is. Deeks isn't.

And that's the way it's going all over. The useful, necessary legislation is going through Congress now without being cluttered up by stupid dam bills and water bills and other idiocies that simply clog the works.

And then, of course, there are the gang wars. Now, I feel as sorry for the Sanitation Department as anybody, but at least they're cleaning the streets for good now. The boys who are dying off and getting sent to hospitals and jails are just the ones who should have been sent away long ago. Everybody knows that, but nobody can prove it.

Except the PRS.

And the PRS is busy doing just what it can about that proof.

And all it takes is a few of you. I don't know how many-I don't know how many of you there really are, for that matter. But it must be a fair number to stock all your branches with "top-level" executives and the lower-level men and women who really believe in the PRS blind, and do their best to keep it working.

There are probably a lot of ways it might work, but the simplest and best way I can think of is this one: there's a clearing-house sort of set-up, and information comes in from various telepathic spies working for the PRS, about various projected activities of the imbecile contingent.

And, from this information, you figure out the best time and place for lightning to strike, and you select the kind of lightning it's going to be. Here it's a misplaced letter, there some "facts" that aren't facts, and somewhere else a dropped package of secret records. Somebody goofs-and is exposed.

Maybe it works on the local-organization level. Maybe there are teams all over the country, all ready to synchronize their minds and jab somebody in the thought processes at just the right time, in just the right way, as soon as they get the word. That's one way of doing it, maybe the best way.

There are others, but it doesn't really matter how that end of it works. The important thing is that it does work.

And, when it works, it can certainly create quite a mess. Yes-sirree, Bob. Or Lou, as the case may be.

I sure hope somebody's picking all this up, because I'd hate to have to explain it again when I get there.

Are you there, anybody?

Malone imagined he heard Lou's voice. "Yes, Ken," she said. "Yes, I'm here."

But, of course, there was no way for them to get through to him. They were telepathic, but Kenneth J. Malone wasn't he told himself sadly.

Hello, out there, he thought. I hope you've been listening so far, because there isn't going to be too much more. But there are a couple of things that still need to be cleared up. I've got some answers, but there are others I'm going to need.

There's Russia, for instance. It does seem to me as if your teams in Russia, whatever they're calling themselves, are having a lot more fun than the U. S. teams. For one thing they've got an easier job.

In this country, the teams are looking for ways to get rid of the blockheads, and there are a lot of them. In Russia, you don't have to get rid of the blockheads. All you have to do is clear the road for them. And you can do that by fouling up the more intelligent people.

"Intelligent people?" he could hear Lou say.

Intelligence doesn't mean good sense, Malone thought. I don't doubt that the men who are maintaining Russia's power are intelligent men-but what they're doing is bad for the world as a whole, in the long run.

So you foul them up, and leave the blockheads a clear field to run the country into the ground. And that's easier than fouling up the blockheads.

Sure it is.

There are fewer intelligent, active people around than there are blockheads.

Always were.

And maybe there always will be-but not if the PRS can help it.

Oh, and by the way, Malone thought. You do know how I spotted you, don't you? You were tuned in then, weren't you?

And I don't mean just Lou. I mean all of you.

In a world of blind men, the man who can see stands out. In a world of the insane, the sane man stands out.

And in a world where organizations are regularly being confused and fouled up-either as whole organizations, or through your attempts to get rid of individual members-a smooth-running, efficient organization stands out like a sore thumb.

Frankly, it took me longer to see it than it should have.

But I've got the answer at last—the main answer. Though, as I say, there are some others I'd like to have.

Like, for instance, Russia. And exactly what did happen that night in Moscow.

CHAPTER 14

At this point Malone suddenly became aware of a sound that was not coming from his own mind. It was coming from somewhere behind his car, and it was a very loud sound. It was, he discovered when he looked back, the siren of a highway patrolman on a motorcycle, coming toward him at imminent risk of life and limb and waving frantically with an unbelievably free hand.

Malone glanced down at the speedometer. With a sigh, he realized that his reflexes had allowed him a little leeway, and that he was going slightly over the legal speed limit for this Virginia highway. He shook his head, eased up on the accelerator, and began to apply the brakes.

By the time he had pulled over to the side of the road, the highway patrolman was coming to a halt behind the big Lincoln. Malone watched him check the number on the rear plate and then walk slowly around to the window on the driver's side. "Can't you hurry?" Malone muttered under his breath. "All this Virginian ease is okay in its place, but—" In the meanwhile he was getting out his identification, and by the time the patrolman reached him he had it in his hand.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Sorry?" the patrolman said, frowning. He had an open, boyish face with freckles and a pug nose. He looked like somebody's kid brother, very dependable but just a little cute. "What for?" he said.

Malone shrugged. "What else?" he said. "Speeding."

"Oh, that," the patrolman said. "Why, don't you worry about that."

"Don't worry about it?" Malone said. This particular kid brother was obviously a little nuts, and should have been put away years ago. He ground his teeth silently, but he didn't make any complaints. It was never wise, he knew, to irritate a traffic cop of any sort.

"Sure not," the patrolman said. "Why, we don't pay any attention out here until a fella hits ten miles over the posted limit. That's okay."

