

“Legal” con man crashes through unusual love story, hammer like climax.

Six Hours Past Thursday

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## PROLOGUE

Sans religious zealotry, this is a story of sin. Practical sin. Everyday, working sin. It's set in the year, 1966, and for a reason.

This is an end-of-an-era story, focusing on one variety of sin, that which immediately preceded our present-day variety. The texture - and the consequences - are explored. That's all. Nothing judgmental. Thus, this era and its effects can be compared by you, as in the "before" and "after."

According to the sociological intelligentsia, a brief two-year period from 1966 to 1968 brought about the quickest, most radical changes in the mores of American society in, yes, the entire history of our nation. The backdrop...

In 1966 a new tract house cost \$15,000-\$18,000 (not down payment, but full payment, for the entire house). From 1968 on, prices ballooned to many multiples thereof.

In 1966 a cup of coffee in a restaurant cost a dime, and a "well" drink in a bar, 35 cents. Your local doctor would treat you for as low as \$5 per visit. Your friendly neighborhood barrister would vend legal advice for as little as \$10 per hour of consultation. All other costs of living and doing business were relative. Post-1968, ditto housing, cars and other big-ticket consumer items...prices up, up, and away!

The societal changes....

In 1966 women had little standing in the workplace and minimal recognition at all. Such a triviality as being platinum blonde was considered "cool." Shortly after 1968 the feminist movement was born.

The chastity belt was off, communal love, on for the wild, the uninhibited. Passivity was off, assertiveness on for the bold, the serious.

In 1966 the United States had one hundred thousand troops in Vietnam, by 1968, five hundred thousand. In 1966 war protests were a whisper, by 1968 a thunderclap.

*Jack Payne*

The outgrowth of these societal changes: pronounced cosmetic surgery on the face of sin.

In 1966 nearly 60% of the adult population smoked legal cigarettes. Consumption of two to three packs daily was commonplace. By 1968 the smoke of choice had quickly drifted to illegal "pot."

In 1966 the drug of choice was still legal alcohol. In 1968 the transition toward a broad menu of illegal hard drugs was well underway.

In 1966 legal casino gambling in the U.S. existed only in the State of Nevada. Since 1968 it has slowly seeped into our "cultural" fabric – virtually everywhere.

While organized crime was, as ever, pervasive in 1966, unorganized crime was nearly non-existent. But 1968 brought the stirrings of street gangs beyond the neighborhoods of New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles. All sorts of mayhem proliferated – random violence for the sake of random violence.

End-of-an-era 1966 had a low rate of illegitimate births and divorce; from 1968 forward a many-fold increase.

Both eras, the post-World War II era ending in 1966, and the present-day era beginning in 1968, had their respective share of rampant vices.

Which was worse?

Read on. You be the judge.

## CHAPTER 1

**S**teve Draves wondered if she did or didn't. Further appraisal seemed to be in order.

He palmed his Martini, lifted it casually, and eyed the redhead sitting alone next to him at the bar. Good looking. Stacked. Hard as a hammer head. The red hair was probably natural, basically, with some help from a bottle. Though the question he posed to himself had nothing to do with her hair color.

He couldn't make up his mind whether or not he should try to pick her up. A glance at the gilded, gold-framed clock hanging at the far corner of the room told him it was 5:15, which meant he only had forty-five minutes to line her up, precious little time to operate in this mob.

The usual Friday cocktail rush was starting early today. Not only was the bar jammed, but the liquor-lovers were stacked two-deep behind it. For the moment he decided to let it go, despite the shortness of available time; he would consider her again five or ten minutes hence.

From an elevated platform above and behind the horseshoe-shaped bar, Tom Berryland, the black pianist, had just started into a perfect rendition of the old, old Earl "Fatha" Hines arrangement of "Saint Louis Blues." Draves wanted to listen to the music. He rather resented all the inane chatter and "make-out" innuendoes of the Michigan Avenue male predators and the coy utterances and giddy laughter of the women at the bar, the objects of the predators' attention.

Chicago really had 'em, he mused to himself - every type, shape, size, breed and oddball in existence. Only difference from New York: New York was a bigger snake pit. The women here were among the weirdest. All the gals who for one personality defect or another couldn't make it in the small towns.

From throughout the Midwest and from all over the United States they came, converging on Chicago like a swarm of bugs: the alcoholics, the hop-heads, the psychos, the schizos, the cleptos, the naive who thought modeling was the key to their landing a wealthy man, the hippies, the nutty artists, the wackos, and the nymphos. Then there were the out-and-out sluts - call girls and hustlers who flocked to Chicago, magnetized by the business held forth by America's convention city. Upon further thought, he was now convinced that the girl sitting next to him fell into that latter category: she was a "professional" woman.

*Jack Payne*

The year, 1966, had been a good one so far, Draves thought. Cupped in his hand, the cold glass felt good on this hot September day. He swirled it easily in an even, circular motion, watching the olive ride the sides. A guy was entitled to a few drinks and a little relaxation, he figured, after wrapping up the tough-to-swing Selby deal. He had gotten off the Northwestern “400” earlier that afternoon after having quickly found a buyer in Milwaukee for the Selby property in Mel-wood, Illinois. The deal was all sewed up, tied into a neat, tidy package. Now it was time for that relaxation, and (he shot another glance at the redhead) maybe some instant sex.

Although he didn’t want to appear too obvious about his interest, he concluded it didn’t really make any difference. From the corner of his eye he’d noticed that she had been sizing him up for some time. Now, he figured, it was his turn. He liked what he saw, despite the obvious fact that she’d been around. The mileage stood out all over her, from the makeup that barely covered the emerging lines in her face to the slight midriff bulge her girdle didn’t come quite high enough to camouflage. Draves guessed her age to be well over thirty-five, perhaps closer to forty-five. She was a looker though and probably well worth the \$50, \$75, or whatever she charged.

