

# Make The Corpse Walk

James Hadley Chase

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For Peter Belbin

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Money buys everything...or at least, that's what eccentric millionaire Kester Weidmann believed. So. When his brother died, Kester figured all he had to do was to buy the services of a voodoo expert and bring him back to life. But first he had to find a voodoo expert. And for that he employed Rollo—a small-time operator who used the Gilded Lily Club as a front. Rollo thought he had it made—it would be the con trick of the century. But he was reckoning without the interference of Celia, his smouldering Creole mistress, and Butch, the club muscle-man, who both decided that Weidmann's fortune was worth a heck of a lot more than Rollo's flabby neck...

## CHAPTER ONE

On a pleasant summer evening, a few minutes after eleven o'clock, a black and chromium Rolls-Royce turned into Curzon Street from Clarges Street and slid to a standstill by the narrow passage that leads to Shepherd Market.

Two young women in fox furs, loitering in the shadows, regarded the Rolls-Royce with professional interest and also, perhaps with a feeling of bitterness and envy at such a display of wealth.

Except for the two young women and the Rolls-Royce, Curzon Street was deserted—one of those freak lulls that sometimes occur in the streets of the West End of London for no apparent reason.

The young woman watched the slim, uniformed chauffeur leave the car, open the rear door and speak with the passenger whom they were unable to see. Then the chauffeur stepped back and looked a little helplessly up and down the street.

“Think he wants us?” the taller of the two women asked.

The blond woman giggled. “What a hope,” she returned, fingering a stray curl before tucking it absently under her neat little hat. “We’re not in the Rolls class, dearie.”

The chauffeur noticed them talking together and approached them.

The tall woman said, “Hello. Did you want me?”

She was secretly surprised to see how young he was now that she could examine his white, immature face. In spite of his immaturity, there was something about his eyes and the rigid way he held himself that made her uneasy.

The chauffeur looked at her, recognized her for what she was and made an imperceptible movement of disgust. “Do you know where the Gilded Lily Club is?” he asked after a moment’s hesitation. His voice was soft and timbreless.

“Oh, God!” the woman exclaimed, angry in her disappointment. “Why don’t you ask a policeman instead of wasting my time? I thought you wanted me.”

“There is no policeman to ask,” he replied, hating her with his bleak gray eyes. “Anyway, you don’t look so busy.” His thin mouth twisted in a sneer. “If you don’t know, say so and I’ll ask someone else.”

She turned away. “Then ask someone else,” she snapped, still sour with disappointment.

“Ask me,” the blonde woman said, joining them. “I know.”

The chauffeur pulled at the cuff of his black gauntlet. He looked suspiciously from one to the other of the women. “Well, where is it?” he said, impatiently.

The blonde woman smiled. Like her companion, now that she could see the chauffeur’s face, she felt an uneasy doubt about him. “It’s for members only,” she explained. “You’ll never get in. There’re so strict.”

“Never mind that,” the chauffeur returned, still jerking at the cuff of his gauntlet. “Just tell me where is it.”

The eyes of the blonde woman jerked at him. “You’ll never find it. Not if you look all night.” She glanced quickly at the tall woman and lowered her voice. “I’ll take you there if you make it worth my while.”

The tall woman heard her. “Why, May!” she exclaimed, suddenly angry that she herself had not seen the commercial opportunity. “You don’t know where it is any more than I do.”

“Oh, yes I do.” The blonde woman tossed her head. “I keep my eyes open. I know where it is and I can take him there if he makes it worth my while.”

The chauffeur stepped back and was looking up and down the street, but there was no one else to ask so he walked to the car and spoke to the passenger again.

“Hop it, Love,” the blonde woman pleaded. “Can’t you see you’re in the way?”

“I like that,” her companion returned bitterly. “I spoke to him first.”

“Don’t be silly.” The blonde woman’s lips smiled, but her eyes were cold and threatening. “I know where the club is, you don’t. He can afford to give me something, but there’s nothing in it for you.”

“Oh, all right.” The tall woman accepted her defeat philosophically, and shrugging her shoulders she drifted away into the darkness.

The blonde woman looked across at the Rolls-Royce. A little man in a long black coat, a black slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, his small hands encased in white buckskin gloves, had just got out of the car. Moonlight glittered on his highly polished shoes. He accepted the ebony, gold mounted walking stick the chauffeur handed to him, then he walked across the pavement. “So you know where the club is, my dear?” he said, pausing before the blonde woman.

She looked curiously at him. The broad brim of his hat hid the upper part of his face, but she could see his small mouth. His lips were red and full and his chin pointed at her like an accusing finger.

She nodded. “I’ll take you there if you make it worth my while,” she said, then added, “You’re a foreigner, aren’t you?”

“What a clever little girl.” The full red lips smiled. “But you mustn’t waste my time. Take me to the club and I’ll give you a pound.”

“Make it two, darling,” she returned quickly. “I’ve had ever such a rotten night.”

He hunched his shoulders and leaned heavily on the stick. “A few minutes’ walk is only worth a pound. Don’t you agree?”

She eyed him. “It’s not the walk you’re paying for. It’s my knowledge.”

He smiled again. His teeth were white, small and vicious looking, like those of a ferret. "So it is. You're quite intelligent. Very well, then let us say two pounds."

She brightened. "I didn't think you were mean," she said, fluttering her eyelids at him. "I'd like it know. Not that I don't trust you, but a girl can't be too careful."

He pulled off his glove. A large diamond flashed in the moonlight from a ring that he wore on his finger. "Do you know Rollo?" he said, lowering his voice and peering up at her face.

She stiffened and looked suspicious. "Suppose I do."

"I would like to know something about him." The hand and diamond disappeared inside his coat and came out holding a thick roll of pound notes.

The blonde woman caught her breath. There must be over a hundred pounds in that roll, she decided.

"I would pay for information," the little man said, looking furtively over his shoulder as if he feared his chauffeur's disapproval. "That is if you know anything worth while."

She too looked up and down the street. People were appearing again. Not far off she caught the glint of the steel buttons of a policeman making his lonely patrol.

"You'd better come back to my flat," she said. "We can't talk here."

He shook his head. "We'll go for a little ride," he said and taking her arm he walked with her to the car.

The chauffeur opened the door and they got in.

The blonde woman gave an ecstatic sigh as she sank into the cushioned seat. It was, she thought, like sitting on a cloud.

The little man, still holding the roll of notes in his left hand, reached with his right hand for a gold cigarette case which was fitted into a small walnut cabinet by his side.