"Fine," Malone said cheerily. "Then I can drive on?"

"Now, just hold it a second there," the patrolman said. "Let's see your identification if you don't mind."

Malone held it out wordlessly. The patrolman, obviously intent on finding out just what kind of paper the card was made of, who had printed it and whether there were any germs on it, gave it a long, careful scrutiny. Malone shifted slightly in his seat, counted to ten and managed to say nothing.

Then the patrolman started reading the card aloud. "Kenneth J. Malone," he said in a tone of some surprise. "Special Agent of the FBI." He looked up. "That right?" he said. "What it says here?"

"That's right," Malone said. "And you can have my autograph later." He regretted the last sentence as soon as it was out of his mouth, but the patrolman didn't seem to notice.

"Then you're the man, all right," he said happily. "I caught your plate number as you went on by me, back there."

"Plate number?" Malone said. "What am I supposed to have done?" He'd overslept, he knew, but that was the only violation of even his personal code that he could think of. And it didn't seem likely that the Virginia Highway Patrol was sending out its men to arrest people who overslept.

"Why, Mr. Malone," the patrolman said with honest surprise written all over his Norman Rockwell face, "as far as I know you didn't do a thing wrong."

"But—"

"They just told us to be on the watch for a black 1973 Lincoln with your number, and see if you were driving it. They did say you'd probably be driving it."

"Good," Malone said. "And I am. And I'd like to continue doing so." He paused and then added, "But what happened?"

"Well," the patrolman said, in exactly the manner of a man starting out to tell a long, interesting story about the Wars of the Spanish Succession, "well, sir, it seems FBI Headquarters in Washington, they got in touch with the Highway Patrol Headquarters, down in Richmond, and Highway Patrol Headquarters—"

"Down in Richmond," Malone muttered resignedly.

"That's right," the patrolman said in a pleased voice. "Well, they called all the local barracks, and then we got the message on our radios." He stopped, exactly as if he thought he had finished.

Malone counted to ten again, made it twenty and then found that he was capable of speech. "What?" he said in a calm, patient voice, "was the message about?"

"Well," the patrolman said, "it seems some fella down in Washington, fella name of Thomas Boyd, they said it was, wants to talk to you pretty bad."

"He could have called me on the car phone," Malone said in what he thought was a reasonable tone of voice. "He didn't have to—"

"There's no call for yelling at me, Mr. Malone," the patrolman said reproachfully. "I only obeyed my orders, which were to locate your black 1973 Lincoln and see if you were driving it, and give you a message. That's all."

"It's enough," Malone muttered. "He didn't have to send out the militia to round me up."

"Oh, no, Mr. Malone," the patrolman said. "Not the militia. Highway Patrol. We don't rightly have any connection with the militia at all."

"Glad to hear it," Malone said. He picked up the receiver of the car phone and waited for the buzz that would show that he was connected with Communications Central in Washington.

It didn't come.

"Oh, yes," the patrolman said suddenly. "I suppose that's why this Mr. Boyd, he couldn't call you on the car telephone, Mr. Malone. The message we got, it also says that the fella at the FBI garage in Washington just forgot to plug in that phone there."

"Oh," Malone said. "Well, thanks for telling me."

"You're right welcome, Mr. Malone," the patrolman said "You can plug it in now."

"I intend to," Malone said through his teeth. He closed his eyes for a long second, and then opened them again. He saw the interested face of the patrolman looking down at him. Hurriedly, he turned away, felt underneath the dashboard until he found the dangling plug, and inserted it into its socket.

The buzz now arrived.

Malone heaved a great sigh and punched for Boyd's office. Then he looked around.

The patrolman was still standing at the car window. He was looking down at Malone with an interested, slightly blank expression.

Malone thought of several things to say, and chose the most harmless. "Thanks a lot," he told the patrolman. "I appreciate your stopping off to let me know."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Malone," the patrolman said. "That was my orders, to do that. And even if they weren't, it was no trouble at all. Any time. I'd always be glad to do anything for the FBI."

"Boyd here," a tinny voice from the phone said.

Malone eyed the patrolman sourly. "Malone here," he said. "What's the trouble, Tom? I-No, wait a minute."

"Ken!" Boyd's voice said. "I've been trying to—"

"Hold it a second," Malone said. He opened his mouth, and then he saw a car go by. The patrolman hadn't seen it. Malone felt sorry for the driver, but not too sorry. "Say!" he said to the patrolman.

"Yes, sir?" the patrolman said.

"That boy was really going, wasn't he?" Malone said. "He must have been doing at least ninety."

The patrolman jerked his head around to stare at the disappearing car. "Well—" he said, and then: "Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Malone. Thanks. I'll see you later." He raced for his machine, swung aboard and roared down the road, guiding with one hand and manipulating the controls of his radar set with the other.

Malone waved him a cheery farewell, and got back to the phone.

"Okay, Tom," he said. "Go ahead."

"Who was that you were talking to?" Boyd asked.

"Oh, just a motorcycle patrolman," Malone said. "He wanted to be helpful, so I told him to go chase a Buick."

"Why a Buick?" Boyd said, interestedly.

"Why not?" Malone said. "There happened to be one handy at the time. Now, what's on your mind?"