He glanced at his watch. It read 5:20, which meant he had but 40 minutes to work on the project. He was certain he could get the girl lined up, for a price, in that time span. But it was a matter of both principle and pride with Steve Draves: he would never pay for it. So the big trick would be in talking her into going for free. This handicap, plus the restrictive time element, posed an intriguing challenge. He therefore decided to take it up.

“Don’t you have a request?” Draves half turned toward the girl and smiled. He motioned his drink in the direction of the sign leaning against the front of the piano. It read: TOM BERRYLAND PLAYS YOUR REQUESTS, 5-9 P.M. NIGHTLY.

She met his smile with one of her own. “I just love ‘Apple Blossom Time,’” she cooed in a velvety voice. “Though I’m just too bashful to speak up and ask for it.”

Too bashful! Her! Draves was slightly astonished. Man, this sex kitten was really playing it cool, he thought. He doubted 40 minutes would be enough. He would have a hard time even haggling a low price in that time. And the challenge of it was: he had to get the price down to zero dollars and no cents.

*SIX HOURS PAST THURSDAY*

Tom Berryland had just finished “Saint Louis Blues.” Like the auto driver who leans on his horn behind another driver the instant the traffic light changes, Draves yelled up at him, “How about Apple Blossom Time?” His voice was urgent, commanding.

Berryland grinned, bobbed his head, and started in on it, to the disappointment of several patrons and bar-flies who had shouted their own requests too late.

Draves turned back to the girl. “There. You know what they say ‘bout the squeaky wheel. If you want something, don’t ask for it, don’t request it, demand it.”

“Oh, thank you,” she said. She then rolled her head back, pursed her overly-painted lips, closed her overly-painted eyelids, and made ecstasy motions, arms and shoulders swaying in unison in time with the music.

As the piece came to an end the enraptured girl opened her eyes, sighed, picked up her drink and daintily sipped at it. Draves watched with disdain. Who was she trying to fool with this show of artifice? The glass was tall, frosted, with various pieces of fruit and other “garbage” floating at the top. It looked like a Tom Collins to Draves, who would never touch one himself.

“Ritual over?” he asked.

The redhead laughed, put her drink down, and started into a friendly stream of get-acquainted dialogue.

Draves learned that she came from a small town, population four thousand, in northern Wisconsin. She said she had always been fascinated by anything big: tall buildings, airplanes, and long, wide streets like Michigan Avenue. And she loved the fast paced nightlife of Chicago. She was “caught up” in the immensity of it all.

These influences helped reveal her personality. Draves knew that more than a few twisted people with disjointed thinking shared her reasons for moving into Chicago proper, especially into the environs of the near-north side where she said she lived. However, there was more to it than that. He was positive there were further reasons for leaving her small town with its family roots and security. These reasons hadn’t come out clearly in their conversation. All he could extract from her regarding her personal life in whatever the name of the town was (he couldn’t recall) was that her townsfolk “weren’t very broad-minded.” Wasn’t that enough though? It was the clue he’d been waiting for.

*Jack Payne*

Draves checked the time again. 5:40 now. He would have to work fast. “Do you like this joint?” he asked, following the question quickly with a bit of small talk. “I come here quite a bit. The marquee out front sure grabs you, doesn’t it? A huge neon, One-Eyed Pussy Cat.”

He gestured toward the bartender. “Joe, over there, the guy who owns this fine establishment, certainly doesn’t look like a pussy cat. He looks more like a gorilla. But that eye-patch he wears throws him into the conversation-piece category. Of course the music here is always tops, too, which helps draw the crowds.”

The girl muttered humble appreciations for the surroundings and music. They finished their drinks simultaneously and Draves ordered for both of them. Hers proved to be a Tom Collins, as he’d guessed. As always he stuck to his favorite food supplement: the Martini.

When their second round came Draves fondled his glass, then took a measured swallow. He decided on a direct lunge; let the chips fall. Almost too casually he said, “You find this place a good hunting ground?” He wasn’t looking at her when he said it; thus, he didn’t know how convincing her facial expression would be.

Her voice sounded appropriately perplexed. “Why, whatever do you mean?”

Still not looking at her he said, “Oh, come off it. How much?”

She fumbled with her purse. She didn’t open it, just fiddled. “Well, a girl has to have money, you know, especially when she wants to live the way I want to live.”

“How much?”

“I don’t do this often. It’s just when I’m low on money or saving for something...”

“I didn’t ask you to justify it. Everybody knows it’s a big business. It’s a well-recognized institution among the broad-minded. It’s the oldest profession in the world. I just asked you how much?” It was close to 5:45 now. Draves was growing impatient. “One hundred-fifty dollars.” Draves was just consuming another sip from his drink when she said it. He choked, then cleared his throat before setting the glass down. He had figured \$50, \$75 tops. But \$150?

“Did you say \$150?” he asked, even though he knew he had heard correctly. Desirable as she was, this girl must be out of her mind. It was a staggering starting point from which to “bargain down.”

*SIX HOURS PAST THURSDAY*

“Why, yes.” She was haughtily defensive. “Like I said, I don’t do this often. When I do I’ve got to make it worthwhile.” She jutted her chest forward. “I’m thirty-six, twenty-five, thirty-six. Guess I’ve got something to offer.”

They all said they “didn’t do this often.” And the price! In monosyllables under his breath Draves cursed this upsetting of the form chart. “But how about the law of supply and demand?” he complained. “Your competition is thick as flies. They’re all charging \$75 to stoke up a little new business and get some referral customers.”

“Well...” She brought her head low, worked up the corners of her mouth in a playful smile, fluttered her long artificial eyelashes, and looked up at him enticingly. “You’re a real good looking guy. Maybe this time for \$75. It...might even be fun.”

Seventy-five dollars was still \$75 too high for Steve Draves. He would never pay as much as a nickel, present-day legal tender or Confederate, for a piece. It was now a few minutes after 5:45. He didn’t have much time. So, after making a production of eyeing the girl up and down approvingly, he went speedily into his sales pitch.

