

**IRVING
WALLACE**

*The
Golden
Room*



THE GOLDEN ROOM

Irving Wallace

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ONE

Chet Foley was awed by what he was seeing and hearing.

It was a chilly spring afternoon in the last week of March in 1903, and although Foley had already spent his first week in Chicago, this was the moment he had been waiting for.

They were walking on the cobbled sidewalk of South Dearborn Street, scrawny young Foley in step with his older, huskier companion, Thomas Ostrow, veteran City Hall reporter for the Chicago Tribune. Ostrow had been assigned by the managing editor to show their new feature writer around.

Foley straightened his jacket as they proceeded. He was wearing his very best suit. It was a grey and black English worsted with a finely cut boxed coat. He had put on a red cravat and his shiniest lace-up shoes. It was an outfit he wore only for special occasions with young ladies, and he wore it now hoping that it would impress the charming young women he would meet today.

'We're almost there,' Ostrow said, less concerned about his baggy, worn blue suit with two cigarette burns on the rumpled jacket.

Foley nodded with anticipation.

'This is the notorious Levee district,' Ostrow went on. 'You've heard of it, of course.'

'Yes, sir, I have.'

'It got its name just before the Civil War,' Ostrow continued, 'when steamboats came up right near here and discharged southerners who wanted to go to the gambling places and enjoy sex shows and orgies in houses of ill fame. It hasn't changed in all the years since, just gotten wilder. It is not a large area. Only four or five square blocks, but there are over

200 whorehouses crammed into this space. However, you're only interested in seeing one of them.'

'Yes, just one.'

They strode in silence another thirty feet, and then Ostrow abruptly halted.

He waved his hand towards the three-storey building to their left. 'Here you are, Chet. Here it is.'

This is 2131 South Dearborn Street. This is it.'

Foley looked at the building - one broad stone mansion -with its smooth stones, solid lines, grand windows and its broad flight of steps leading up to the entrance.

'The Everleigh Club itself,' Ostrow announced. 'Actually, the most famous and elegant whorehouse in the entire world.'

'I heard of it many times in Peoria.'

'Just as everyone knows about it in New York, London, Paris, Berlin. What do you think?'

Foley gulped. 'I ... I wonder what it's like inside.'

'You'll know very soon. I called Minna and Aida Everleigh and told them I was bringing you over to introduce you. I explained that you are our newest reporter on the Tribune. They love the press, and they can't wait to meet you.' Ostrow took the younger reporter by the arm and pointed him towards the stairs. 'Let's go in and meet the ladies. What they have to show you will be something you'll never forget.'

Inside the Everleigh Club, behind the oversized rosewood desk in the richly appointed study that served as her office, Minna Everleigh was having her usual late breakfast while awaiting her visitors. Her sister Aida was seated across the desk, reading aloud from the Chicago Examiner.

Nibbling at her sturgeon and truffles, Minna stood up to pour another glass of Mumm's Extra Dry champagne for herself from the bottle nestled in her monogrammed ice bucket.

Even standing straight, Minna was diminutive. She was five feet two, unstylishly slender (no corset necessary), 106 pounds, with auburn hair that had been brushed and curled high and adorned with sparkling rhinestone crescents. Her grey-blue eyes were small and intense. She was wearing a pale-pink taffeta blouse cut dangerously low, her favourite butterfly pin ringed with diamonds, a high-waisted skirt of dark cheviot serge and a maroon elastic belt. The skirt barely touched the tops of her high pointed kid shoes.

Across the desk, Aida, taller, heavier at 124 pounds, was definitely wearing a corset to accent her hourglass figure. She was more conservatively garbed in a Havana-brown cloth dress trimmed with silk braiding. She was reading aloud from the newspaper story about the mayor's latest re-election speech.

Listening, Minna took in her study to see that it was in order for her expected visitors. She knew that the study was an eclectic mix, and purposely so. Basically, the furnishing was Louis XIII, which Minna regarded as the most opulent of the French Revival styles. The high ceiling was gilt, panelled with elaborate swirling leaves designs. On the walls hung imported tapestries, colourful, costly. The chandelier had recently been converted from candlelight to electricity.

Viewing the study, Minna felt that the room had true elegance. Across the way was the fireplace, its white-veined marble mantel bearing a miniature bronze statue of Minerva, a vase overflowing with yellow daffodils, a tall German clock of the darkest, richest oak. On either side were bay windows.

From each ebonized cornice descended embroidered lambrequins with tassels, behind which hung damask curtains, lace undercurtains, and muslin roller shades. On the Aubusson-styled rug sat two comfortable upholstered mahogany chairs - one covered in crimson leather, the other with a trellis back - and a mahogany sofa with spiral arms and lion's paw feet. Between her desk and the sofa stood a carved drop-leaf centre table.

Having decided that the room was very much in order, Minna resumed sipping her second glass of champagne and began to revive. As was their custom — and the habit of the thirty girls on the premises - both Minna and Aida Everleigh had slept all morning and had just finished breakfast at two o'clock in the afternoon.

There was a brisk knock on the office door, and Edmund, their mulatto valet, put his head in. His hair was short, wiry, grey, his nose straight and long, his complexion light brown, set off by a perfectly

fitted dark-blue valet's uniform. 'Miss Everleigh,' he addressed Minna, 'two members of the press here to see you, Mr Ostrow and Mr Foley. Mr Ostrow said that you were expecting them.'

'I am,' said Minna. 'Show them in.'