"I've been searching all over hell for you," Boyd said. "I wish you'd just leave some word where you were going, and then I wouldn't have to—"

"Damn it," Malone cut in. "Tom, just tell me what you want. In straightforward, simple language. It just took me ten minutes to pry a few idiotic facts out of a highway patrolman. Don't make me go through it all over again with you."

"Okay, okay," Boyd said. "Keep your pants on. But here's the dope: I just flew in from New York, and I brought all the files on the case—the stuff you left in your office in New York, remember?"

"Right," Malone said. "Thanks."

"And I think we may be able to get the Big Cheese," Boyd went on.

"Manelli?" Malone said.

"None other than the famous Cesare Antonio," Boyd said. "It seems two of his most valued lieutenants were found in a garage in Queens, practically weighted down with machine-gun bullets."

Malone thought of Manelli, complaining sadly about the high overhead of murder. "And where does that get us?" he said.

"Well," Boyd said, "whoever did the job forgot to search the bodies."

"Oh-oh," Malone said.

"Very much oh-oh," Boyd said. "They're loaded down, not only with lead, but with paper. There are documents linking Manelli right up to the International Truckers' Union—a direct tie-in with Mike Sand. And Sand now says he's tied in with the Great Lakes Transport Union in Chicago."

"This sounds like a big one," Malone said.

"You have no idea," Boyd said. "And in the middle of all this, Burreis called."

"Burreis?" Malone said.

"That's right," Boyd said. "He wants me to go on down to Florida and take over the investigation of the Flarion assassination. So it looks as if I'm going to miss most of the fun."

"Too bad," Malone said.

"But maybe not all," Boyd said. "It may tie in with the case we're working on. At least, that's what Burreis thinks."

"Yes," Malone said. "I can see why he thinks so. Did he have any message for me, by the way?"

"Not exactly," Boyd said.

Malone blinked. "Not exactly?" he said. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well," Boyd said, "he says he does have something to tell you, but it'll wait until he sees you. Then, he says, he'll tell you personally."

"Great," Malone said.

"Maybe it's a surprise," Boyd said. "Maybe you're fired."

"I wouldn't have the luck," Malone said. "But if I get any leads on the Flarion job, I'll let you know right away."

"Sure," Boyd said. "Thanks. And-by the way, what are you doing now?"

"Me?" Malone said. "I'm driving."

"Yes, I know," Boyd said patiently. "To where, and why? Or is this another secret? Sometimes I think nobody loves me any more."

"Oh, don't be silly," Malone said. "The entire city of Miami Beach is awaiting your arrival with bated breath."

"But what are you doing?" Boyd said.

Malone chose his words carefully. "I'm just checking a lead," he said at last. "I don't know if it's going to pan out or not, but I thought I'd drive down to Richmond and check on a name I've got. I'll call you about it in the morning, Tom, and let you know what the result is."

"Oh," Boyd said. "Okay. Sure. So long, Ken."

"So long," Malone said. He hung up the phone, put the car into gear again and roared off down U. S. Highway Number One. He didn't feel entirely happy about the way things had gone; he'd been forced to lie to Tom Boyd, and that just wasn't right.

However, there was no help for it. It was actually better this way, he told himself hopefully. After all, the less Tom knew from now on, the better off he was going to be. The better off everyone would be.

He went on through Fredericksburg without incident, but he didn't continue on to Richmond. Instead, he turned off U. S. 1 when he reached a little town called Thornburg, which was smaller than he had believed a town could be and live. He began following a secondary road out into the countryside.

The countryside, of course, was filled with country, in the shape of hills, birds, trees, flowers, grass and other distractions to the passing motorist. It took Malone quite a bit longer than he expected to find the place he was looking for, and he finally came to the sad conclusion that country estates are just as difficult to find as houses in Brooklyn. In both cases, he thought, there was the same frantic search down what seemed to be a likely route, the same disappointment when the route turned out to lead nowhere, and the same discovery that no one had ever heard of the place and, in fact, doubted very strongly whether it

even existed.

But he found it at last, rounding a curve in a narrow black-top road and spotting the house beyond a grove of trees. He recognized it instantly.

He had seen it so often that he felt as if he knew it intimately.

It was a big, rambling, Colonial-type mansion, painted a blinding and beautiful white, with a broad, pillared porch and a great carved front door. The front windows were curtained in rich purples, and before the house was a great front garden, and tall old trees. Malone half-expected Scarlett O'Hara to come tripping out of the house at any moment.

Inside it, however, if Malone were right, was not the magnetic Scarlett. Inside the house were some of the most important members of the Psychological Research Society.

But it was impossible to tell from the outside. Nothing moved on the well-kept grounds, and the windows didn't show so much as the flutter of a purple curtain. There was no sound. No cars were parked around the house, nor, Malone thought as he remembered *Gone With the Wind*, were there any horses or carriages.

The place looked deserted.

Malone thought he knew better, but it took a few minutes for him to get up enough courage to go up the long driveway. He stared at the house. It was an old one, he knew, built long before the Civil War and originally commanding a huge plantation. Now, all that remained of that vast parcel of land was the few acres that surrounded the house.