“It’s too bad you don’t do this often.” He shook his head regretfully. “You’d be good in the catalog. If you were in it you’d get more business than you could possibly handle.”

The bait was taken. “What do you mean? Catalog? What catalog?”

“You mean you haven’t heard of the catalog? It’s national. It’s run by a Chicago man. It includes only the best-looking professionals.” He ceremoniously assessed her again. “But I think you could qualify. About twenty thousand copies are printed a year. It includes photos of the best girls available. The various poses indicate the girl’s specialty, those who have one, that is. Of course the poses are subtly suggestive, not pornography.

“The price is coded into the information beneath each picture,” he continued. “It’s supposed to be an order number, to fool the ignorant who think they’re just buying an ‘art’ picture from a photographic supplier. These people have many prints made up for that purpose too. The catalogs are circulated at and around all the hotels loaded with convention delegates. Naturally, here in Chicago it gets wide exposure. The Chicago girls who are in it get more business than they can handle. They don’t have to bother tying up with the local syndicate, cab drivers, bell captains, and subject themselves to all those piece-work cuts.

*Jack Payne*

“If you’re acceptable, or if you know somebody who can get you in, you only pay \$175 a year. Then your earnings, 100% of them, are all yours. And you even get a commission from every picture that’s sold too.” Draves hesitated while he lit a cigarette. “Wouldn’t work for you, though. If you’re only in this business part-time you’d just have to turn away too much business.”

The redhead put her hand on his arm. “Do you know the right people? Could you get me in?”

“Yeah,” Draves responded in a provisional way. “Both the business manager and the owner are friends of mine. In fact I’m on a big job for the owner now, in another field.” He paused to let her anxiety heighten. “I’ve been instrumental in getting girls in, in the past.”

“Will you introduce me to the right man? When can I see him?” For a girl who didn’t do “that” very often she appeared unusually eager.

“No hurry. Tomorrow, next week, anytime.” Draves took a slow drag on his cigarette and let the smoke drift lazily. “I was just thinking, maybe we could go someplace now and get a bite to eat, then go up to your place. I value my working relationships with these people. I wouldn’t think of recommending someone to them without first sampling the merchandise myself.”

He reached into his inside jacket pocket, pulled out his checkbook, looked at his balance as if trying to decipher the exact meaning of an intricate sentence from Chekhov and frowned. “No. Guess we’d better forget it today. I made a mathematical error in figuring my balance. Had an extra zero in there. I’m overdrawn on this account. Won’t be able to transfer a couple of thousand from another account until Monday.” With a show of dejection he put the checkbook back in his pocket.

“Oh, that’s alright,” the girl quickly said. “Let’s go now. We can go to my apartment; it’s a nice place on Huron. I’ll cook my specialty, a really choice sirloin. I’ve got a stereo and all the best records. We’ll have a party for two. I wouldn’t think of charging you.”

Too late! With a series of periodic glances Draves had been watching the door. Tina had come in and was looking, searchingly, about the large room that was the One-Eyed Pussy Cat Lounge. It was just 6:00. Draves bemoaned this turn of fortune; Tina had picked this day to be precisely on time. Just another three minutes and he and the redhead would have been gone.

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Tina was so often late for their dates he was counting on it today. This chronic tardiness irritated him no end; so he figured if he stood her up this once it wouldn't matter. It might teach her a lesson. He would have made up an excuse to use later. Because she was in the Loop today, seeing her agent, it wouldn't have been too great an inconvenience for her to have just gone on home alone. Now his plans for standing her up were out the window.

Draves rose and detached his arm from the redhead's grasp. "Some other time. I've got to go now. A friend just came in. It's important." He thought fast. "Uh, the wife of my best friend. They're breaking up and she's been wanting to talk to me. She's all torn up. You know how it is." He grinned nervously. "Duty before pleasure," he said as he turned to walk toward Tina.

"But you don't even have my phone number. How do I get in touch with you?" Anguished, the redhead blurted it loudly.

"I'm in here a lot. Stop in." Draves then turned his back on her completely and quickly strode over to Tina. He took her hand and led her to a booth, the redhead now stricken from his mind.

They sat down and Draves ordered drinks.

Tina Landon was one helluva girl, Draves thought. A platinum blonde, she had a pronounced petulant look about her, Bridget Bardotish. Her figure was first rate in every detail, her complexion photogenic perfection, full lips pouty. Her soft blue eyes carried a perpetual hurt expression, as if the world were out to get her and was, in fact, succeeding. As usual she was dressed smartly - today in a tailored, silk, beige dress with the proper amount of bronze-colored accessories.

The girl's mouth was poutier than ever. "She doesn't have your phone number. Aren't you going to give it to her? You'd better hurry. Look. She's upset. She's leaving." The acidity of the words together with the habitual facial expression belied Tina Landon's normal personality.

Draves could see he would have to settle her down. If he failed he would fail once again in his long quest of getting her in bed. "Look, honey." He reached for her hand and held it gently. "She's just some dumb woman who happened to be sitting next to me while I was waiting for you. She had a fight with her boyfriend. She made a big decision never to go back to him. She was grasping at straws. I happened to be there. I was a good listener. I don't know what she wanted. Maybe she was angling for a rebound fling.

*Jack Payne*

Anyway she's gone. I don't even know her name. Forget her, will you? I have."

Their drinks came, via one of Joe's pert waitresses, another Martini for Draves, a Manhattan for Tina.

Tina Landon folded her hands in her lap and looked at them contemplatively. Her suspicions appeared to be generally allayed, but she was depressed about something else.

"I can't take it anymore, Steve. All these modeling jobs you've gotten for me. Sure. I make top money. I've got quite a bit put away." She shook her head dejectedly. "But there's so much needless cheesecake in this business. And all those single-purpose men! It's disgusting. I don't want to be a model. I've been studying at the Actor's Academy for a solid year now. I can act. Oh, Steve, can't you hook me up with a good theatrical agent, now? Frankly I'd like to tell my present agent where to go."