Seconds later Edmund opened the door again and held it open as Ostrow and Foley entered.

Quickly kissing both Minna and Aida on a cheek, Ostrow brought his companion forward. 'Ladies, I want you to meet our new reporter on the Tribune. This is Chet Foley. He just moved here from Peoria. His dearest wish was to see your Club.'

Minna extended a hand to Foley. 'How's my boy?' she said.

Momentarily dumbfounded, Foley shook her hand, and then Aida's hand. He swallowed. 'I am honoured.'

Minna turned to her sister. 'Aida, give him your chair. Why don't you and Tom sit back there on the sofa?'

Briskly, Minna signalled Foley to the seat across from the desk. 'First, let's lubricate you and Tom,' she said, pouring champagne for each of them. She served one glass to Foley and took the other to Ostrow.

Returning to the desk, Minna sat down and smiled brightly at Foley. 'So you want to know more about the Club,' she said. 'I'm sure you want to ask what every newcomer always asks first, "How did Aida and I get into this?" How did two classy sisters become madams? Am I right, my boy?'

Feeling more at ease, Foley could not resist a thin smile. 'You're quite right, Miss Everleigh . . .'

'Make that Minna.'

'Yes, Minna,' Foley said, nervously. 'But if you're tired of that old question, I can wait. ..'

'I'm never tired of that question,' said Minna. 'My sister is more reticent, but I love to talk about our past. How did we wind up opening the Everleigh Club? It's a long story, but I'll make it short and sweet.'

Minna swallowed the last of her second glass of champagne, and poured herself yet another. She settled back comfortably in the velvet-covered chair.

'Aida and I were raised in the bluegrass country of Kentucky,' Minna began softly. 'We still have relatives there, aristocratic, genteel, and struggling. Our brother Charles and his two children are our main family. Charles was once a successful lawyer like our father, and he would still be one if he had not suffered a stroke. He had to give up his practice and is having difficulty holding on to the family house and farm. We've tried to help him, but he doesn't like taking money from us.'

Minna poured, then continued more cheerfully. 'Anyway, his daughter is marrying into riches.'

Charles wrote to us recently that our niece, Cathleen, whom we haven't seen since she was a child, is engaged to marry the son of Harold T. Armbruster, the Chicago meat-packing king. Anyway, to get back to Aida and myself. Our father was a well-off lawyer. We were both sent to a Southern finishing school. Later on, we both fell in love with two handsome brothers and were wedded to them. Very fancy. But our husbands turned out to be spoiled brats, and not above being violent with us. Wouldn't you agree, Aida?'

From across the room, Aida piped up in a small voice, 'You know they were worse than that, Minna. Some of my bruises never went away.'

Minna addressed Chet Foley again. 'When you get to know me better, Chet, you'll know I'd never stand for anything

like that for long. So I just upped and left my husband, divorced him, and went to Washington, D.C. A short time after, Aida did the same and followed me to Washington. At finishing school, we'd both studied elocution and play-acting, and so for want of anything else to do, we decided to become actresses. I must say, it didn't hurt that we were fairly good-looking.'

'You both still are, Minna,' Ostrow called out from the rear of the study.

'I agree,' Foley said with enthusiasm.

'Well, thank you, boys,' said Minna. 'Soon after we joined up, Aida and I found jobs in a stock company and travelled across the country. While we were on the road, our father died, and we inherited \$35,000. We learned about this when we reached Omaha, where the Trans-Mississippi International Exposition was taking place. We wanted to leave the stock company - it was miserable work - we wondered if we could invest our money in something more lucrative and pleasant.'

'And this was your first idea?' asked Foley.

Minna thought about it. 'No, not really,' she said. 'We thought of becoming hat makers or tearoom hostesses. But then something happened. One day we overheard another actress say that her mother thought that being an actress was no better than being a prostitute. Aida and I looked at each other as if to say - hey, why not? We never became prostitutes, but we liked the idea of becoming madams. Business women, to be exact. I was always good at handling people, and Aida was efficient at handling finances and details.'

'So just like that you became madams,' Foley said.

'Right then and there,' Minna affirmed. 'Remember, Aida?'

Aida was remembering. 'It was a memorable decision.'

Addressing Foley once more, Minna went on. 'We acquired a rundown house, redecorated it with our own money, and opened it up to the free-spending males swarming over the fair. By the time the fair wound up, our \$35,000 holdings had doubled to \$70,000. Without the fair, we knew that Omaha couldn't do much for us. We needed a bigger city. Also, equally important, we needed the fanciest, most unforgettable house in the United States. Then Aida and I had the same idea at the same time. To take a trip. Travel around and see the best brothels in Europe and the U.S.A. to pick up hints from them. So that's what we did. We spent a year visiting the most luxurious houses and meeting the most successful madams. We learned what we could before going into our own business once more. By the time we returned from our travels, Aida and I had a fairly good idea what a perfect brothel should be.'

'All we didn't know was where to put it,' said Aida.

'That's right,' agreed Minna. 'So I wrote again to Cleo Maitland in Washington, D.C., and said we'd like to visit her and get some advice. And that's what we did. Aida and I checked into the Willard Hotel, and we found Cleo at - what was it? - yes, 1233 D Street, a brick row house. Cleo was posing as a landlady, and the six girls living there were her female boarders. Cleo was most cordial.