"Have a cigarette," he said, looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. He gave her a light from a contraption

that glowed red when he touched a switch on the cabinet. Then, as she drew in a lungful of smoke, he said to the chauffeur, "Drive round, but don't go far."

"This is marvellous," the blonde woman said, as the car slid away from the kerb. "I'd give anything for a car like this."

The little man grunted. "There are other things to talk about," he said. "You know Rollo?"

She flicked the cigarette, spilling ash on the pile carpet covering the floor of the car. "He doesn't like being talked about. I've got to be careful."

"It's all a question of money, isn't it?" he returned. "Here, perhaps you will have more confidence if you have this."

He gave her ten one pound notes.

She slid them quickly into her purse, but her eyes never left the roll that remained in his hand. "Yes, I know him," she said.

"He owns the Gilded Lily Club?"

She nodded.

"What is the club?"

She hesitated. "Well, you know, it's just a night club. People go there to dance." She studied the glowing end of her cigarette while she wondered what else she could say without committing herself. "There's a good band," she went on. "It's ever so expensive. Members only. You can't get in without being a member." She glanced at him and looked away. "I know because I've tried. They don't even allow members to bring guests."

He sat huddled up by her side, motionless, his hands folded on the top of his stick. "Go on, he said when she fell silent.

"Well, what else can I tell you?" Her arm squeezed against the bag with an unconscious protective movement. "You can get a meal there. The sub's stiff. Rollo must make a lot of money out of it." Her voice trailed away as her imagination failed her.

“You’ve told me noting I could not have found out by ringing the club,” The little man said querulously. “I don’t give away money as easily as that. There’s more behind the club than what you’ve told me. What is it?”

“I don’t know,” she said uneasily. “Mind you, I’ve heard things. People talk, but I wouldn’t like to get anyone into trouble.”

“You wouldn’t be getting anyone into trouble,” the little man said, then he added peevishly, “I could take that money away from you.”

“You mustn’t tell anyone I told you,” the blonde woman said, uneasily. “They wouldn’t care what they did to me.”

“Who wouldn’t?”

She shook her head. “I didn’t mean that; a girl’s got to be careful.”

“You don’t have to be afraid.”

She sat still for a moment trying to make up her mind, then she said a little breathlessly, “Rollo’s supposed to help people in trouble. He buys things from them. Some of the girls get dope from him—so they say. I don’t know anything really. It’s only what I’ve heard.” She twisted her hands in her lap. “He’s got a gang. There’s a fellow called Butch who hangs around the club. He scares me. They say he’s a killer. Mind you, as far as I know, it’s just an ordinary club.”

“You mean Rollo’s a receiver of stolen property and a trafficker in drugs, is that it?”

She sniffed. “Something like that.”

“I see.” The little man rested his full red lips on the gold knob of his stick. Absently he nabbed at the gold while he stared out of the window. “I want to see Rollo.”

“You won’t get into the club. They’re ever so strict.”

The little man did not seem to hear her. He touched a switch at his elbow and spoke into a minute microscope. “Return.”

The Rolls-Royce slowed, stopped, reversed and maneuvered its long length so that it faced the way it had come. Then in a few minutes it again stopped outside the narrow passage that leads to Shepherd Market.

“Take me to the club,” the little man said, getting out of the car.

As the blonde woman passed the chauffeur who was holding the door she felt him give her a searching glance. She felt too, as she walked into the shadows with the little man, that the chauffeur was staring after her; not knowing why, she shivered.

As they walked into the square that is in the middle of the market, she put her hand into the little man’s arm. “You’ll give me the two pounds you promised, won’t you, darling?”

“I’ve given you enough——” he began, then shrugged. “Well, we won’t argue about that,” and he gave her two more pounds.

“Thanks darling, you’ve been ever so generous. This way. Mind how you fall.”

The street lights threw dim shadows. There were a few dark figures standing in doorways. Most of them were women. The red glow of cigarettes indicated where other people, hidden in the darkness, were standing. A few men loitered in the street, hesitating suspicious.

Together the blonde woman and the little man walked across the square and through another alley. It was so dark there that the little man paused.

“Is it far?” he asked, peering hesitatingly into the inky darkness.

“At the end of this alley,” the blonde woman returned, lowering her voice. “I’ve got a torch. It’s all right, you needn’t be nervous.

A thread of light stabbed the darkness. He could see now. They were in a narrow passage that was abruptly terminated by a high brick wall. In the light of the torch, the little man

saw that the paint was peeling from the panels and the great iron knocker was rusty.

“That’s it,” the blonde woman said. “Don’t blame me if they don’t let f they don’t let you in.”

“Thank you.” the little man returned. “You can go now. Thank you very much.”

“That’s all right.” She was thinking of the roll of notes he had put back into his pocket. “Why don’t you come to my flat later on? It’s just across the way. I’d give you a good time.”

The little man raised the knocker and let it fall. The door shook under the violence of the blow.

“No,” he said curtly. “Please go away.”

As she moved down the alley, she heard the door open and she looked back. The little man stepped through the doorway and the door closed behind him.

She stood still, starring at the door in the light of her torch, surprised and a little irritated that he had got in so easily. She had hoped that he would not have got in at all, then, perhaps, he would have gone with her.

Suddenly she felt someone at her side. She turned quickly. The beam of her torch swung wildly until it rested on the chauffeur who was standing close to her. He looked at her at her with stony, contemptuous eyes.

“You frightened me,” she said, with a nervous giggle, feeling her skin bristle into goose-flesh.

“Put that light out,” he said his voice flat and menacing.

Automatically, rather like a rabbit hypnotized by a snake, she obeyed and darkness closed in on her. The chauffeur reached out and took hold of her arm.

“Do you feel anything?” he asked.

As he spoke she felt something sharp pricking through her clothes into her side.

She tried to pull away, but he held her. “What the hell are you playing at?” she gasped, her knees buckling with terror.

“It’s a knife.” He still spoke in a casual conversational tone. “It’s sharp. I could open your belly like a trap door.”

She drew in her breath to scream, but the knife pricked her again, just above her hip bone. She stood trembling, her mouth open and sour sickness in her stomach.

“Give me your bag,” he went on, and don’t move.”

She let him draw the bag from under her arm. She heard him open it and take out the money.

“You rotten little rat,” she said, shivering with rage and fear.