But the original family still inhabited it, proud of the house and of their part in its past. Over the years, Malone knew, they had kept it up scrupulously, and the place had been both restored and modernized on the inside without harming the classic outlines of the hundred-and-fifty-year-old structure.

A fence surrounded the estate, but the front gate was swinging open. Malone saw it and took a deep breath. Now, he told himself, or never. He drove the Lincoln through the opening slowly, alert for almost anything.

There was no disturbance. Thirty yards from the front door he pulled the car to a cautious stop and got out. He started to walk toward the building. Each step seemed to take whole minutes, and everything he had thought raced through his mind again.

Nothing seemed to move anywhere, except Malone himself.

Was he right? Were the PRS people really here? Or had he been led astray by them? Had he been manipulated as easily as they had manipulated so many others?

That was possible. But it wasn't the only possibility.

Suppose, he thought, that he was perfectly right, and that the PRS members were waiting inside. And suppose, too, that he'd misunderstood their motives.

Suppose they were just waiting for him to get a little closer.

Malone kept walking.

In just a few steps, he would be close enough so that a bullet aimed at him from the house hadn't a real chance of missing him.

And it didn't have to be bullets, either. They might have set a trap, he thought, and were waiting for him to walk right into it. Then they would hold him prisoner while they devised ways to...

To what? He didn't know. And that was even worse; it called up horrible terrors from the darkest depths of Malone's mind. He continued to walk forward, feeling about as exposed as a restaurant lamb chop caught with its panty down.

He reached the steps that led up to the porch, and took them one at a time.

He stood on the porch. A long second passed.

He took a step toward the high, wide and handsome oaken door. Then he took another step, and another.

What was waiting for him inside?

He took a deep breath, and pressed the doorbell button.

The door swung open immediately, and Malone involuntarily stepped back.

The owner of the house smiled at him from the doorway. Malone let out his breath in one long sigh of relief.

"I was hoping it would be you," he said weakly. "May I come in?"

"Why, certainly, Malone. Come on in. We've been expecting you, you know," said Andrew J. Burris, director of the FBI.

CHAPTER 15

Malone sat, quietly relaxed and almost completely at ease, in the depths of a huge, comfortable, old-fashioned Morris chair. Three similar chairs were clustered with his, around a squat, massive coffee table made of a single slab of dark wood set on short, curved legs. Malone looked around at the other three with a relaxed feeling of recognition: Andrew J. Burris, Sir Lewis Carter, and Luba Vasilovna Garbitsch.

"That mind shield of yours," Burris was saying, "is functioning very well. We weren't entirely sure you had actually located us until you pulled into that driveway."

"I wasn't entirely sure what I was locating," Malone said.

"And so it's over," Burris said with a satisfied air. "Everything's over."

"And just beginning," Sir Lewis put in. He drew a pipe from an inside pocket and began to fill it.

"And, of course," Burris said, "just beginning. Things do that; they go round and round in circles. It's what makes everything so confusing."

"And so much fun," Lou said, leaning back in her chair. She didn't look hostile now, Malone thought; she looked like a cat, wary but content. He decided that he liked this Lou even better than the old one. Lou, at home among her psionic colleagues, was even more than he'd ever thought she could be.

"More what?" she said suddenly. Burris jerked upright a trifle.

"What's more what?" he said. "Damn it, let's stick to one thing or the other. As soon as this thing starts mixing talk and thought it confuses me."

"Never mind," Lou said. She smiled across the table at Malone.

Malone jerked a finger under his collar.

"What made you decide to come here?" Sir Lewis said. He had the pipe lit now, and blew a cloud of fragrant smoke over the table.

Malone wondered where to start. "One of the clues," he said at last, "was the efficiency of the FBI. It hit me the same way the efficiency of the PRS had hit me, while I was looking at the batch of reports that had been run off so rapidly."

"Ah," Sir Lewis said. "The dossiers."

"Dossiers?" Burris said.

Sir Lewis puffed at his pipe. "Sorry," he said. "I thought you had been tuned in for that."

"I was busy," Burris said. "I can't tune into everything. After all, I've only got one mind."

"And two hands," Malone said at random.

"At least," Lou said. Their eyes met in a glance of perfect understanding.

"What the hell do hands have to do with it?" Burris said.

Sir Lewis shrugged. "Tune in and see," he said. "It's an old joke; but you'll never really adjust to telepathy unless you practice."

"Damn it," Burris said, "I practice. I'm always practicing. This and that and the other thing—after all, I am the director of the FBI. There's a lot to be done."

Sir Lewis puffed at his pipe again. "At any rate," he said smoothly, "Mr. Malone had requested some dossiers on us. On the PRS, myself, and Luba. They arrived very quickly. The efficiency of that arrival, and the efficiency he'd been noting about the FBI ever since he began work on this case, finally struck home to him."

"Ah," Burris said. "You see? The FBI's a full-time job. It's got to be efficient."

"Of course," Sir Lewis said soothingly.

"Anyhow," Malone said, "Sir Lewis is right. While every other branch of the government was having its troubles with the Great Confusion, the FBI was ticking along like a transistorized computer."

"A good start," Sir Lewis said.