I told her we had finished our research, and now we needed a city, a big city with plenty of wealthy men, a city with no luxurious houses. Immediately, Cleo had the answer to that. "Chicago, Illinois,"

she told us. "A city rich with millionaires, a well-protected red-light district, and without one high-class beautiful bordello." She said, "I even know the perfect house you can get for yourselves in Chicago. It's really two adjoining three-storey mansions with fifty rooms at 2131 South Dearborn Street. It was built by a madam, Lizzie Allen, for \$125,000 for the World's Columbian Exposition.

After the fair, Lizzie decided to retire. She leased the house and sold its furnishings to Effie Hankins, another madam. Recently, Effie wrote to me that she wanted to retire too, and told me to keep an eye out for a possible buyer. Well, ladies, there's your seraglio in Chicago - \$55,000 for the furnishings,

with the girls already on the premises, the goodwill, and a rental price of \$500 a month on a long-term lease. I'd look into it right away." So Aida and I hurried to Chicago, and looked over the house. It couldn't have been more perfect. We leased it at once.'

'Already - just like that,' Foley marvelled.

Minna shook her head. 'No, we began to make changes. The first thing we changed was our name.

We were Minna and Aida Lester. But our grandmother in Kentucky always ended her letters to us by signing them, "Everly Yours". Well, that sounded better. We became the Everly - spelled Everleigh - sisters. Then we got rid of all the sloppy, uncouth, hardened prostitutes. We ransacked the entire country for the most attractive, sexually skilled, ladylike girls we could find, starting with young actresses we knew from our earlier career. We dressed all of them in evening gowns and good manners. We fired the uppity white servants, and replaced them with decent, more respectful, efficient coloured valets and maids. Then there was the matter of fees.'

Minna took another sip of her champagne and went on. 'The average madam in the Levee charged customers fifty cents to a dollar for a toss in bed. Since we were offering more, we charged more. It cost our customers fifty dollars for a session with a girl. We installed a restaurant, with a minimum charge of fifty dollars for dinner and twelve dollars for a bottle of wine. We shared our profits with our staff.'

'And no one objected to your higher prices?' asked Foley.

Minna shook her head vigorously. 'No one objected. They welcomed paying for what we gave them. Our customers have included Ring Lardner, Edgar Lee Masters, Marshall Field, Jr, Stanley Ketchel, Percy Hammond, George Ade, James J. Corbett, John Barrymore, John "Bet a Million"

Gates, and Jack Johnson, whom I mentioned before, as well as certain United States senators who often spend their vacations here.'

Minna stood up, and set down her empty glass.

'Now, Chet, I'm going to give you a personally conducted

grand tour of the Everleigh Club. You'll see what we learned in our travels, and you'll see some innovations of our own . . . Aida, you keep Tom Ostrow occupied right there. He's had the tour. I'm going to take this boy around. Come along, Chet.'

In the hall, Minna took Foley's arm and led him to the Everleigh Club's library, which had books on every wall, most of them leather-bound. Foley ran a finger along the sets of books, one the complete works of Honore de Balzac, another the complete poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Minna chuckled. 'You know what "Bet a Million" Gates said when he saw this library? "Minna, that's educating the

wrong end of a whore."

Next door was the art gallery, where oils and lustrous marble sculptures were shown, among them a copy of Bernini's Apollo and Daphne.

Entering the dining-room, Foley saw a handsome restaurant, tables laid with gleaming silverware on damask linen. Centred on each table was a burst of fresh flowers.

'One millionaire brought his business associates for dinner,' said Minna with pleasure, 'and his bill came to \$1,500. We threw in the orchestra free.' She moved through the restaurant. 'Now come closer, Chet. What do you see at the far end?'

'A railroad Pullman dining-car,' said Foley with amazement.

'Correct. It's a replica, really, with the interior done in mahogany. Here we are. Look inside. There's the buffet. The guest may choose the food he wants and take it to one of the small tables in the Pullman, or go into the dining-room itself. Now I'll show you my very favourite chamber, used for conversations - and sometimes for orgies.'

Foley followed Minna into a parlour that glittered like El Dorado. He stood breathless, gaping at what he saw.

'The Gold Room,' announced Minna happily. 'You can see the furniture is all gilt, the hangings gold, the fishbowls edged in gold. Those eighteen-carat cuspidors cost me \$650 apiece. The fountain in the middle of the room is spraying perfume. My favourite object is over there - the gold piano, real gold, cost me \$15,000. It's two-thirds normal size, and except for the keyboard, every inch of it is pure gold, including the foot pedals. This is a wonderful room to chat with other male guests, or have some fun relaxing with one of our young beauties.'

As they left the Gold Room, Foley had a question. 'Minna, how do you decide which girls you want to work for you?'

'It's easy,' said Minna. 'You see a pretty and shapely girl, no more than twenty-one, working behind a counter in Mandel Brothers or Carson, Pirie, Scott. She works endless hours every day for six dollars a week. You learn if she's had sexual experience — the chances are she has — and you ask her if she'd like to make \$300 a week with little real work and if she'd like to live in the lap of luxury. The odds are she'll grab at the offer. She must be over eighteen and use no drugs or alcohol or foul language. We never take on inexperienced girls or widows, because they are more apt to want to leave the moment someone asks them to marry. Every girl must be healthy, be polite, have the gift of being amusing. She must be ready to learn how to use make-up, how to dress well, how to have good Southern manners, and how to stay well informed. I encourage my girls to read the books in my library. Above all, I tell each new girl to give sex, but give it interestingly and with mystery. Now let's move on. I have more to show you on this floor before I take you upstairs.'