“Ten pounds for that,” he said softly. “You didn’t tell him anything he didn’t know already. He’s crazy to throw his money about like this. Well, you’re not having it.” He pressed the knife into her, but in her fury, she hardly noticed the sharp pain. “I’m keeping this. I need it more than you.”

“You won’t get away with it,” she said. “I’ll tell him. He’s got to come out and I’ll tell him, you rotten swine.”

He drew away from her. She could feel warm blood running down her thigh inside her skirt where the knife had cut her. She knew it wasn’t a serious wound but it frightened her and made her weak to think that she was bleeding.

“But he won’t see you when he comes out.” Then a hard, gauntleted fist whistled out of the darkness and smashed against her jaw.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rollo—no one had ever heard him called by any other name—was an immense man of fifty odd years. He was four inches over six feet, bulky fat with a great soft egg of a belly and pendant cones for arms and legs. His eyes made small by fat puffs around them were, by turns, bland, shrewd, vicious and lustful. A small waxed mustache graced his

upper lip and his immense fat hands, like bleached spiders, were never still.

No one really knew what Rollo did, apart from owing and directing the Gilded Lily Club. He was suspected of having his fingers in every dubious pie. Some said that he controlled the red light district of Shepherd Market. Some said that he dealt in stolen motor cars or that he was the biggest receiver of stolen property in the country. Others winked knowingly and hinted that his income came from a profitable traffic in drugs, while others whispered "murder." But no one really knew.

The Gilded Lily was the most exclusive night club in London. Its six hundred members had one thing in common—they all lived by their wits. Some of them were more dishonest than others, but none of them, even the richest and the most influential of them, could ever have been called honest. They ranged from an armament king to a pimp, from a male impersonator to a high-class prostitute, if there is such a thing. Between these degrees of degradation, the club membership consisted of motor car thieves, confidence tricksters, share pushers, society women with kleptomania, blackmailers and drug traffickers and the like. Over them all, Rollo reigned supreme.

The Gilded Lily Club comprised one large ornate room with a surrounding balcony. Only a favoured few ever went up on the balcony. It was Rollo's favourite observation post. Most evenings, soon after midnight, he could be seen, standing with his white, hairy hands on the rail, looking down at the dancers and diners, his little eyes alight with speculation.

Rollo always looked imposing. On his egg-shaped head, which was as hairless and as smooth as a billiard ball, he wore a red Turkish fez. His grossy body was dressed in a black cutaway coat, black waistcoat with white piping. A black satin Ascot tie hid his thick neck, striped grey worsted

trousers covered his massive legs and patent leather shoes adorned his flat , splayed feet.

As you entered the largest room you automatically looked up at the balcony to see if Rollo wished to speak to you. If that was his wish, he would make a sign with his fingers and then disappear into his office.

You would not go up immediately. There was no point in letting everyone know that Rollo wished to talk to you. It usually meant that something was on and that something was best kept a secret. You would go first to the long bar at the far end of the room, order a whisky and speak to the barman. While you drank the whisky you watched the Greek waiters as they served the expensive dinner. Then you would wander down the left-hand aisle between the tables and the miniature dance floor and pause for a moment to listen to the excellent four piece dance band and perhaps, marvel at the astonishing technique of the negro drummer. Then with all the indifference in the world, you would step behind a black velvet curtain that concealed the stairs leading to the balcony.

Butch would be there, guarding the staircase. He was a tall, thin creature with a dead-pan face, dressed in black, a black slouch hat, black shirt and white silk tie usually decorated with red and yellow horseshoes. Butch would be leaning against the wall, picking his teeth with a goose quill on the traditional lines of a movie-gangster. You would nod to him but he would ignore you and you passed on, knowing that if Rollo did not wish to see you, Butch would be planted before you and in his soft American voice, threatening and cold, he would order you back into the restaurant.

Rollo's office was quite magnificent; oak-paneled, concealed lightly, heavy Persian rugs, a big glass-topped desk, elaborate ornaments, large green leather armchairs and a huge settee.

Rollo would be behind his desk, a big cigar between his

large yellow teeth and a sleepy expression on his face. You never saw any papers on his desk. He would simply sit there, his hands folded on the green blotting-paper and stare at you as if he were surprised to see you.

Celie would be standing by the fireplace. She seldom spoke, but her great black eyes missed nothing nor did they leave your face while you were in the room.

Celie was a Creole. She looked like a pale bronze statue. She had big, sultry eyes, a wide, short chin, cobra-like cheek bones, a mouth like a slashed red fruit. Her figure was outrageous. She was tall and, as she faced you, she seemed incredibly narrow. In profile, her feminine lines might have been drawn by a lascivious cartoonist. She hid her crinkly black hair in a scarlet turban and no one had ever seen her without some kind of head covering; for Celie was ashamed of her West Indian blood. Her evening gowns were always vividly coloured, cut to emphasize every line of her figure and she disturbed all male visitors with her overpowering sensuality. She was Rollo's mistress.

In this room, with Rollo at his desk and Celie behind him, watching you, you would conduct your business, make plans, agree about money and then go away. You did not know that when you had gone, Rollo would glance over his shoulder and raise his eyebrows. Then Celie would say whether you were to be trusted or not. She had an uncanny gift of reading men's thoughts and many a time she had warned Rollo to take care. It was not easy to double-cross Rollo. In fact those few who have been foolish enough to try, had invariably come off second best. One or two of them had been fished out of the lower reaches of the Thames by the river police, while others, less dangerous, had been rushed to Charing Cross hospital with cracked skulls. It was considered extremely unhealthy to double-cross Rollo and once it became known, few, if any, tried it on.

This night then, Rollo was sitting at his desk, a cigar clamped between his teeth and a watchmaker's glass screwed into his eye. He was examining a massive piece of jewellery. Diamonds, emeralds and rubies flashed in the strong desk light as he turned the brooch over in his fingers.

Celie peered over his shoulder. She breathed quickly and her eyes showed desire and suppressed excitement. Rollo took the glass out of his eye and grunted. He put the brooch down on a small-square of black velvet and eased his bulk more comfortably in the chair. The back of the chair creaked.

"Gomez must work on this at once," he said. "I want to get it out of the country by to-morrow morning."

"I'd like it." Celie was watching him closely. "Why spoil it? We don't need the money. I would like to keep it as it is."

There are times when you are stupid," Rollo returned, opening a drawer in his desk and taking out a small cardboard box. "If they saw you with this, you'd get five years." He dropped the brooch into the box and put the box in an envelope. "Besides, we always need money."

A light sprang up on his desk.