When she was in one of these self-pitying moods, placating Tina Landon was difficult. But after letting the redhead get away Draves didn't want to strike out with Tina again, so he tried.

"Look. You need exposure. You've been modeling less than a year. Look at the tremendous exposure you're starting to get. Good God, a cover on *World Fashion*; you can hardly do better than that. I've told you over and over. You've got to interest the top agents in your face and figure first, then they'll beat a path to your door. Then you can show them how you can act."

"Oh, I suppose you're right," she replied unhappily. Her eyes met his; she sharpened their focus on him. "How much longer do you think I'll have to go through this modeling routine?" she asked timidly, inquisitively.

"Only a few more months, honey." Draves picked up on her optic reconnaissance, held her gaze, tried to reassure her. "Jay Dowler, you know, the hot-shot Hollywood agent, is coming to town in December. He's about the best in the business. I know him quite well. When he gets here you should be all set up. By that time you'll be ready. I'll talk to him and get you two together."

Draves sat back, drearily reached into his pocket, shook out another cigarette, and evaluated the sullen girl. For four long months he'd been working on her. God, what beauty. How he craved her. Tonight was to be the night; he had planned it. Now, another of her too-frequent moods was getting in the way. Why did she have to be so completely absorbed in that damned career? Or, rather, "would-be" career, actress extraordinaire. He

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lusted for her so badly though, he felt compelled to keep pitching. “Why don’t we get out of here and go up to the roof of the Bellflower,” he said soothingly. “We can have dinner, and dance some, then go up to your apartment.”

Tina had an ear constantly attuned to ominous overtones from all sources. The suggestion of a long evening with the hint of something special at the end of it seemed to trigger her defensive mechanism. “I appreciate all you’re doing for me, Steve, and all you have done.” She tried to sound grateful. “Really, I do. But I just don’t feel well tonight. Even that one drink kicked something up in my stomach a little. I think I’m going to have to cut out now, get home and get a good night’s sleep. Thanks for the drink.” She rose to leave.

Draves was vexed by the suddenness of it. The heat within him could barely be held in abeyance. “How about tomorrow? Or Sunday?”

“How about later?” she said. Then, placatingly, “Steve, you know...really, it’s not that I’m a prude, stodgy, or narrow-minded. It’s just that, well, you’ve been great to me, but I don’t know; maybe it’s just that I’m still a little girl at heart, waiting for a dashing knight in shining armor, or some such cornball fantasy to happen. I, what I’m trying to say is, that I just don’t want to get in too deeply with you, not just yet, until I’m sure you feel something for me, rather than, you know.”

“But Tina...”

“I just want to be convinced. Maybe I will be convinced, soon. Just don’t rush me, Steve.” She bent down, kissed him in sisterly fashion on the cheek, and left with a rush, without even looking back.

Draves finished the remains of his Martini, glaring at the cushion of the now-empty seat opposite him as he did so. His descent into the doldrums reflected in his every step once he got up and slowly moved through the heavy doors of the One-Eyed Pussy Cat, out onto the sidewalk of Michigan Avenue, and turned south. At Madison he turned west and walked to the Northwestern Station. He boarded the 6:38 Green Bay, Wisconsin-bound train, found a seat, and stared aimlessly out the window.

God, how he wanted Tina. When he thought of all the time he had invested in her it made him a little ill. He’d invested four long months, setting her up for that first glorious flop. He wondered if his investment in her would ever pay off. He muttered some miscellaneous profanities to himself. The suspicious, ever-cautious bitch. And here he’d passed up a sure piece - the redhead - only to be put off, frustrated again, by Tina.

*Jack Payne*

His lapse into daydreamland made the trip seem short. Like a sleepwalker he got off the train at Melwood, Illinois and found his Volkswagen in the station parking lot. He got in and headed for 1714 Oakwood Drive.

Was Tina a lost cause? He just didn't know. If he couldn't score with her in the next couple of weeks he guessed he'd simply have to give up and concentrate on Sandy and Deby.

Draves pulled into the driveway and scanned the house as he got out of the car. Frame, small, about one-thousand-two-hundred square feet, a typical, box-shaped ranch. All the other houses up and down either side of the street were look-alikes, the only difference being that some were brick. The house was neat, he thought. Good enough, for the time being, for a family of four.

As he opened the front door Betty was right there to meet him, as usual, one of the twins cupped in each arm.

"Look guys," she said with a happy smile. "Daddy's home."  
She mashed his lips with a hearty welcoming kiss.

## CHAPTER 2

**A**fter dinner Steve Draves picked up his twin sons Scott and Greg, nine months old now, and held them in his arms. He made a face and conversed in the language one does with children of that age. “Pata, pata, pata,” and other such indecipherable garble. Then he balanced one rotund youngster on each knee and watched with amusement as they slapped at each other, patty-cake fashion.

Draves was relaxing in his large overstuffed recliner. Made of rust-colored vinyl, it was his favorite chair. Betty Draves came into the room and set a glass of coffee down on the lamp table next to him.

“A *glass* of coffee?” The container seemed to fascinate Draves. He screwed up the flesh over the bridge of his nose in a deep frown and glared at it.

Betty sat down on the sofa that backed against the maple-paneled wall on Draves’ right. She made nervous, twisting gestures with her apron which she still hadn’t taken off. “I’m sorry, Steve. In the afternoon Elaine came over. She stayed four hours. I just haven’t had a chance to do the dishes all day.”

Upon picking up the glass Draves burned his fingers and quickly put it down.

“You’ll have to hold it at the top, honey,” Betty said.

Experimentation proved her correct, though the glass was still extremely warm. After taking a few sips Draves put it down, then lifted the twins off his lap, onto the floor, and said, “O.K., boys. Off you go. Daddy wants to read the paper.” He leaned back and picked up the copy of the *Chicago Daily News* from the lamp table beside him and began leafing through it as the twins crawled off into the living room, babbling contentedly.