They entered what Minna described as the Japanese Room. The floor was covered with finely woven straw matting and there was a bamboo umbrella stand inside the door. Dominating the room was a carved Oriental chair on a dais over which was hung a canopy of silk. The chandelier suspended from

the deep-blue ceiling had small Osaka parasols instead of lamp shades. The walls were painted with Japanese flowers in their natural colours. Above was a frieze of flying storks, with bronze panels depicting sacred dragons of mythology. Decorative artifacts strewn about ranged from iron tea kettles from Kyoto to hangings of Japanese fans.

Next door was the Chinese Room. The chandelier was a fringed temple lantern with painted scenes of Peking life. Carved ebony furniture was everywhere, and on one wall in a teak frame was an

embroidered peacock. In the room's dim corner, Foley made out cabinets filled with exotic artifacts — snuff bottles, porcelains, and small bronze figures.

Dizzied, Foley trailed Minna into a vast ballroom with bandstand, divans, cushions, and statuary arranged on the parquet wood floor. Adjoining the ballroom was the Copper Room, with walls of hammered brass, and beyond that, the Silver Room, ornamented with filigreed lace and silver, and the silver statue of a mounted horseman next to a plush brocade chair.

Then came the Moorish Room, with foxskins on the floor, and incense burners in every corner. The furnishings consisted of a circular sofa with round tufted back, a potted palm beside it, numerous 7 small octagonal tables, and chairs upholstered with rich gold-threaded brocade that touched the floor. On the fireplace mantel was set a hookah crusty with hashish sediment.

'There are no pictures on the walls,' Minna noted, 'because representational images are forbidden by Muslim law.'

With Foley by her side, Minna moved on to the Egyptian Room. On a frieze around the room and on the ceiling were drawings of ancient Egyptian scenes. A large stone fireplace bore sphinx heads which had been carved into the mantel.

Next, like a breath of fresh air, was the Blue Room. Its atmosphere was youthful, very American, with deep-blue divans and leather pillows printed with pictures of Gibson girls. Fittingly, each wall was decorated with lively college pennants.

Minna was particularly proud of her Music Room. A grand piano stood in one corner, not gold, not fancy, but very grand. Mirrors framed in Moorish arches lined the walls, and tufted Turkish furniture was scattered about.

Foley grew more and more dazed as they pushed on through the Green Room, the Rose Room, and the Red Room.

'Finally, the Mirror Room,' stated Minna, drawing Foley inside. 'What strikes you most?'

'The floor,' Foley gasped. 'The entire floor is mirrored.'

'Every inch of it,' said Minna proudly. 'It's often where we bring our guests when they can't decide which of our girls to choose. It's far more effective than the House of All Nations in Budapest.'

There, men surveyed a panel of photographs of nude women to select their favourites. A visitor would pick the photograph of the girl he liked most, and then touch the bell-push under her photograph. Immediately, the photo was covered, so the next visitor would know the lady was engaged and he would have to pick someone else. This Mirror Room is much better for making choices. Many of the things you've seen were created by Aida and myself. But the idea for this Mirror

Room came from Babe Connors, the fat Negress in St Louis whose teeth were inlaid with diamonds. Babe had a Mirror Room, and I installed the same thing in this room immediately.'

'But why a mirror for a floor?' Foley asked.

Minna looked at him impatiently. 'This is where we have some of our best floor shows,' she said.

'Our girls come in here to dance for the guests. They're wearing evening gowns, but absolutely nothing beneath them. Those dresses are long, but not so long or narrow that you can't see anything.

That mirror floor reflects what the girls are offering - which is to say, they're entirely naked underneath and that's what you see in the mirror floor. Titillating, don't you think?'

Foley reddened and stared at the floor.

'Yes, Ma'am,' he said.

Still bemused, he followed Minna out of the Mirror Room until they arrived at the staircase leading to the boudoirs upstairs. There were potted palms and Grecian statuary on either side of the stairs, and two thickly carpeted flights rose ahead of them.

'Usually,' said Minna, 'we allow the local press to have the run of the downstairs facilities. The upstairs suites are off limits. However, since yours is an introductory visit, I will show you a typical boudoir and introduce you to its occupant.'

Minna went nimbly up the staircase, with Foley immediately behind her. At the landing, she walked a few feet, paused before a door which looked like the others, and firmly rapped on it. Then she quickly opened the door and stepped inside, signalling Foley to join her.

The first thing Foley saw was a magnificent young blonde stretched languidly on a marble-inlaid brass bed. She put aside the book she was reading, and lifted her head as Minna brought Foley into the bedroom. 'Chet, this is Virginia. And Virginia, this is Chester Foley of the Chicago Tribune. I told you he would be here.' With a wide, sweeping gesture Minna went on. 'That's a white cashmere blanket Virginia is lying on. Note the mirrored ceiling, and the divan with the silver-white spotlight directed towards it. The other door beyond leads to Virginia's bathroom, which has a gold bathtub.

The roses next to the bed are freshly cut. There's a push-button concealed in the headboard that can call up another bottle of champagne. The oil paintings on the walls are all originals and imported from Italy. But the most brilliant work of art here is Virginia.'

With this mention of her name, Virginia swung off the bed and stood before Foley. He was held speechless by her splendour. She was as tall as he and wore only a gauzy white peignoir. Her breasts were firm and their nipples pointed straight at him. He could see plainly the outline of her curved waist and narrow hips.

'My boy,' Minna said to Foley, 'she's all yours, an introductory gift from the Everleighs.'