"Someone is coming upstairs," he said, pursing his thick lips.

Without haste, he opened the bottom drawer of his desk and slid the envelope out of sight.

Celie sighed. That was the last she would see of the brooch. The desk drawer was the mouth of a chute. In a second, the box would have fallen to the basement where Gomez worked.

A tap sounded on the door and Butch came in.

Rollo said, "What is it?"

There's a guy asking for you," Butch said, his eyes straying for a moment to Celie and then back to Rollo. "I've never seen him before. He's not a member."

"What does he want?"

"He didn't say."

"I don't want to see him."

Butch nodded. "He guessed that." He took an envelope from his pocket. "He said he wanted you to have this."

Rollo's eyebrows went up. He took the envelope and glanced at Celie, then he opened the envelope and pulled out a treasury note.

There was a sudden silence in the room. The faint sound of the dance band drifted up from the restaurant.

Rollo unfolded the note and spread it out on the blotter.

"A hundred pounds."

Butch and Celie leaned forward.

"A hundred pounds," Rollo repeated and pushed back his chair. He picked up the envelope and glanced inside. "A nice visiting card." He touched the treasury note with his finger tips. "Who is he?"

Butch shrugged. "A little guy, well dressed, rich looking."

Rollo picked up the treasury note, held it up to the light, grunted. "I'll see him," he said. "I might want to know something about him. If I ring twice, follow him, Find out who he is."

Butch nodded and went away.

"A hundred pounds," Celie said softly and moved to her position by the fire-place. I wonder what he wants."

Rollo lifted his great shoulders. "We shall see," he said, and folding the treasury note, he slipped, it into his waistcoat pocket.

They remained motionless, staring at the door.

Butch came in again. He stood on one side and the little man who had come in the Rolls-Royce took off his hat.

Rollo regarded him with carefully concealed interest.

The little man crossed the room. "My name," he said, "is Dupont. I wanted to see you."

Rollo rose to his feet "You have an expensive way of introducing yourself," he said. "Sit down, Mr. Dupont"

Butch glanced at Rollo and then went out. The door closed silently.

The little man sat down. He looked at Celie and his deep-set eyes glowed. "Perhaps we might be alone," he said to Rollo.

Rollo lowered his bulk into his chair again. "We are alone, Mr. Dupont," he said.

There was a long pause. Celie remained like a pale bronze statue, her eyes on Mr. Dupont.

"You wanted to see me," Rollo said at last "Why?"

Mr. Dupont folded his hands on top of his stick. "I have heard about you," he said, his eyes still on Celie. "You may be able to help me."

"It is not my habit to help people," Rollo said frankly. "I have many things which occupy me."

"I should be prepared to buy your help."

Rollo spread his hands. "That is different."

Again there was a long pause. Mr. Dupont nibbled the top of his stick, reluctant to commit himself, uncertain of Celie, aware of her disturbing gaze.

"It would, I think, be better if we were alone."

"You mustn't mind Celie," Rollo said. "She is important to me." He smiled. "She knows no English."

Mr. Dupont was not deceived by the lie, but he decided that he could not afford to be too particular.

"Very well," he said, putting his stick on the floor beside him. "What I have to say is, of course, in confidence."

"Of course."

Mr. Dupont examined his finger-nails for a moment. "I am interested in voodooism," he said

"You are interested in—what?" Rollo asked, leaning forward, his hands spread out on the green blotter.

Mr. Dupont did not meet his eyes. "Voodooism," he repeated, his voice low and suppressed.

Rollo's face took on a dusky, purple hue. His little eyes snapped angrily, but he was still cautious. His instinct told him that the hundred pound treasury note was one of many. If this odd little man wished to make a fool of him he could do so—at a price.

"I don't understand," he said, gently.

"I wish to be put in touch with someone who knows about voodooism," Mr. Dupont said, fiddling with his gloves. "I thought perhaps you might know. I would pay for information."

Rollo had only a vague idea what voodooism meant. He most certainly had no idea whether anyone in his unusual circle knew any more about it than he did, but since there was money to be made from this extraordinary request he was not prepared to turn it away.

"There's not much I don't know," he said, looking at Mr. Dupont with an encouraging smile. "But before I commit myself, perhaps you would care to give me more details?"

"I don't think that is necessary" Mr. Dupont said, a little curtly. "You either know or do not know anyone who understands the ritual ceremonies of voodooism. If you know, tell me who it is and I will pay you. If you do not know, then we are wasting time."

"It is not a cult that is encouraged in this country," Rollo said, feeling his way, unsure of himself. "I should have to know why you wished such a thing." He raised his shoulders apologetically. "One has to be careful."

"Shall we say one thousand pounds and no questions?" Mr. Dupont asked, looking at Rollo fixedly.

Rollo had difficulty in controlling his surprise, but he succeeded. "That is a lot of money," he said. "Yes, perhaps I can help you."

"Very well, give me the name and address of this person and I will give you the money. Nothing could be more simple."

Rollo mentally agreed that it was simple enough if he knew this person's name and address. Unfortunately, he did not. This situation would need a little generalship.

"There is a man," he began, weighing his words carefully, "who understands voodooism. He has produced some extraordinary results." He paused and touched his waxed moustache. "Some extraordinary results," he repeated to give himself confidence. "I know him well. In fact, I was only talking to him yesterday. Wasn't I, my dove?"

Celie said nothing.

"What results?" Mr. Dupont asked quickly. "You mean materialization?"

This was beyond Rollo's knowledge or imagination. He waved his hands airily. "I don't think he would like me to give away confidences," he said, "but if I could interest him in helping you, then I am positive he would be the right choice."

"His name?" Mr. Dupont was sitting forward. His gloves slipped off his small bony knees on to the floor. He did not notice them.

"I must speak to him first," Rollo said. "He may not care for me to reveal his identity. You understand?"

Mr. Dupont sat back. His small, selfish face revealed his disappointment. "Yes," he said, after a moment's thought. "That is reasonable." He stood up. "You will consult him and I will come again."

Rollo looked up searchingly. "But you haven't told me what you want him to do?"

"Tell him that I am interested in seeing the ceremonial ritual performed. It will be carried out in the strictest privacy but it must include zombiism. Tell him that. He will understand. The fee will be a large one."

Rollo searched in his waistcoat pocket and found a pencil. He wrote zombiism on his blotter. That was a word he had never heard of, nor could he guess its meaning.

"What would the fee be?" he asked. "Forgive my curiosity, but a large fee to some might be a small fee to others."