“I ran into Mrs. Chamberlain at the supermarket today,” Betty said. “She got word that you found a buyer for the Selby property already. Apparently Mr. Fanning told her right after you phoned him from Milwaukee. She’s real happy. She says the whole Melwood Citizens Committee for Better Housing will be happy Mr. Fanning let you handle the sale.” She beamed in exaltation. “I was very proud of you.”

Draves looked up from his paper. “What? Oh, yeah. The Selby deal. It’s all wrapped up. All the closing documents are signed, sealed, and will be

*Jack Payne*

delivered by registered mail to Fanning's office tomorrow." He cut off short. He didn't want to talk about it.

"Steve."

"Uh-huh."

"Won't that mean a good-sized commission?"

"Yes, hon. It's a million-dollar sale, and I got the full price. It's a 5% deal. That means it'll bring \$50,000 into the coffers." Draves brought the paper up high, as if to use it as a shield, to fend off further discussion.

"Fifty *thousand* dollars. Why that'll mean..."

"Honey, isn't it time to put the boys to bed? It's past their bedtime." Draves hoped the ploy would work, would get her mind off the Selby deal.

"Oh, dear, yes. It's past their bedtime." Betty took care of her chore, then resumed her post on the family room sofa. She fidgeted further with her apron. It was apparent something was on her mind and she didn't want to press the point of it, but did anyway.

"Steve, you're only paying yourself \$180 a week. That's all you're taking out of the business. It just, well, it just seems, with a \$50,000 commission coming in, couldn't you give yourself a raise? Just a little one, maybe - to \$200 or \$225 a week? We could breathe a little easier then, on the food bills, on everything." As he'd feared, she had picked right up where she'd left off.

There was a brief period of silence while Draves figured what to tell her and how. Then he came out from behind his paper and, in the voice of a counselor, said, "You don't understand a lot of things about business overhead, hon, and so-called variable costs. You know I'm the biggest advertiser in the business opportunities sections of *Midwest Commerce*, the *American Financial Observer*, and *Business Opportunities News & Trends*. The ad rates are staggering. Why, it costs \$500 for a single two-column-by-six-inch ad in *Midwest Commerce* alone. And that's only a regional publication. The other two are national.

"A bill from the ad agency came yesterday. It's \$29,000. Don't forget, too, all the new office furniture and new office layout that we got in May. That came to almost \$11,000. Haven't paid it yet. Then there's \$1,000 a month office rent, Deby's salary, and about \$7,000 worth of finders' fees for referrals I still owe. Besides, closing on the Selby property won't be 'til the end of November. I get no cash on it 'til then. When I do, it's all eaten up."

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He hoped she had missed the fact he had just told her: that the closing documents on the Selby deal were in the mail and would be delivered to Fanning's office tomorrow.

Draves' wife looked down and painstakingly tried to smooth out some of the folds in her apron with the flat of her hand. "I'm sorry, Steve. Of course I don't understand these things." Evidently satisfied with his explanation, she smiled warmly. "I knew my honey could do it. Oh, everyone in Melwood will be so happy that those horrible Arkin Brothers didn't get their filthy hands on the property."

"Yeah. Good." Draves said it blandly. He tried to get back to his newspaper, but his attention was distracted by an overturned lamp, on the floor in front of the picture window in the living room. Motioning through the archway at the prone lamp, he asked, "What happened?"

"Oh, the lamp? Greg pulled it off the table this morning."

"This morning? You mean it's been like that, overturned, on the floor, all day? Why didn't you pick it up?"

"I just forgot, honey, that's all. I'll do it now." Betty got up and moved into the living room. She got to the lamp, bent down, lost her balance and went to one knee. Even picking up a fallen lamp was a task for her, Draves reflected sadly. In spite of her many technical shortcomings there were so many good things about her though. While she stayed in that position, fiddling with the cord and some adjustment screws, apparently straightening something out, Draves couldn't help but relish some of those good things.

Oh, how wonderful she looked, even in the un-pressed purple and white print slacks with the clashing yellow blouse she was wearing. Betty could wear any offbeat combination of colors in any weird fabric and still look like royalty to Steve Draves. He never did know exactly what color her hair was. Depending upon the light, it sometimes appeared to be lustrous amber, at other times a glistening caramel - the color you get at a soda fountain atop a sundae. Some people said she was blonde; some referred to her as a brunette. Oddly, even without combing, her natural waves usually fluffed out and fell into neat, orderly strands. They framed her face in such a way as to give her an irresponsible, carefree look, though she carried with it an air of helplessness that made men stumble all over themselves, as if entranced, to do things for her.

Her skin was soft, delicate, the kind that would sunburn severely with as little as ten minutes overexposure to the sun's ultra-violet rays. Her cheekbones were set rigidly straight, as was her small nose. The jaw line was

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even and in perfect symmetry with the other contours of her face and head. Betty Draves' shining hazel eyes, always wide open, made for an engagingly unique combination of puzzlement and inbred joy.

In all, her physiognomy seemed to Draves to have been chiseled to the precise specifications of a talented sculptor's interpretation of the Love Goddess. Her height was five feet-six, just right. In fact, to Draves, she was "just right" in every detail. She wasn't like Tina: too pouty. She wasn't like Deby: too thin in the shoulders, hips, and shanks. She wasn't too busty and borderline hefty like Sandy.

No, there wasn't the remotest trace of an imperfection about Betty. Her posture was erect without any attempt on her part to make it so. Her bust was only slightly larger than average, gorgeously rounded, without the unseemly, cow-like propensities of so many big-chested women. Her tiny rib cage made her look even bigger-busted than she was.

She had but a wisp of a waist. It melted into full-blown, perfectly molded hips, which encased an even, flat abdomen despite birth of the twins less than a year ago. Last, her legs were classic (down to the cute dimples on her knees) even-tapering calves, and slim ankles. The overall effect was indeed imposing. And at the age of twenty-two, she was still flowering. The best years were yet to come.