'Minna,' Foley gasped, 'I couldn't possibly afford anything like -'

'Didn't you hear me, my boy?' said Minna, starting for the door. 'I told you, this one's on the house.'

As she opened the door, Minna saw Virginia slip out of her peignoir. She was exquisitely naked as she moved towards Foley.

Minna smiled, quietly shut the door, and descended the stairs to the ground floor. She strolled over to the library, took down a volume of Balzac, fished a package of Sweet Caporals out of her pocket, lit one of the cigarettes, and sank into a sofa.

She read peacefully, and when twenty minutes had passed, she looked up to see young Foley coming down the last flight of stairs, appearing flushed and somehow older.

Minna stood up.

'Well, how was it, my boy?'

Foley seemed breathless. 'Incredible ... it was incredible. I don't know how I can ever repay you.'

He caught his breath. 'But I think I can. I know I can. Soon's I get back to the paper, I'm going to write

a wonderful story about the Ever-leigh Club. There hasn't been one for months, and now I'm going to write the big story.'

'No, you're not,' said Minna.

'What do you mean?'

'There's going to be no story,' said Minna emphatically, 'at least not now. Usually we welcome publicity. It helps us. Right now any story would gravely hurt us. You know Mayor Harrison is running for re-election on a reform platform. Publicity about us would assure his election. If he is elected, he has promised that his first act will be to close down the Ever-leigh Club. I don't intend to cooperate in our demise.'

'But you're so important in Chicago - can't you prevent his being elected?'

'I intend to. Minna Everleigh always has something up her sleeve.' She winked at Foley and took his elbow. 'Leave it to me. As for yourself, you look a bit tuckered out. I think another glass of champagne is in order.'

Harold T. Armbruster was one of the three reasons why Chicago was called the Porkopolis of the world. The other two reasons were packing-house kings Philip Armour and Gus-tavas Swift.

Among them, they owned almost all the city's stockyards and slaughterhouses. And among them, Armbruster was the third-richest, having cleared two million dollars in the last half-dozen years.

But it was not his desire to become the richest that had brought him out to hear a speech this night - at an hour when normally he was preparing for bed.

Armbruster had come to Turner Hall to listen to the election campaign speech that Mayor Carter Harrison was scheduled to deliver before members of the Municipal Voters' League. Armbruster had squeezed into a vacant tenth-row seat with difficulty. He was grossly overweight, with his belly and sides bulging over his belt. He scratched his potato nose and his walrus moustache impatiently as he waited for the speaker to appear.

Ordinarily, Armbruster had no particular interest in politics. He was perfectly aware that Mayor Carter H. Harrison, a Democrat, was running for re-election against a popular Republican named Graeme Stewart. Only one facet of the campaign interested Armbruster, and that was Harrison's promise to enlarge the stockyards and spend more money on freight trains to carry more pigs, sheep, and steers into Chicago. His rival, Stewart, was against such civic expenditures.

Armbruster's presence at the lecture, despite his discomfort, was meant to provide him with first-hand reassurance that Mayor Harrison was the man who deserved his support and contributions.

After waiting restlessly for ten minutes, Armbruster saw an alderman he knew slightly appear on the platform to introduce the principal speaker. 'Chicago is fortunate in having a mayor who keeps his hands in his own pockets,' the alderman quipped. This drew a round of laughter, and then the alderman announced, 'Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour and a privilege to introduce Mayor Carter H. Harrison.' Most of the audience broke into hearty applause.

Immediately, Mayor Harrison came out of the wings and strode to the lectern. Over the years Armbruster had seen Harrison many times, but always from a distance at social events — or he had noticed his picture in the newspapers. Armbruster had never seen the mayor this closely, and as he observed him, he was pleased with what he saw: a sturdy, darkly handsome man with black hair neatly parted on the side, flashing eyes, and a moustache similar to Armbruster's own, but tidier.

Harrison was immaculately attired in a celluloid collar and bow tie, white shirt, navy-blue jacket

over a vest and watch-chain, and sharply pressed darkish-grey trousers.

Once Harrison began speaking, Armbruster's attention drifted off. The packing-house magnate had come to hear Harrison address Armbruster's own interests, but instead Harrison was speaking passionately about his determination to clean up Chicago, and close down the Levee and its gambling houses and bagnios. Armbruster had no interest in this nonsense. He filtered the mayor out as his mind wandered to business matters. It was at the very end of the speech that Armbruster again became alert.

Besides his desire to clean up the city, the mayor was offering a few words about making Chicago more prosperous, adding elevated trains and extending freight transportation into the stockyards.

When Harrison's appeal had ended, the audience was invited to line up and, in turn, shake the mayor's hand. A long line immediately formed.

Armbruster remained squeezed into his seat, wondering what to do. Then he realized that he very much wanted Harrison elected, and he knew what he should do.

He waited restlessly for the line of well-wishers to shrink, and finally he heaved himself up and took his place as the last in line. It was half an hour before he reached the stage. He inched ahead until he was able to shake hands with the mayor.

Facing Harrison, he gripped the mayor's limp hand and blurted, 'I've wanted to meet you. I'm Harold T. Armbruster, the meat-packer -'

Harrison's hand tightened on Armbruster's. The mayor beamed. 'At last,' he said. 'Armour, Swift, Armbruster. I've always wanted to know you, and I'm honoured you came to hear my little speech.'

'The honour is mine,' replied Armbruster. 'Most impressive, your speech. I'm on your side, and now I want to be a backer.'

'A backer?'

'I want to do everything in my power to see that you are elected again. What's the most effective way I can support you, Mayor?'