Again Mr. Dupont ducked his head in agreement. "Ten thousand pounds," he said, his full red lips twitching. "But it would have to be successful for that amount of money."

Rollo's eyes showed respect. Obviously this little man was going to be worth cultivating.

"Thursday this time?" he said, standing up. "I will have the man here—if he agrees."

Mr. Dupont nodded. "It is understood?" he asked. "A thousand pounds for you for the introduction. Ten thousand pounds for him for the work?"

Rollo kept his fat face expressionless. "It is understood."

Mr. Dupont held out his hand. "May I have my visiting card back?" he said softly. "I merely used it to gain an entrance."

Not for one second did Rollo hesitate. He took the folded note from his pocket and handed it to the little man. It was like drawing one of his great yellow teeth, but Rollo knew instinctively that it was worth the gamble. If the little man did not trust him then he would never see him again, and Rollo was most anxious to see him again.

Mr. Dupont went to the door, opened it and went out. They heard him walk down the corridor that led to the restaurant.

"He is mad," Celie said. "Did you see his eyes? He is quite insane."

Rollo lifted his shoulders. "I thought so too," he said, "but he is rich," and he put his great thumb on the bell push on his desk and rang twice.

\* \* \* \* \*

Susan Hedder walked down Shaftesbury Avenue and paused at the corner of Denman Street as a taxi cautiously edged into the stream of traffic flowing towards Leicester Square.

A man said out of the darkness, "Hello, girlie, going my way?"

Susan ignored him and as the traffic lights turned from green to red, she crossed the street and walked on towards Piccadilly. Eight men had said precisely the same thing to her during the past hour. It was her own fault. She must stop this aimless walking. She must go home. Home? She thought of the small bed-sitting-room on the top floor of an old-fashioned house in Fulham Road. You couldn't really call that home. Until to-night, she had regarded it only as a place where she kept her things and where she slept, but now it was all she had got. The home she had planned and which seemed, a few hours ago, so certain had vanished with the coming of the letter. But she wasn't going to think about the letter. There would be plenty of time to think about that later on. So far as she could see, she could read the letter and think about it every night for the rest of her life. Tonight, she wasn't going to think about it.

But she couldn't go on walking the streets. It was getting late. Besides she had been walking now for two ours and her legs were aching. She felt if she went back to her room, away from the glittering lights, the noise of the traffic and the bustling surge of people she would start thinking. To-night she just could not bear to be alone and that was what it meant if she went back to her room. She knew eventually that she would have to go back, but she wanted to postpone that moment for as long as she could.

She was tired. The man who had spoken to her was walking a few paces behind her. He had a dragging step as if one of his legs was shorter than the other. She knew without looking round that he was following her. She wasn't alarmed

because there were so many people about, but all the same it was a nuisance to hear this persistent shuffling behind her and to know that he thought she was a likely "pick-up."

She followed the gradual curve past the Monico into Glasshouse Street. That, of course, was a mistake because Glasshouse Street was dark and a haunt for "pick-ups." The man kept close behind her and she quickened her step, annoyed that she should have so deliberately left the safety of Piccadilly. A snack bar a few yards up the street offered the solution. Without pausing, she walked straight in and shut the door in the man's face. She did not look back, but she could feel his frustrated gaze boring into the back of her head.

It was hot and a little steamy in the cafe. The place was fairly full and every table was occupied. She looked round uncomfortably aware that most of the people looked at her either curiously or with vague interest. She hastily sat down at a table whose occupant paid her no attention. This man was reading the *Evening News* and he held it open so that she could not see him. All she could see was the paper and the two black gauntleted hands that held it open.

A waitress said coldly, "We're closing."

Susan looked at her, feeling suddenly exhausted. The bright light and the steamy heat of the place seemed to absorb all her remaining energy. The back of her legs ached and her body felt as if it were dissolving into a pool of lassitude.

"Oh, I thought—I just wanted a cup of coffee," she said, thinking that the waitress's face looked like a suet pudding.

"We're closing," the waitress repeated inexorably.

Susan thought, I must rest. I just can't go out into that street again, anyway not for a moment. He'll be out there, waiting to follow me. But she saw people were watching her, and she was frightened of the waitress who looked tired and ill-tempered. I know she'll make a scene if I don't go, she

thought dismally. So she picked up her bag which she had placed on the marble topped table and pushed back her chair.

"There's still twenty minutes before you shut," a soft, timbreless voice said. "Give her a coffee."

Both Susan and the waitress glanced at the man who was sitting at the table. He had lowered the newspaper and was staring at the waitress with bleak, grey eyes.

The waitress opened her mouth to repeat that the cafe was closing, but she changed her mind. There was something about the man's, thin, white face that made her uneasy. She couldn't say what it was, except, perhaps, that his will was stronger than hers. Somehow she felt that if she did not serve the coffee he would go on and on at her until she did so, even if he stayed there all night.

She went to the counter, drew coffee from the urn and came back. She slapped the cup and saucer down in front of Susan and stood over her while she scrawled a bill. Then she went away.

While she did these things, the-man watched her, his newspaper still open, but lowered. When she had gone away, he compressed his lips, grunted and hid himself behind the newspaper again.

Susan sat looking at the thin, steaming coffee, feeling that everyone was staring at her and not sure whether she ought to thank the man for coming to her assistance. Obviously he had no interest in her because not once had he looked at her.

While he was watching the waitress, Susan had examined him. He was in chauffeur's uniform, well fitting, expensive, smart. The peaked cap was pulled down over his eyes, but she could see his face well enough. He was young—she guessed he was her age—twenty-one. His features were small and regular. His skin was very fair. His black eye-brows looked out of place against the fairness of his skin. His grey

eyes under somewhat long curling lashes held her attention. They were hard, experienced eyes. They frightened her.

She stirred the coffee,-wishing in a way that he would lower the newspaper. It would be so much easier just to thank him and then dismiss him. Somehow this newspaper barrier-made things not only difficult but, oddly enough, rather mysterious.

She decided that she wouldn't say anything.

She opened her bag and took out the letter. She looked at the crabbed, immature writing and she thought of all the other letters she had received. It had brought her no joy. She thought dully that it was a pity it had to be the last letter she was to have from him as all the other letters had been so loving.

He had tried to be kind and let her down lightly, but he had only succeeded in being stilted and insincere. Of course, she knew he was fond of his mother, but why hadn't he thought of that before? "I've decided it wouldn't be fair to mother," he had written. "It's a question of waiting until I earn more and it may be a long time. I don't think I ought to ask you to wait all that time...."