Draves dropped his head into the palm of his hand. His studied appreciation of his wife brought other thoughts: deep regrets. Why, oh, why did he have such a constant, burning passion for other women? Right here at home he had everything any man could ever want. When they made love every square inch of her magnificent body spoke to him. His fulfillment was always complete, absolutely glorious. Why, then, did he have to be such a compulsive philanderer? It didn't even make nonsense. Draves wondered if he needed to see a shrink.

After straightening out whatever she was straightening out, Betty finally got the lamp upright, placed where it should be, then returned to her spot on the family room sofa. She folded her hands neatly in her lap. "Steve," she said.

"What?"

"The dryer broke down again today."

"So...call somebody to come and fix it."

"Won't...won't you call somebody, after you get to the office Monday? I just don't know who to call."

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“Betty. Good God. A simple thing like that. Use the phone book. Just look in the yellow pages and call somebody. Let your fingers do the walking. It’s easy.” Try as he did, Draves couldn’t keep the irritation from his voice.

“What do I look under?”

Draves slapped a hand down onto his newspaper, half mashing it into his lap. “Try ‘D’ for dryer, or ‘R’ for repair, or ‘E’ for electrician. How should I know? Look around. Explore.”

“I’m sorry. Guess I shouldn’t bother you with such a little thing as that.”

“That’s right. Guess you shouldn’t.” Draves made still another attempt to get interested in his newspaper.

“One more thing.”

“What?” he blurted.

“Lona’s been teaching me to sew, and I’ve been thinking of trying to make a skirt. Lona always buys her material at Wells. But this new yard goods store just opened on Center. They say prices are a lot lower. I don’t know if the material is as good though. Do you think I ought to try the new store, or stick with Lona’s choice: Wells?”

“Good Lord. Please deliver me....,” Draves offered up a little mumbled prayer of despair to the ceiling. He put the paper down in his lap for what seemed to be the twentieth time and turned on his wife. “I don’t know the first damn thing about fabrics. Make your own investigation. Make your own decision. I couldn’t care less where you buy such stuff.” He slapped a wrinkle out of his newspaper, raised it, and once more tried to read.

Betty idly lifted her apron and examined the hem, evidently trying to decide on a course of action she was contemplating. Then she resolutely got up, moved over in front of her husband and looked down on him, a faint, culpable smile on her face. Just in time Draves could see what she was going to do and was able to get the paper out of the way. She sat down on his lap, put both hands behind his neck, and gently caressed the back of his head.

“I guess I sometimes act like a ten-year old who can’t do anything without first asking Daddy’s permission.” She leaned forward and kissed him, with feeling, then straightened up. “I love you, Steve Draves, and I promise I’ll try harder in the future to act more like a wife than a daughter.”

Draves gazed into her eyes. The usual peace and contentment with things as they were, today, registered in them, as did the misgivings and

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foreboding over the things which she considered beyond her control, tomorrow.

Draves' gaze deepened. He said nothing. At times her natural powers over him were omnipotent. Soon he was drowning in her eyes. Closer and closer he drew her, his breathing becoming shorter, his heartbeat quickening. When the small gap between them had been sealed he embraced her with arms that seemed inadequate. He wished he had two more. As she clung to him, he could feel the portent, the imminent outpouring of the heat which was building within her, too. Once more every inch of her body was about to speak to him.

He used his limited capacity, only two arms, to the best advantage he knew at the moment. He lifted Betty with him as he rose from his chair.

A moment later the bedroom door closed behind them.

The 7:48 Northwestern commuter train drew close to Chicago's Loop. Today, the Monday after he'd struck out with both the redhead and Tina, and then gone home to the glorious euphoria provided by his wife, was a bright, warm day. Draves stared absently out the window of the dining car at the sky, worked on his third cup of coffee and dragged at his third cigarette since boarding the train.

Fred Quimby was in one of his too-frequent advisor moods. "Yes, you're still a young man, Steve. How old are you? Thirty? Thirty-five? I say why struggle with that business of yours. There's just too damned many crooks in the business brokerage field anyway. Many of these people are so crooked, when they die, the undertaker won't even have to bury them, just screw 'em into the ground. There's no room for an honest guy like you." With what was supposed to be an adroit flip of his napkin he clumsily wiped away some crumbs of toast from his pudgy chin and put the napkin down.

Draves sipped at his coffee and faced Quimby across the table. "Yeah, I know. I'm young enough yet to change fields. And, you're right. Some of the people in my business aren't too, uh, discrete in their methods. But don't worry about me, Fred. I'm doing alright. I make out."

To Draves, Quimby was an odd-looking duck: short; fat; bald, with a U of prickly-looking brown and gray hair. For some reason the man had his barber eliminate the sideburns and trim the sides and back of his head unusually high. Often when Draves was distracted by the offbeat haircut he wondered if that was how a biblical times' Crown of Thorns might look.

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“Don’t kid me, Steve,” Quimby said. “You can’t exactly be making a bucket of money selling candy stores and service stations.”

“I don’t sell candy stores and service stations.”

Undeterred Quimby went on. “Look. You’ve got a real estate broker’s license. You’ve had a lot of experience buying and selling businesses. You’re young; you’ve been struggling with that business of yours for five years. You’ve got everything going for you. Good background. Now’s the time to cash in on it. Step up. What do you take out of your business now – 10 to 15 thousand a year?”

“I’ve told you before, and I’ll tell you again. Tom Grimes, the head of the real estate department at Kramco, is a good friend of mine. He thrives on young guys like you. I’m sure I can get you 16 to 18 thousand to start and none of those headaches of meeting all the bills in your own business. Kramco’s buying up shopping center sites all over the Midwest, and existing shopping centers, too. It’s duck soup for you.”

“How’s old Wayne Stuidivant? Hear he’s been sick.”

“He was in the hospital a couple of times last year. He’s fine now, healthy as a horse.” Quimby looked at his fellow commuter quizzically.

“How old is he now?”