Harrison stared at the meat-packer. 'Well, I suppose I should be honest with you.'

'Be honest with me.'

'Like all politicians, I need contributions - cash donations - to be used to inform the electorate about my platform.'

'You tell me how much,' said Armbruster. 'I'm prepared to help.'

Harrison coughed. 'I . . . actually I don't deal in campaign contributions directly. I have two aldermen who run my campaign. One is John Coughlin.' The mayor gave an embarrassed laugh.

'He's more familiarly known as Bathhouse John, because he owned a Turkish bathhouse before venturing into politics. His partner is Michael Kenna, also an alderman, better known as Hinky Dink, because of his short stature.

They're very astute men. They're the men to see. They'll know what I could use, and how it might best be spent.'

'Where do I contact them?' Armbruster asked.

'Give me your card. I'll have one of them telephone you. They'll set a date to meet with you anywhere

at your convenience.'

Armbruster handed over his card. 'I'll be waiting. I'll be available all of tomorrow afternoon.'

Harrison shook the meat-packer's hand again. 'You are very generous, Mr Armbruster. You don't know what a lift this gives me. It's going to be a heated election next week, and I need every bit of help I can get.'

'You've got mine,' Armbruster promised him.

'Of course, if there's ever anything I can do for you, Mr Armbruster -'

'We'll see,' said Armbruster.

The following afternoon, Armbruster summoned John Coughlin and Michael Kenna - Bathhouse John and Hinky Dink — and met them in one of the private rooms reserved for members in the Chicago Club.

Armbruster observed that the pair looked like scoundrels. Coughlin wore a pompadour, long sideburns, a moustache, and was almost as beefy as Armbruster himself. Kenna was a glum little man, less flamboyant than his partner - and clearly the brains of the pair. Armbruster told himself no matter that they resembled pirates; if they were good enough for the mayor, they were good enough for him.

'The mayor tells us you want to contribute to his campaign,' began Coughlin.

'I definitely want Harrison elected. How can it be guaranteed?'

Kenna spoke up. 'Nothing in politics can be guaranteed, Mr Armbruster. But we can do our best.'

'How much do you need?' inquired Armbruster.

Coughlin came forward on the sofa where he sat with Kenna. 'Let me explain the realities of the situation,' said Coughlin. 'The mayor can hold his own throughout the city. Where he is less popular is in the First Ward, which Hinky Dink and I represent. The First Ward is the Levee — where houses of prostitution are presently flourishing. With the "proper handling, we can still turn the First Ward around, and that could ensure the mayor's election.'

'What is the proper handling?' Armbruster demanded.

'I'll be frank with you, sir,' said Coughlin. 'The First Ward is filled with pimps, tramps, the unemployed, and drunks. Distributing free drinks - whisky, beer — and cigars could go far. Added to that, a free silver dollar for each of their votes would go further.'

'Would they really vote for Harrison?'

'No question,' Kenna piped up. 'They'll all owe us, and will be looking for more of the same in the future. They'll vote for Harrison, all right.'

Armbruster peeled and clipped an Uppmann cigar. Coughlin bent over to light it. Armbruster inhaled and exhaled a cloud of smoke. 'How much?' he asked.

Coughlin glanced at Kenna, who also leaned forward. '\$15,000 cash should do it.'

'That's a lot of money,' said Armbruster.

'That's a lot of votes,' said Kenna.

'When do you need the cash?' asked Armbruster.

'Today,' said Coughlin. 'The election is next week.'

'You've got it,' said Armbruster, taking out his chequebook. 'Go to work.'

Minutes after Armbruster had left them, Coughlin and Kenna received a telephone call from Minna Everleigh.

'Bathhouse,' Minna said, 'Aida and I want to see you and Hinky Dink as soon as possible. We have some business to discuss.'

'How soon?' asked Coughlin.

'Right now,' said Minna.

'Uncork the champagne,' said Coughlin. 'We're on our way.'

A half-hour later, Coughlin and Kenna were seated on a gold divan in Minna's beloved Gold Room, with Minna and Aida on a divan across from them.

'You know what we want to see you about, Bathhouse,' began Minna.

'Haven't the faintest idea,' said Coughlin innocently. 'But if we can be of service in any way -'

'You're damn right you can be of service.'

'We need some help from you,' chimed in Aida. 'My sister will explain.'

Minna rose and poured champagne for Coughlin and Kenna, then for Aida and herself.

She remained standing, drinking from the crystal goblet as she eyed the two aldermen. At last she spoke. 'Bathhouse . . . Hinky Dink . . . you both know what that rotten mayor friend of yours is trying to do to us.'

'You mean his reform movement?' said Kenna. 'He's going after the entire Levee, not just you.'

'Nonsense,' snapped Minna. 'There may be 200 brothels in the area, but you know and I know Harrison is after only one. He's been very open about that in all his speeches. He wants to shut down the Everleigh Club because it is the best-known sporting house in the city, the country, the world. He wants to make an example of us. We don't intend to let him do that. We want him beaten in this election. We want Stewart to beat him.' Her voice rose. 'You hear me - Aida and I cannot allow Harrison to be elected.'

'What do you expect us to do?' asked Coughlin.

'Oh, come on,' said Minna with exasperation. 'We know you two have the First Ward in your pocket. If you can get your army here to vote against Harrison, he'll be licked.'

'I repeat,' said Coughlin, 'what do you want us to do?'