She couldn't read any more just then, the writing suddenly became blurred, and she folded the letter carefully and put it in her bag. She was aware of a tear that rolled down her cheek and splashed into her coffee.

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief and looked round the cafe to see if anyone was watching her. Apparently now that she had been served, no one was interested in her any more.

She bit her lip and pushed the wisp of handkerchief into her cuff. It was no use crying, she told herself. She would get over it. It was just that she had made all her plans and being jilted suddenly like this hurt her pride. Besides, she had given her employer notice—how glad she had been to leave the dark office in Leadenhall Street—and she had got her

home together. Now her home had gone and she was out of work. It was quite a tragedy.

She became aware of the chauffeur again. He was watching her. He sat with his back to the wall, holding the newspaper so that only she could see him.

"It won't get you anywhere," he said, his lips scarcely moving. "It never does."

She felt blood rush to her face and for one horrible moment she thought she was going to burst into uncontrolled tears.

"You're soft," the chauffeur went on, his weak, grey eyes never leaving her face. "I suppose you're howling over some man. Well, don't. It doesn't get you anywhere."

"Please mind your own business," she said, suddenly angry and she turned her head so that she need not look at him.

"That's better," he said. "That shows you've got spirit. Only don't tell me what's wrong. I don't want to hear."

"Please don't speak to me," she said, her tears and self-pity forgotten.

"I want you to help me," he said. "It's important."

She turned back so that she could look at him. "I don't know who you think you're talking to ..." she began, her eyes flashing.

He made an impatient movement with his head. "Let me do the talking," he said. "You're all right. I know girls. You're the right sort of girl. You've had a knock, but that doesn't matter. You'll get over it."

She picked up her bag. "I'm going," she said. "I don't let strange men talk to me."

"I got you that coffee, didn't I?" he returned, staring at her. "Can't you do something for me in return?"

She felt his eyes boring into her and through his eyes she felt the strength of his will. It made her feel weak.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, shut up talking and give me a chance. There's a man sitting at the left-hand table at the far end of the room. He's wearing a black shirt and a white tie. Is he still there?"

She glanced over her shoulder.

A man was sitting at the left-hand table at the far end of the room. He *did* wear a black shirt and a white tie. His black slouch hat was pushed to the back of his head. In a vague way, he reminded her of Humphrey Bogart. He was looking in her direction in a disinterested detached way.

"Yes," she said, wondering what all this meant.

The chauffeur compressed his lips. "He's following me," he confided after a moment's hesitation. "If ever you follow anyone don't wear clothes that shriek. I noticed that tie half an hour ago. It's been following me ever since."

"It's nothing to do with me," Susan said, a little bewildered. She drank her coffee and opened her bag.

"It could be," the chauffeur said. "You've had a knock. This is the way to forget it. I want to know who-that man is. Will you follow him for me?"

She was so surprised she could only stare at him.

"Give you some excitement," the chauffeur went on. "He wouldn't expect you. I'd make it worth your while." He took out a thin packet of pound notes and pushed them across the table. "Ten pounds," he went on. "It's easy money."

She drew back. "I think you must be mad," she said, feeling a sudden excitement. "I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"Yes, you would," he returned, looking at the newspaper with a frown on his thin, white face. "I don't make mistakes. A moment ago you were thinking you'd make a hole in the river. Now, you've almost forgotten what you were howling about. This will round off the night."

She said reluctantly, "But I've never followed anyone before."

"It's easy," he said, still seemingly absorbed in his newspaper. "He's got a car. It's a big green Packard XLA3578. He's left it at the top of the street. All you have to do is to get in the back and put the rug over you. There's a rug in the back—I've seen it. He'll follow my car and then go back to Shepherd Market At least I think that's where he'll go, but I want to be sure. It'll be a night out for you."

"I'm not going to do it," Susan said. "He might find me. Then what would happen? Besides, I don't like the look of him."

"Nor do I," the chauffeur said, "but he won't find you. He'd never think of looking. Can't you see that? You better make up your mind. We can't stay here all night."

"No," she said. "It's too ridiculous."

He looked at her. "It's exciting," he said simply. "You don't look as if you've ever had any real excitement You're the sort of girl who needs it."

I don't know about that, Susan thought, her heart beating rapidly, but to-night I do need something. It would be better than going back to my room.

"Who is he?" she said. "Who are you? Why is he following you?"

The chauffeur rattled the paper impatiently. "Never mind all that," he said. "When you have followed him, we'll meet and talk about it. There's no time to waste now."

"But I'm not going to follow him," Susan said weakly.

"Ten pounds," the chauffeur urged. "I'll engage you for the work. Imagine you're a detective."

She giggled. This was really too absurd.

"Do you think I look like a detective?"

"That's why you're going to be good," he said. "No one would rumble you." He pushed the notes further across the table, screening the move from everyone by the newspaper. "Don't be a fool. You can use the money. Look upon it as a job."

She could use the money all right, she told herself. Jobs didn't hang on trees. Yes, ten pounds would be useful.

She glanced across at the man in the black shirt. He was lighting a cigarette, not looking in their direction. He looked ruthless and unpleasantly like an American gangster. She shivered, suddenly tense with excitement. She wondered what George would have said if he knew what she was going to do. Poor George who hated her to walk down Fulham Road in the dark. She wished George and his mother were in the cafe. The thought of their shocked horror finally decided her.

"All right," she said, "I'll do it," and immediately regretted saying so.

The chauffeur looked at her. "You could say that, take the money and go home, couldn't you?"

She faced him. "Yes, I could."

He eyed her for a moment of time. "But you wouldn't. Some girls would, but you wouldn't. I know girls. You're the right sort."

Somehow she was flattered, although she knew she ought to have been angry.

"All right," he said. "Meet me somewhere tomorrow. Outside the Green Man on Putney Hill. Ten o'clock. All right?"

She began to say that she had to look for a job tomorrow but stopped herself in time. She would look for a job in the afternoon, she decided.

"All right."

"A green Packard. XLA3578. At the top of the street. I'll give you three minutes' start and then I'll come on. He'll follow me."

She picked up the notes and put them into her bag. I can't believe this is going to happen, she thought. I do hope I'm not being stupid. I do hope it will work out all right. She got to her feet and went over to the counter. The waitress

took her three-pence and threw the three coppers into the till. She slammed the till drawer as if to say "and good riddance."