"Darn good," Burris said. "Malone, I knew I could depend on you. You're a good man."

Malone swallowed hard. "Well, anyway," he said after a pause, "when I saw that I began to remember a few other things. Starting with a couple of years ago, when we first found Her Majesty, remember?"

"I'll never forget it," Burris said fervently. "She knighted me. Knight Commander of the Queen's Own FBI. What a moment."

"Thrilling," Malone said. "But you got to Yucca Flats for your knighting awfully quickly, a little too fast even for a modern plane."

"It had to be done," Burris said. "Anyhow, I've never really liked planes. Basically unsafe. People crash in them."

"But you wouldn't," Malone said. "You could always teleport yourself out."

"Sure," Burris said. "But that's troublesome. Why bother? Anyhow, I'd been to Yucca Flats before, so I could teleport there—a little way down the road, where I could meet my car—without any trouble."

"Anyhow, that was one thing," Malone said. "And then there was Her Majesty, when she pointed at that visiphone screen and accused you of being the telepathic spy. Remember?"

"She wasn't pointing at me," Burris said. "She was pointing at the man in the next room. How about you doing some remembering?"

"Sure she was," Malone said. "But it was just a little coincidence. And I have a hunch she felt, subconsciously, that there was something not quite right about you."

"Maybe," Burris conceded. "But that doesn't answer my question."

"It doesn't?" Malone said.

"Now look, Malone," Burris said. "None of this is proof. Not real proof. Not the kind the FBI has trained you to look for."

"But—"

"What I want to know," Burris said, "is why you came here, to my home? And in spite of everything you've said, that hasn't been tied down."

Malone frowned. After a second's thought he said, "Well ... All I know is that it just seemed obvious. That's all."

"Indeed it is," Sir Lewis said. "But one of the things we'll have to teach you, my boy, is how to distinguish between a deduction from observed fact and a psionic intuition. You've been confusing them

for some years now."

"I have?" Malone said.

"Sure you have," Burris said. "And, what's more—"

"Well, he's no worse than you are, Andrew," Lou said.

Burris turned. "Me?" he said in a voice of withering scorn.

"Certainly," Lou said. "After all, you've never really become used to mixtures of thought and speech. And, what's more, you've been using telepathy so long that when you try to communicate with nothing but words you only confuse yourself."

"And everybody else," Sir Lewis added.

"Hmpf," Burris said. "I'm busy all the time. I haven't got any extra time for practice."

Malone nodded, comparatively unsurprised. He'd wondered for years how a man so obviously unable to express himself clearly could run an organization like the FBI as well as he did. Having psionic abilities evidently led to drawbacks as well as advantages.

"Actually," he said, "my prescience made one mistake."

"Really?" Burris said, looking both worried and pleased about it.

"I expected the place to be full of people," Malone said. "I thought the elite corps of the PRS would be here."

"Oh," Burris said, looking crestfallen.

"Why, that was no mistake," Sir Lewis said. "As a matter of fact, they are all here. But they're quite busy at the moment; things are coning to a head, you know, and they must work quite undisturbed."

"And this," Burris added, "is a good place for it. There are sixty rooms in this house. Sixty."

"That's a lot of rooms," Malone said politely.

"A mansion," Burris said. "A positive mansion. And my family has lived here ever since—"

"I'm sure Ken isn't very interested in your family just now," Lou broke in.

"My family," Burris said with dignity, "is a very interesting family."

"I'm sure it must be," Lou said demurely. Sir Lewis choked with laughter suddenly and began waving his pipe. After a minute, Malone joined in.

"Damn it," Burris said. "Let's stick to one thing or the other. Did I say that?"

"Twice," Malone said.

"Sixty rooms," Burris said. "All built by my family. And local contractors, of course. That's enough to house sixty rooms full of people. And that number of people is a large houseful, I should think."

"It sounds like a lot," Malone said.

"It is a lot," Burris said. "All in my house. The house my family built."

"And we're grateful for it," Sir Lewis said soothingly. "We truly are."

"Good," Burris said.

"You must have had a large family," Lou said.

"A large family," Burris said, "and many guests. Many, many guests. From all over. Including famous people. General Hood slept in this house, and he slept very well indeed."

"As a matter of fact," Lou added, "he's still sleeping. They call it being dead."

"That's not funny," Burris snapped.

"Sorry," Lou said. "It was meant to be."

"I—" Burris shut his mouth and glared.

Malone was far away, thinking of the sixty rooms full of people, sitting quietly, their minds ranging into the distance, meshed together in small units. It was a picture that frightened and comforted him at the same time. He wasn't sure he liked it, but he certainly didn't dislike it, either.

After all, he told himself confusedly, too many cooks save a stitch in time.

He veered away from that sentence quickly. "Tell me," he said, "were you receiving my broadcast on the way here?"

Burris and Sir Lewis nodded. Lou started to nod, too, but stopped and looked surprised. "You mean you didn't know we were?" she said.

"How could I know?" Malone said. "After all, I was just tossing it out and hoping that somebody was on the listening end."

"But of course somebody was," Lou said. "I was."

"Good," Malone said. "But I still don't see how I was supposed to know that you—"

"I answered you, silly," Lou said. "I kept on answering you. Remember?"