“Little over seventy, I guess,” Quimby said. Then the electrodes generated in his head. He smiled, exhibiting pipe-stain-colored teeth, though Draves had never seen him smoke a pipe. “Hey, wait a minute. I know what you’re thinking. Sure, Kramco only deals with one outside broker. He’s it; has been for 40 years. Forget it, Steve. Stuidivant’s a hearty old cuss. He’ll probably live to be ninety. Sure, he’s got a good thing going. In fact he’s gotten rich off the Kramco account alone. But you can’t waste your life waiting around for a break like that. The competition for it is fierce. There are at least a hundred brokers waiting in line for Stuidivant to croak.”

“Oh. I was just wondering about him.”

“Why don’t you let me talk to Grimes about getting you on our payroll? Forget the outside brokerage account. You’ll never get it.”

“That’s nice of you, Fred.” Draves decided he’d have to be firm, definite. “Please don’t bother though. I’m just not interested.”

Quimby shrugged. “Well. Can’t say I didn’t try,” he said philosophically. “I just hate to see a sharp young guy like you go to waste. I see you on the train every morning and only about once a week on the late

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afternoon run. All those wild hours you work, 'til midnight, two in the morning. And what have you got to show for it?"

Draves knew what he meant: the Volkswagen and his little \$18,000 house.

The train drew into the station. Both got off. Draves bid Quimby goodbye as the fat man got into a cab; he then started the long walk up Madison toward his office in the Bayfield building on Michigan Avenue. His fast pace was matched by the milling thousands of men and women all hurrying to their own jobs.

At the intersection of Madison and LaSalle, Draves dropped his brief case. As he tried to pick it up he was brushed and bumped by several people eager to get past him. Ah, the humanities of metropolitan life, Draves thought, as he retrieved the brief case and fell back in step with the onrushing tide. If anyone had a seizure and collapsed in the middle of the sidewalk, writhing in pain, screaming, and gurgling up foam, he was sure nine-hundred-ninety-nine out of every thousand people would walk right around the victim. The heartlessness of the Chicago early morning commuter rush could be matched only by New York.

With difficulty Draves managed to squeeze out of the jammed elevator when he got to the eighth floor of the Bayfield building. He walked briskly down the corridor. On the way into his office he hesitated, as he often did, to admire the gold-leaf lettering on the glass door. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED, it proclaimed elegantly.

Upon entering the office, he stopped and listened attentively. No sound. Deby Collinger, his not-dry-behind-the-ears-yet, twenty-one-year-old secretary, was sitting behind her desk reading some mail. Her long legs were crossed, per daily custom, pulling her skirt taut, high above her knees, and binding her hips and lower abdomen in a provocative way.

"Good morning, Mr. Draves," she said brightly as he came up to her desk.

"Deb, did you forget the tape again?"

"Oh!" She put the back of a hand to her open mouth, blushed, scrambled to her feet, went to the reception room's large sectional divan and moved it forward. She then bent behind it.

Draves heard the click.

Deby replaced the divan and returned to her desk. Soon the soothing, muffled sounds became audible: a battery of typewriters clacking away, complete with the ringing of the end-of-the-line bells; the occasional plump,

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plump sound of an adding machine; the grating, dull roll of a ball-bearinged file drawer being opened; the low, indistinguishable conversations - mostly female, some male.

“Sounds almost eerie, Mr. Draves. Just you and me in this business, and all those ghosts behind the wall,” Deby commented.

“Did you check the doors?”

“Yes, I did, Mr. Draves.” Her tone turned apologetic. “I don’t know why I forgot the tape today.” She hesitated. “But why the doors, every day?”

“The cleaning women unlock them to clean at night. What if they forget to lock them again some night when they’re done? And, next day, a customer is in and opens one by mistake. Think of how shocked he’d be when he found only a blank wall. Just don’t want to take any chances, that’s all. That’s why you’ve got to check the locks every morning, as soon as you open up.”

Deby looked sheepishly down at her desk. “Don’t worry. I won’t forget the doors, or the tape, again.”

Draves walked into his large executive-suite-type inner office. The plush furniture included a massive maple desk, underpinned and surrounded by carpet of pale yellow, complimented by drapes of tan with a brownish tint - both lustrous. The three art “originals” that hung on the walls always made him feel successful. The amplitude of conspicuously expensive furniture was impressive to begin with, but it was the pictures that were the clincher. They made for the ultimate “front.” A nineteenth century Dutch coastal scene, a skier’s downward view of the Swiss Alps, and a painting of a stalagmite-stalactite-dominated underground scene similar to the Carlsbad Caverns of New Mexico - these were Draves’ pride and joy.

He had purchased the three wall hangings from a fence who dealt in counterfeit art goods. They were made from overlay impressions - liftings from the originals which cost approximately \$3,000 each. Draves had bought the fake originals for \$200 apiece and encased them in costly frames. He was satisfied. No interior decorator would approve of the particular combination. To hell with ‘em all, Draves thought. The pictures created quite an impression; the favorable comments they provoked from visitors were well worth the expense and effort.

The building manager must have thought him to be nuts when he ordered the paneling with the extra doors, he thought, as he sat behind his

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desk, comfortably ensconced in his high-backed leather chair, listening to the satisfying sounds of office activity playing on the stereo tape. He recalled the scene in the man's office. The poor boob's mouth dropped open and stayed that way so long Draves thought he'd never be able to close it. But, what the hell, he, Draves, was paying for it. It was none of the manager's business.

Draves had carefully selected this office suite because it had two freight elevators and an elongated stockroom adjacent, on the other side of his reception room. Both faced out, onto a corridor along the back of the building used by the building's employees only. The visual effect from the front corridor, used by the public, was that his office housed a layout totaling three to four thousand square feet.

The stereo tape had cost him dearly. Long-playing, it was tailor-made and played on four stereo speakers concealed in the far wall of the long, narrow reception room, to convey the illusion of forty, maybe sixty, employees busily working. The reception room paneling was of creamy pegboard and rich, red maple, in a checkerboard pattern. The speakers were hidden at various strategic locations behind the mottled pegboard.