Minna put down her glass. 'We want you to do what you've done for years. Buy the votes. Buy votes against Harrison.'

'That takes considerable money,' said Coughlin.

'How much?' demanded Minna, aiming her question at Kenna. 'How much will it cost us to stay in

business?'

'\$15,000 cash on the line today,' said Kenna.

Minna whistled. 'That's a lot.'

'You're asking a lot,' said Kenna smoothly.

Minna's eyes went from Coughlin to Kenna. Finally, she said. 'No. You're skimming too much off the top for yourselves. Aida and I will offer you \$10,000.'

Coughlin shrugged and said, 'I don't know.' He squinted at his partner. 'What do you think, Hinky Dink?'

Kenna stared down at the carpet. He murmured, 'Well, of course, Minna and Aida are old friends.'

'Okay,' said Coughlin, meeting Minna's gaze. 'I guess \$10,000 could do the job.'

Minna broke into a smile and picked up her glass. 'It's a deal.' She swallowed her champagne. 'Let's go to the study and we'll give you the money.'

John Coughlin and Michael Kenna did not discuss the newest deal they had made until they were safe in the confines of their City Hall alcove.

Seated, they both loosened their collars as Kenna poured two whiskies. 'Quite a day,' Kenna said.

'Productive,' said Coughlin.

Kenna sat down again with his whisky and drank it. 'Okay, Bathhouse, how do we do it?'

'Do what?'

'How do we spend Armbruster's money to elect Harrison and spend the Everleighs' money to see that Harrison is not elected?'

'Easy,' said Coughlin, gulping his drink.

'Yeah, how?'

Coughlin sat up. 'We go with the highest bidder. We elect Harrison.'

'But the Everleighs are old friends, Bathhouse.'

'Never mind,' said Coughlin expansively. 'We'll make it up to Minna and Aida after Harrison wins.

We'll elect the mayor, which will make our meat-packer happy. But we won't let Harrison shut down the Everleigh Club. That way, both sides get what they want.'

Kenna squirmed. 'Sounds impossible.'

Coughlin finished his whisky. 'I don't know. All hell'll bust loose, but we can do it. I have a few ideas. Trust me, Hinky Dink. Everyone's coming out on their feet - I think.'

TWO

Minna Everleigh stood beside the desk in her study, angrily rereading the front page of the Chicago Times. She glared at the headlines:

CARTER HARRISON WINS MAYORAL RACE

INCUMBENT DEFEATS STEWART 146,208 TO 138,548

SLENDER MARGIN DUE TO

SURPRISE TURNROUND IN FIRST WARD

REFORM CANDIDATE HARRISON

PROMISES IMMEDIATE CLEAN-UP OF CITY VICE

Minna looked up as Aida returned from her telephone call. 'Well?' Minna asked.

'I spoke to Bathhouse, told him you wanted to see him,' said Aida. 'He expected the call. He and Hinky Dink are already on their way.'

Still seething, Minna flung the newspaper on the desk. 'Those double-crossers!'

Aida picked up the paper. She scanned the bold headlines. 'It was close, anyway.'

'Close only counts in bed,' snapped Minna.

Aida continued to scan the front page. 'Minna, listen to this. Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of the kaiser of Germany . . .'

'What about him?'

'He's coming to Chicago soon. Minna, he'll attract a lot of people. It could mean more business for us.'

'What business? We'll be out of business. Harrison will see to that.'

'Why don't we find out what Bathhouse and Hinky Dink

have to say?' pleaded Aida. 'Here, let me pour you a whisky.'

'Make it a double!'

Fifteen minutes later, as Minna and Aida sat brooding, Edmund the valet knocked, opened the door, and showed John Coughlin and Michael Kenna into the office.

Minna snatched up the paper and waved the front page at Coughlin. 'After taking all of our pay-off money, how do you explain this? Your very own ward turned the tide for Harrison. How did that happen?'

'We passed your money around,' Coughlin said with sincerity. 'Apparently it wasn't enough.

Someone else must have come along and outspent us.'

'I don't believe you,' said Minna sharply. 'I'll bet you pocketed it all yourselves.'

'Minna, I swear -' began Coughlin.

'We spent it all,' interjected Kenna. 'Somebody on the mayor's side just came along and bamboozled us.'

'It makes no sense,' persisted Minna. 'The Levee vote was suicidal. Everyone voted against themselves. Everyone is going to be wiped out, and first of all the Everleigh sisters.'

'No, that's not true,' said Coughlin. 'That's what I was coming over here to tell you.'

'What do you mean, not true?' Minna demanded.

'Please sit down, Minna. You too, Aida, and let me explain what really happened.' He waited for the sisters to sit, and then picked up the newspaper. 'It says here you lost, but I can tell you that you really

won.'

'That's a slick one, Bathhouse,' said Minna bitterly. 'We lost but we won.'

Coughlin pushed on. 'Just listen to me. Hinky Dink and I were with Mayor Harrison this morning.

To congratulate him. I tell the mayor, "You can do whatever you want to do with the other houses in the Levee. But you can't close the Everleigh Club." The mayor rears up at that. "Who says I can't close the Everleigh Club? It's the one whorehouse I mean to close and fast." Then Hinky Dink speaks up and

says, "Mayor, we have it on good authority it is not a whorehouse. Sure, it was once. But it isn't one now. The Everleigh Oub is a restaurant, and the girls there are dancers and entertainers." The mayor is furious. He says, "I know it's a whorehouse." So I says to him, "Mayor, you better prove 15

that for certain before you can close it down." That shut him up for now.' Coughlin beamed at Minna. 'So there you are, home free.'