Malone blinked, focused and then said, very slowly, "That was my imagination. Please tell me it was my imagination before I go nuts."

"Sorry," Lou said. "It wasn't."

"But that kind of thing," Malone said, "it takes a tremendous amount of power, doesn't it?"

"Not when the receiver is a telepath," Lou said sweetly.

Malone nodded slowly. "That," he said, "is exactly what I'm afraid of. Don't tell me—"

There was silence.

"Well?" Malone said.

"You said not to tell you," Lou said instantly.

"All right," Malone said. "I rescind the order. Am I a telepath, or am I not?"

Lou's lips didn't move. But then, they didn't have to.

The message came, unbidden, into Malone's mind.

Of course you are. That was the whole reason for Andrew's assigning you to this type of case.

"My God," Malone said softly.

Sir Lewis laid down his pipe in a handy ashtray. "Of course," he said, "you will find it difficult to pick up anyone but Lou, at first. The rapport between you two is really quite strong."

"Very strong indeed," Lou murmured. Malone found himself beginning to blush.

"It will be some time yet," Sir Lewis went on, "before you can really call yourself a telepath, my boy."

"I'll bet it will," Malone said. "Before I can call myself a telepath I'm going to have to get thoroughly used to the idea. And that's going to take a long, long time indeed."

"You only think that," Sir Lewis said. "Actually, you're used to the idea now. That was Andrew's big job."

"His big job?" Malone said. "Now, wait a minute—"

"You don't think I picked you for our first psionics case out of thin air, do you?" Burriss said. "Before anything else, you had to be forced to accept the fact that such things as telepaths really existed."

"Oh, they do," Malone said. "They certainly do."

"There's me, for instance," Burriss said. "But you had to be convinced. So I ordered you to go out and find one."

"Like the Bluebird of Happiness," Malone said.

Burriss frowned. "What's like the Bluebird of Happiness?" he said.

"You are," Malone said.

"I am not," Burriss said indignantly. "Bluebirds eat worms. My God, Malone."

"But the Bluebird," Malone said doggedly, "was right at home all the time, while everyone searched for it far away. And I had to go far away to find a telepath, when you were the one who ordered me to do it."

"Right," Burris said. "So you went and found Her Majesty. And, when you did find her, she forced acceptance on you simply by being Her Majesty and proving to you, once and for all, that she could read minds."

"Great," Malone said. "Of course, I could have got myself killed taking these lessons—"

"We were watching you," Burris said. "If anything had happened, we'd have been right on the spot."

"In time to bury the body," Malone said. "I think that's very thoughtful of you."

"We would have arrived in time to save you," Burris said. "Don't quibble. You're alive, aren't you?"

"Well," Malone said slowly, "if you're not sure, I don't know how I can convince you."

"There," Burris said triumphantly. "You see?"

Malone sighed wearily. "Okay," he said. "So you sent me out to find a telepath and to prove to me that there were such things. And I did. And then what happened?"

"You had a year," Burris said, "to get used to the idea of somebody reading your mind."

"Thanks," Malone said. "Of course, I didn't know it was you."

"It was Her Majesty too," Burris said. "Everybody."

"Good old Malone," Malone said. "The human peep-show."

"Now, that's what we mean," Sir Lewis broke in. "Subconsciously, you disliked the idea of leaving your thoughts bare to anyone, even a sweet little old lady. To some extent, you still do. But that will pass."

"Goody," Malone said.

"The residue is simply not important," Sir Lewis went on. "Your telepathic talents prove that."

"Oh, fine," Malone said. "Here I am reading minds and teleporting and all sorts of things. What will the boys back at Headquarters think now?"

"We'll get to that," Burris said. "But that first case did one more thing for you. Because you didn't like the idea of leaving your mind open, you began to develop a shield. That allowed you some sort of mental privacy."

"And then," Malone said, "I met Mike Fueyo and his little gang of teleporting juvenile delinquents."

"So that you could develop a psionic ability of your own," Burris said. "That completed your acceptance. But it took a threat to solidify that shield. That was step three. When you discovered your mind was being tampered with—"

"The shield started growing stronger," Malone said. "Sure. Her Majesty told me that, though she didn't know why."

"Right," Burris said.

"But, wait a minute," Malone said. "How could I do all that without knowing it? How would I know that some of my thoughts were safe behind a shield if I didn't know the shield existed and couldn't even tell if my mind were being read?" He paused. "Does that make sense?" he asked.

"It does," Burris said, "but it shouldn't."

"What?" Malone said.

"Two years ago, you had the answer to that one," Burris said. "Dr. O'Connor's machine. Remember why it did detect when a person's mind was being read?"

"Oh," Malone said. "Oh, sure. He said that any human being would know, subconsciously, whether his mind was being read."

"He did, indeed," Burris said. "And then we came to the fourth step: to put you in rapport with some psionist who could teach you how to control the shield, how to raise and lower it, you might say. To learn to accept other thoughts, as well as reject them. To learn to accept your full telepathic talent. That was Lou's job."

"Lou's ... job?" Malone said. He felt his own shield go up. The thoughts behind it weren't pleasant. Lou had been ... well, hired to stay with him. She had pretended to like him; it was part of her job.