Susan looked back over her shoulder. The chauffeur still hid behind the *Evening News*. The man in the black shirt was yawning and looking irritably up at the ceiling. There was nothing to show that anything extraordinary was about to happen. She opened the door and stepped into the street.

I think you had better go home, she said to herself. You don't know who these men are. You'll probably be sorry in a little while that you had anything to do with them. There's still time to give him back his money. There's still time to catch a 14 bus outside Simpson's.

But she only hesitated a moment, then aware of a wildly beating heart, she walked up the street in search of the green Packard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Butch—his proper name was Mike Egan—drove along the darkened Thames Embankment, his big muscular hands resting on the steering wheel; a cigarette hung limply from his thin lips.

He decided that it had been a pretty good evening. A glance at the dashboard clock showed that it was a few minutes after twelve thirty. Still time to take care of his private affairs, he told himself. He had managed to give Celie the high sign. She knew what that meant. She'd find a way to ditch the old buzzard and be over at her Mews apartment by the time he got there.

Butch pushed his hat to the back of his head and grunted. Celie was all right. She'd got a head on her. She was a looker too. Odd that he never considered her as "coloured." Very odd considering how he hated niggers. Take that dinge Gilroy, the drummer at the Gilded Lily. Butch's

mouth tightened. Back in the States he would have taken him for a one-way ride. Here, it didn't pay to take guys for a ride. These coppers in their funny helmets were dynamite, so he had heard. Anyway, Rollo thought so and Rollo wasn't the kind who scared easily. Shoot a guy in this country and they hang you. He shook his head. Some country!

Yes, Gilroy. There was something about the nigger that made him uneasy. He couldn't say just what it was, but he never wanted to turn his back on him. Just as he had never wanted to turn his back on Beer Baron Mulligan in the old days. He nicked the cigarette butt out of the window. The old days! Well, this certainly made a change. It was dull, but it was safe. He grimaced as he remembered his hurried flight to the New York docks and their last-minute attempt to get him. He'd been on the spot all right. The trouble was they wouldn't forget him. If he went back now, they'd be after him as if he hadn't been out of the country for nearly two years. Well, he wasn't going to be a sucker. He was making out all right here. Every so often, of course, he got the trigger itch, but there was nothing he could do about that. Back in the States he had killed a number of Mulligan's gang—he couldn't remember just how many—but he had decided regretfully after a few days in London, that if he wanted to keep healthy he'd have to put that kind of thing out of his mind. Not that it was easy. The urge to get a man at the end of his gun sometimes tormented him. It was a sensation which beat everything—including women. To see a guy cringe, to feel the gun kick in your hand, to see the surprised look of horror on the guy's face as he began to fall was something. It gave you the biggest bang of the lot—and he'd tried everything once, sometimes more than once.

So long as he stayed in this country he would have to be content with Celie when he wanted sensation. He got two separate and distinct bangs out of his association with her. One was Celie herself. An affair with her was like an affair

with a tigress. She was likely to sink her nails into your neck if she was in that kind of a mood. Then there was Rollo. Rollo kidded himself that Celie regarded him as a god; that her whole world revolved around him and that there never could be any other man in her life. That was a laugh. Butch didn't kid himself that *he* was the only other man in Celie's life. He was too smart for that. He knew the way things were; although she never talked and he didn't ask questions. There were nights when he gave her the high sign and she just looked blankly through him, her dark eyes expressionless as wet stones. Some other guy, he would think, and grin. She was certainly stacking the deck against Rollo.

Yes, he got a bang out of cheating Rollo. The guy was dangerous. Butch admired him because he wasn't like Legs Diamond or Al Capone or Bugs Moran. He didn't fly off in a rags and tell the boys to start a massacre. He wasn't crazy dangerous. He was dangerous like a snake—a black mamba. He'd just sit there with a placid look on his fat face and you'd think he was too scared to start anything. Then suddenly a few days later, maybe a few weeks later, he struck. You heard about it in a roundabout way. Some guy you were drinking with in a pub would say casually, "Heard about Johnny Gee?"—or Bill Adams or Dusty Miller or whoever it was this time. And you would look up, remembering that Johnny Gee or whoever it was had got in Rollo's hair a couple of weeks ago and you'd grin. "The poor bloke had a sudden haemorrhage. The croaker said it was almost as if he'd been eating glass. Went out like a light.

Yes, Rollo was a great hand at slipping powdered glass into your chow. With Rollo you never quite knew where you stood. It made fooling around with Celie something more than a tumble. It was like fooling around with a black mamba. Butch liked it that way. He liked the excitement, the secret meetings, the danger of Rollo suddenly dropping in just when things were happening. He got a big bang out of it.

He slowed down as he came to Victoria station and then opened up again once he was clear of the omnibuses that were pulling out of the station yard on their last journey for the night. He kept on up Grosvenor Place, past Constitution Hill and into Piccadilly.

He lit another cigarette by snapping the match head alight with his thumb nail. Dragging down a lungful of smoke, he thought of Gilroy.

The negro was a pretty marvellous drummer, he admitted. That was all that was marvellous about him. He suddenly gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles glistened white. If he ever caught the dinge hanging around Celie, then he'd start something. It'd be worth taking a chance with the coppers to get Gilroy in front of his gun.

Even to himself he would not admit that this was the only thing that ever worried him. He didn't care how many white men fooled around with Celie—just so long as she didn't tell him—but the idea of Gilroy—the hell with that!

As he passed Clarges Street, he glanced at the dashboard clock. It was now 12.48.

He nodded to himself. Just about right, he thought as he turned into Berkeley Street. He touched the accelerator pedal and the big Packard swept up the street with a rush. Then he braked and edged cautiously into Braton Place, drove a few yards down the dark mews and stopped.

He leaned out of the car window and glanced up at the garage apartment. A light came through a chink in the curtain and he grunted with approval. She was there.

Even then, he did not immediately get out. There were certain moves in the game that had to be observed. Moves that excited and amused him.

He touched the horn button lightly, paused and then touched it again. The deep note of the horn made only a choked, faint splutter, but it was enough. Celie had learned to listen for this sound.

He leaned out of the car window again and waited. The curtains opened and then closed. That was the signal which told him she was alone.

He grinned, opened the car door and slid out. While he was opening the double garage doors, he remembered the time when the curtains had not moved. It had only happened once, but it showed how careful they had to be. Rollo had insisted on returning with Celie that night and if they had not arranged the curtain signal weeks before, Butch would have walked in on them. It would have been a sweet situation to try to explain away.