Draves' desk was situated so that his back was to the largest window. When no one was in, he frequently left the connecting door to the reception room open. Deby's desk was directly opposite, just off the far wall. She faced him through the open door. Draves now looked up to his morning joy. With her legs crossed that particular way, her skirt seemed to be pulled higher than usual this morning, he noticed. But, upon recollection of the wondrous weekend Betty had provided him, he decided today's version of his morning joy wasn't as joyous as usual. Look at this girl overall, he demanded of himself. He had hired her months ago, mainly for her visual appeal, hoping, secondarily, that she would have some work ability too. He analyzed her critically. Tall, about five-feet-nine. Nice shiny near-black hair, always piled high on her head, which made her appear still taller. A "cute" face, though, with somewhat sallow cheeks, which made her look slightly gaunt. Her body was lean-lined all the way: small shoulders, thin waist, eel hips, and those long, long, slim legs. Illusion was that almost half the distance from her feet to the top of her head consisted of those gorgeous limbs, which stoked Draves' desires for her so continually. The only paradox about this genuinely skinny girl was an oversized bust. Because he was an inveterate big-bust-devotee - or maybe it was a congenital condition - this, too, helped fire Draves' flame and perpetuate its regularity.

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He sighed, opened the Carlin file, on his desk in front of him, and got to work.

A bit later Deby held up a large piece of newsprint. "The galley proof of the Sikes ad is here," she said. "But *Midwest Commerce* left out, 'must sell due to illness.' Are you sure you want it in? Mr. Sikes was in Friday. He looked healthy to me."

"Put it in," Draves said tartly as he put the Carlin file aside and started to browse through the opened mail Deby had already placed on his desk. Poor, naive Deby, he thought. He wondered if she would ever learn that in this business "must sell due to illness" was one of the standard sales pitches. The best one was "owner wishes to retire," but that line didn't go very well in the cases of twenty-five, thirty-five, or forty-five year old charlatans.

Draves sat back. He pondered the sale of the Selby property. He, Betty, and the twins would have to move away from Melwood, and soon, before the smelly deal he'd made hit the fan.

"Oh, Mr. Draves," Deby piped up. "I forgot to tell you. Our fine, efficient accountant, Sam - Sam Shafer - called." There was nothing bashful about young Deby. She was all extrovert. More than that, she could be outrightly brash. She got on a first-name, kidding basis with everyone within the first few minutes of meeting them. Draves had had a hard time breaking her of the habit of calling him Steve, even Stevie once. He finally got it through her head that she must get into the habit of always addressing him as Mr. Draves so she wouldn't slip sometime when an important customer was in the office.

"What did he want?" Draves asked. She had gone back to reading the mail.

She looked up. "Oh. He said he's got \$4,000 worth of our bills to pay, and there's only \$1,200 in our checking account. He said to ask you if you wouldn't get our working capital up somehow. Says he's having to hold up on a lot of payments, and we're paying more because we're missing discount dates on some."

"How much does he want?"

"Well, enough to cover the shortage, I guess. About \$3,000."

"O.K., I'll send him a check."

The whole thing seemed to bother Deby. "Mr. Draves?"

"Yeah."

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“If we...if we can spend all this money on the office - the stereo, the paneling, the doors, the furniture, and all - how come we can't afford to stay up with our bills?”

“Who says we can't afford to? I told you, Deb. I'll take care of it. I'll send him a personal check. Don't concern yourself. Let me worry about it.”

“But Mr. Draves. If you've got enough money in you personal checking account to cover these business bills any time, why don't you just keep more in the business account?”

Draves mumbled under his breath. She could certainly get on her soapbox at times, he thought. “Tax purposes,” he replied.

“Oh, I see.”

Draves knew she didn't see at all. In the past he had found “tax purposes,” along with “Have you ever missed a pay check?” effective ways of shutting her up every time she started nagging about money. His handling of his business finances was a delicate thing, none of her business, and he wasn't about to explain it to her. Draves hated to pay bills anyway. He preferred to work as long as he could on other people's capital, then pay up just short of their obtaining a judgment against him.

The phone rang. Draves heard Deby pick up on her desk and parrot the standard response, “Commercial Opportunities Unlimited.” Pause. “One moment please.”

He heard the click of her “hold” button.

“It's Mr. Bond,” she said.

Draves immediately got up, walked to the door and shut off his view of the girl's legs, returned to his desk, sat down, snapped his “hold” button and said, “Hello, Jim. What's new?” The unfortunate guy had taken such a ribbing about his name over the years Draves just couldn't bring it upon himself to add to the cracks anymore.

James Bond, Draves' stockbroker, who worked for Hines, Keenan, Agnew & Co., was a right-to-the-point guy. Never any “How's the family?” or “Have you played any golf lately?” No “What do you think of the weather?” talk from him.

“I think you're crazy, Steve,” the blunt voice said.

Draves laughed. “You've been thinking I'm crazy ever since I've been dealing with you, Jim.”

“I know.” Draves could hear Bond's deep sigh over the phone. “This time I think you've really taken leave of your senses. Kensington Mining?”

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Ye Gods, Steve. The company president was indicted for fraud in Canada. He's been run out of four countries: Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Columbia."

"Look, Jim. You should know by now. We've been doing business together long enough. Don't question me. When I want a particular stock, I want it. That's all there is to it. I gave you a 'buy' order. Just execute it."

"Alright. I'll put it through right away."

"And, Jim..."

"Yes?"

"Did you compute the total market value of my portfolio yet, like I asked?"

There was a delay. Apparently Bond was looking for his figures. "Yes," he said. "I ran a tape. This is the figure as of the Big Board closing Friday...as soon as I can find it."

Draves leaned back and threw one foot onto his desktop. He rested, lazily, as he waited. "What are my total stock holdings up to?" he finally asked impatiently.

"Here it is. Let's see...\$1,980,348.14," was the reply.



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Six Hours Past Thursday

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