That was perfectly clear now.

Horribly clear.

"You are now on your way," Sir Lewis said, "to being a real psionist."

"Fine," Malone said dully. "But why me? Why not, oh, Wolfe Wolf? I'd think he'd have a better chance than I would."

"My secretary," Burris said, "has talents enough of his own. But you, you're something brand-new. It's wonderful, Malone. It's exciting."

"It's a new taste thrill," Malone murmured. "Try Bon-Ton B-Complex Bolsters. Learn to eat your blanket as well as sleep with it."

"What?" Burris said.

"Never mind," Malone said. "You wouldn't understand."

"But I—"

"I know you wouldn't," Malone said, "because I don't."

Sir Lewis cleared his throat "My dear boy," he said, "you represent a breakthrough. You are an adult."

"That," Malone said testily, "is not news."

"But you are a telepathic adult," Sir Lewis said. "Many of them are capable of developing it into a useful ability. Children who have the talent may accidentally develop the ability to use it, but that almost invariably results in insanity. Without proper guidance, a child is no more capable of handling the variety of impressions it receives from adult minds than it is capable of understanding a complex piece of modern music. The effort to make a coherent whole out of the impression overstrains the mind, so to speak, and the damage is permanent."

"So here I am," Malone said, "and I'm not nuts. At least I don't think I'm nuts."

"Because you are an adult," Sir Lewis went on. "Telepathy seems to be almost impossible to develop in an adult, even difficult to test for it. A child may be tested comparatively simply; an adult, seldom or never."

He paused to relight his pipe.

"However," he went on, "the Psychological Research Society's executive board discovered a method of bringing out the ability in a talented child as far back as 1931. All of us who are sane telepaths today owe our ability to that process, which was applied to us, in each case, before the age of sixteen."

"How about me?" Malone said.

"You," Sir Lewis said, "are the first adult ever to learn the use of psionic powers from scratch."

"Oh," Malone said. "And that's why Mike Fueyo, for instance, could learn to teleport, though his older sister couldn't."

"Mike was an experiment," Sir Lewis said. "We decided to teach him teleportation without teaching him telepathy. You saw what happened."

"Sure I did," Malone said. "I had to stop it."

"We were forced to make you stop him," Sir Lewis said. "But we also let him teach you his abilities."

"So I'm an experiment," Malone said.

"A successful experiment," Sir Lewis added.

"Well," Malone said dully, "bully for me."

"Don't feel that way," Sir Lewis said. "We have—"

He stopped suddenly, and glanced at the others. Burriss and Lou stood up, and Sir Lewis followed them.

"Sorry," Sir Lewis said in a different tone. "There's something important that we must take care of. Something quite urgent, I'm afraid."

"You can go on home, Malone," Burriss said. "We'll talk later, but right now there's a crisis coming and we've got to help. Leave the car. I'll take care of it."

"Sure," Malone said, without moving.

Lou said, "Ken—" and stopped. Then the three of them turned and started up the long, curving staircase that led to the upstairs rooms.

Malone sat in the Morris chair for several long minutes, wishing that he were dead. Nobody made a sound. He rubbed his hands over the soft leather and tried to tell himself that he was lucky, and talented, and successful.

But he didn't care.

He closed his eyes at last, and took a deep breath.

Then he vanished.

CHAPTER 16

Two hours passed, somehow. Bourbon and soda helped them pass, Malone discovered; he drank two highballs slowly, trying not to think about anything, and kept staring around at the walls of his apartment without really seeing anything. He felt terrible.

He made himself a third bourbon and soda and started in on it. Maybe this one would make him feel better. Maybe, he thought, he ought to break out the cigars and celebrate.

But there didn't seem to be very much to celebrate, somehow.

He felt like a guinea pig being congratulated on having successfully resisted a germ during an experiment.

He drank some more of the bourbon and soda. Guinea pigs didn't drink bourbon and soda, he told himself. He was better off than a guinea pig. He was happier than a guinea pig. But he couldn't imagine any guinea pig in the world, no matter how heartbroken, feeling any worse than Kenneth J. Malone.

He looked up. There was another guinea pig in the room.

Then he frowned. She wasn't a guinea pig. She was one of the experimenters. She was the one the guinea pig was supposed to fall in love with, so the guinea pig could be nice and telepathic and all the other experimenters could congratulate themselves. But whoever heard of a scientist falling in love with a guinea pig? It was fate. And fate was awful. Malone had often suspected it, but now he was sure. Now he saw things from the guinea pig's side, and fate was terrible.

"But Ken," the experimenter said. "It isn't like that at all."

"It is, too," Malone said. "It's even worse, but that'll have to wait. When I have some more to drink it will get worse. Watch and see."

"But Ken—" Lou hesitated, and then went on. "Don't feel sad about being an experiment. We're all experiments."

"I'm the guinea pig," Malone said. "I'm the only guinea pig. You said so."

"No, Ken," she said. "Remember, all of us in the PRS got early training when it was new and untried. Some of those methods weren't as good as we now have them; that's why a man like your boss sometimes tends to have a little trouble."