He went back to the Packard, drove into the big garage, snapped off the headlights and turned off the ignition. Then he got out of the car, shut the garage doors from the inside and turned on the electric light by the door that led to the apartment.

Whistling softly he climbed the almost vertical stairs to the little hall which was panelled in oak and carpeted with an ivory-coloured, fitted carpet that was as springy to the tread as a lush lawn.

On a richly carved ebony pedestal stood an obscene bronze statue of a woman. It never failed to make Butch blink and he had often asked Celie to get rid of it. But she wouldn't. She said it amused her.

Butch hung his hat on the statue and wandered into the front room which Celie used as her bedroom.

Celie was lying across the bed. She wore flame-coloured satin pyjamas and a heavy gold bracelet on her wrist and gold sandals on her feet. Her head was covered by a little bathing cap affair made of white silk. On any other woman it would have looked ridiculous, but it suited Celie.

Butch eyed her narrowly. It depended on her mood as to what kind of evening he would spend. As she met his eyes, he decided that her mood to-night was vague. He disliked

that mood more than any of the others. It meant that he would have to work on her, and Butch was notoriously lazy.

"Hello," he said, sitting on the bed. "Did you get away all right?"

Celie's mouth turned down at the corners. "Oh, he made the usual fuss," she said. "He hates me out of his sight."

"I don't blame him," Butch said, leaning back on his elbow. "You're looking swell."

Celie made an impatient movement. "What happened tonight?"

"I followed the guy. What did he want?"

"Who is he?"

Butch took out a packet of *Camels*, shook two cigarettes out on to the cream corduroy bedspread, put the packet back into his pocket and offered one to Celie.

When they had lit up, he said, "That's Kester Weidmann, the millionaire."

Celie's eyes opened a shade. "Are you sure?"

Butch nodded.

"Rollo will be pleased."

"What's the idea? What did he want?"

She rolled on to her back and stared up at the ceiling. It was an ornate affair, deep blue with large silver stars. Celie suffered from claustrophobia and she liked to think she was looking at the sky when she was in bed

"He's crazy," she said. "Did you know? Insane. I could tell that by his eyes."

Butch reached out and touched her shoulder, but she pushed his hand away. He grimaced and shrugged.

"What's on your mind, Celie?"

"Kester Weidmann," she said softly.

"Open up, will you?" he said, a little sharply. "What's cooking? What did Weidmann want with Rollo?"

She smiled secretively. "Why don't you ask Rollo?"

He reached out and taking her arm, pulled her roughly towards him. "I'm asking you."

A small coffee-coloured claw flashed towards his face, but he was expecting it. He caught her wrist and held her, grinning down at her.

"Cut it out, honey," he said. "You know it don't pay to get tough with me."

"Let me go."

He looked down at her, seeing the spiteful, furious look in her eyes and her white, even teeth as she drew her lips back like a snarling cat.

"Aw, you're nuts," he said, letting her go and getting to his feet. "Why the hell are we always fighting? Ain't there enough trouble without you and me going on like a couple of savages?" He wandered to the fireplace and put his elbows on the mantelpiece, staring at his lined, hard face in the mirror. "What are you sore about anyway?"

She rolled over on her back again and robbed her arm where he had held her. "I'm not sore."

He grinned at himself in the mirror. "Okay, you're not sore," he said, turning. "Well, come on. Don't be mysterious. What did Weidmann want?"

"He's crazy," she said. "Something about voodooism. I didn't pay much attention."

Butch suddenly knelt across her on the bed. He caught her two wrists and pinned her arms to the corduroy bedspread.

"Like hell you didn't," he said, his face cold and forbidding. "You never miss a thing. What are you up to? Trying to play it on your own?"

She stared back at him; making no attempt to free herself. "Don't be so suspicious," she said and smiled. "I tell you he's crazy. I'm not interested in crazy people."

"Well, I am," Butch said, still keeping her pinned to the bed. "What's this about—what did you say it was?"

She made a little face. "Voodooism."

"That's not a word—it's a noise. What the hell does it mean?"

"To do with the occult." She was laughing at him now.

"Occult?" Lines appeared on his forehead. "What's that?"

"Don't you know anything?"

"Never mind that. Tell me."

"It's to do with the supernatural."

Butch released her and stood away. There was disgust on his face. "If you're kidding me..." he began.

She sat up and yawned. "He wanted Rollo to find him • someone who knows about voodooism."

"Rollo tells him to go to hell?"

She shook her head. "Rollo's smart. He's going to fix something. Eleven thousand pounds is the rake-off."

Butch sucked in his breath sharply, "That's a lot of dough," he said. "He must be awfully interested in this voodoo stuff."

Celie got to her feet and wandered over to the dressing-table. "He is," she said quietly. "So am I."

"Anything in it for us?"

"Eleven thousand pounds."

"I mean—us. You and me."

She pursed her lips. "I don't know."

"Then you'd better start thinking. We've been looking for a break like this, haven't we?"

She touched her face with a powder puff and then turned. "This isn't right for us."

"Sure?"

She nodded. "Rollo can handle it—but you couldn't."

Butch thought for a moment. "Yeah, I guess that's right," he said. "Maybe we can horn in when Rollo's got started. Eleven thousand pounds would be nice pickings."

She smiled secretively to herself. "We'll have to wait a little while," she said and yawned again.

He looked at her sharply. "Making out you're tired."

She nodded. "Very tired."

He came towards her, but her hand went up, stopping him.

"Not to-night," she said.

"You've got something on your mind," he returned, staring intently at her. "You wouldn't be thinking of double-crossing me, would you?"

Her eyes went empty. "Don't be so suspicious."

A hard smile lifted the corners of his mouth. "I've taken a lot from you, Celie," he said softly. "But I'm not grumbling. I want you to know that I'm wise to your boy friends and I don't give a damn. But when the time comes for me to break from Rollo, you're coming with me. You and me are in this together and it'll be too bad if you try anything funny." He rubbed the side of his nose with his forefinger. "Too bad for you," he added, a little unnecessarily.

"Goodnight, Mike," Celie said, not moving, her eyes watchful. "And don't be so suspicious."

Butch grinned. "I'll go in a little while," he said.

Susan Hedder, crouching at the foot of the stairs, heard the sound that an open hand makes when it slaps flesh. She heard a thud that a body makes when it falls heavily to the floor. Then she put her hands over her ears to shut out the half-animal sounds that followed.