"Sure," Malone said. "But I'm your guinea pig. You made me dance through hoops and do tricks and everything just for an experiment. That's what." He took another swallow of his drink. "See?" he said. "It's getting worse already."

"No, it's not," Lou said. "It's getting better, if you'll only listen. I wasn't given this job, Ken. I volunteered for it."

"That isn't any better," Malone said morosely.

"I volunteered because I—because I liked you," Lou said. "Because I wanted to work with you, wanted to be with you."

"It's more experimenting," Malone said flatly. "More guinea-pigging around."

"It isn't, Ken," Lou said. "Believe me. Look into my mind. Believe me."

Malone tried. A second passed...

And then a long time passed, without any words at all.

"Well, well," Malone said at last. "If this is the life of a guinea pig, I'm all for it."

"I'm all for guinea pigs' rights," Lou said. "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Me."

"Agreed," Malone said. "How about that crisis, by the way? Are you going to have to leave suddenly again?"

Lou stretched lazily on the couch. "That's all over with, thank God," she said. "We had to get our agent out of Miami Beach, and cover his tracks at the same time."

"Tricky," Malone said.

"Very," Lou said.

"But—" Malone blinked. "Wait a minute," he said. "Your agent? You mean you had Governor Flarion killed?"

Lou nodded soberly. "We had to," she said. "That paranoid mind of his had built up a shield we simply couldn't get through. He had plans for making himself president, you know—and all the terrifying potentialities of an embryonic Hitler." She grimaced. "We don't like being forced to kill," she said, "but sometimes we've got to."

Malone thought of his own .44 Magnum, and the times he had used it, and nodded very slowly.

"There are still a couple of questions, though," he said. "For instance, there's that trip to Russia. Why did you make it? Was it your father?"

"Of course it was," Lou said. "We had to get him back in and make sure he was safe."

"You mean that Vasili Garbitsch is a PSR member?" Malone said, stunned.

"Well, really," Lou said. "Did you think my father would really be a spy? We had to get him back to Russia; he was needed for work in the Kremlin. That's why we nudged Boyd into making the arrest."

"And the others?" Malone said. "Brubitsch and Borbitsch?"

"Real spies," Lou said. "Bad ones, but real. Any more questions?"

"Some," Malone said. "Were you kidding about that drink in Moscow?"

She shook her head. "I wish I had been," she said. "But I was concentrating on Petkoff, who didn't know a thing about the drugged drink. I didn't catch anything else until after I'd swallowed it. And then it was too late."

"Good old Petkoff," Malone said. "Always helpful. But he was right about one thing, anyway."

"What?" Lou said.

"The FBI," Malone said. "He told us it was a secret police organization. And, by God, in a way it is!"

Lou grinned. Malone started to laugh outright. They found themselves very close and the laughter stopped, and there was some more time without words. When Malone broke free, he had a suddenly sobered expression on his face.

"Hey," he said. "What about Tom Boyd? He knows a lot but he hasn't got any talents, as far as I know, and—"

"He'll be all right," Lou said. "Andrew and the others have thought of that."

"But he knows an awful lot about the evidence I dug up."

"Andrew will give him a cover-up explanation they're working out," Lou said. "That will convince Boyd there's nothing more to worry about. Of course, we may have to change his mind about a few things, but we can do that, probably through you, since you know him best. There's nothing for you to worry over, Ken. Nothing at all."

"Good," Malone said. He leaned over and kissed her. "Because I'm not in the least worried."

Lou sighed deeply, looking off into space.

"Luba Malone," she said. "It sounds nice. And, after all, my mother was Irish. At least it sounds better than Garbitsch."

"What doesn't?" Malone said automatically. Then he blinked. "Hey, I'm Malone!" he said. "How could you be Malone?"

"Me?" Lou said. She caroled happily. "I'm Malone because I love you, love you with all my heart."

"That," Malone said, "does it. A woman after my own heart."

Lou made a low curtsy.

"And a woman of grace and breeding," Malone said. "Eftsoons, if that means anything."

"You know," Lou said, "I like you even better when you're being Sir Kenneth. Especially when you're talking to yourself."

"My innate gallantry and all my good qualities come out," Malone said.

"Yes," Lou said. "Indeed they do. All over the place. It's nice to go back to Elizabethan times, anyhow, in the middle of all these troubles."

"Oh, I don't know," Malone said. "There's always been trouble. In the Middle Ages, it was witches. In the Seventeenth Century, it was demons. In the Nineteenth it was revolutions. In—"

Lou cut him off with a kiss. When she broke away Malone raised his eyebrows.

"I prithee," he said, "interrupt me not. I am developing a scheme of philosophy. There have always been troubles. In the 1890's there was a Depression and panic, and the Spanish-American War—"

"All right, Sirrah," Lou said. "And then what?"

"Let's see," Malone said, reverting to 1973 for a second. "In 1903 there was the airplane, and troubles abroad."

"Yes?" Lou said. "Do go on, Sirrah. Your liege awaits your slightest word."

"Hmm," Malone said.

"That, Milord, was a very slight word indeed," Lou said. "What's after 1903?"

Malone smiled and went back to the days of the First Elizabeth happily.

"In 1914, it was enemy aliens," said Sir Kenneth Malone.

THE END

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