'Who's home free?' Minna demanded. 'If I haven't got our house and our girls, what have I got?'

'An expensive restaurant, with special charges for seeing the girls perform, in whatever way they perform. Maybe a way can be arranged for some of them to perform upstairs if you're careful to screen all visitors.'

'But, in effect, we still don't have a house anymore,' insisted Minna.

'Not exactly. You can earn enough on the restaurant to keep going, and let the girls do floor shows as entertainment.'

'You know our real money comes from upstairs.'

'So you'll lose a little for a short time,' said Coughlin cheerfully. 'Gradually, the heat will be off.

The mayor will have other, more pressing matters on his mind. He can claim he reformed you and forget about it. When he does, you can resume business as usual - no more problems. So maybe you think you lost, but Hinky Dink and I say you won, in the long run you won.'

'That's a terrible scheme, but I'll go along with it for a little while, as long as you do your part.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning that you see to it that none of the Harrison-people get in here. I don't want spies who'll try to prove we're still running a whorehouse.'

'Hinky Dink and I will do our best. You have to do your part too.'

'Like what?'

'You have to get your girls to pledge they won't peep a word of any goings-on upstairs. That means your servants too.'

'Don't worry about the girls and the servants. They don't want the place shut down. They want their jobs.'

Kenna moved up beside Coughlin. 'One thing, Minna. Do you have any outsiders who work here?'

'Outsiders? Just one. Dr Myers from the Loop. He comes here weekly to examine the girls.'

'Can you trust him?' asked Kenna.

'How do I know?'

'Not good enough,' said Coughlin. 'Fire him. We have someone to replace him.' He looked at Kenna, who nodded assent. Coughlin resumed. 'We know of a Dr Herman H. Holmes, who specializes in female complaints and who has offices in Englewood, which isn't that far away. We heard he's the most close-mouthed and trustworthy doctor around. We can tell him what's going on, and I know you can depend on him. We'll send him over Saturday. Mayor Harrison'll never learn a thing. Then you can use the restaurant front, and quietly keep up your business.'

'Sounds reasonable,' said Minna. She glanced over at her sister. 'Aida, let's assume it'll work, and let's have a bottle of champagne on the reformed Everleigh Club.'

When Harold T. Armbruster received the call from Mayor Harrison's secretary, Miss Karen Grant, inviting him to drop by for a moment that afternoon to convey his thanks for the meat-packer's 16

assistance in the election, Armbruster hesitated momentarily. He was a busy man, and normally he would have suggested it would be sufficient for the mayor to thank him on the telephone. But then Armbruster remembered something else he had read in the morning newspaper besides the election results. What he had read was very much on his mind.

He had decided that it might be a wise idea to meet with the mayor in person, after all.

'Yes, fine,' Armbruster had said. 'Tell Mayor Harrison I'll be delighted to come by this afternoon at three o'clock.'

Now, at five minutes after three, Armbruster sat comfortably in a tufted leather chair across from the mayor's roll-top oak desk.

'Congratulations,' Armbruster said again. 'It was a wonderful victory you had yesterday.'

The mayor leaned back in his own high leather swivel chair, plainly pleased with his triumph.

'Thank you for your kind words,' Harrison said, 'and more than that, thank you for your contribution. That probably made the whole thing possible. Let me repeat, Mr Armbruster, if there is ever anything

that I can do for you . . .'

Armbruster interrupted him. 'As a matter of fact, there is something.'

'Ah, good. You need only name it.'

'There was an item that I read in the paper this morning.'

'And what was that?'

'It was about Prince Henry of Prussia, head of the German Navy, the brother to Kaiser Wilhelm.

He's coming to the United States to pick up the kaiser's new yacht - and he intends to make one side trip - right here to Chicago, presumably because of our large German population. May I ask you, Mayor Harrison, is this true?'

'Absolutely. I don't have the date, yet, but I believe that Prince Henry will be in our fair city in about three weeks.'

Armbruster leaned forward intently. 'Mayor, the fact is, I would like to meet Prince Henry.'

'I'm sure that can be arranged.'

'I don't mean merely a handshake. I would like to have a relaxed talk with him. Will he be very busy?'

The mayor thought about it. 'Well, Prince Henry's visit is still in the planning stage. We hope to have him place a wreath on the Abraham Lincoln Monument. Then we plan to escort him on a quick visit through the city. About this talk you want with Prince Henry - is it important?'

'To me it is, yes, very important,' Armbruster said urgently. 'I want to request that the prince assist me in becoming

ambassador to Germany.' Armbruster checked himself briefly. 'Let me confide in you, Mayor Harrison. I have at this stage in my life almost everything a man could wish. A prosperous business. A beautiful mansion for a home. A devoted family and good friends. I have as much wealth as I could ever want. I have everything that Armour, Swift, Marshall Field, and my peers have, except one thing - social status. My peers have it. I don't. For the benefit of my wife, my 17

children, myself, I would like to have social status too. Becoming ambassador to Germany would give me exactly that.'

Mayor Harrison was confused. 'But aren't ambassadors appointed by - well, wouldn't that come from our secretary of state or President Roosevelt?'

'Of course, Mayor. But they could be influenced. If I had an opportunity to ingratiate myself with Prince Henry, he could pass my name on to the kaiser, and the kaiser in turn could suggest to

President Roosevelt that he would like me appointed ambassador. I'm sure that would do it. I may not have diplomatic background, but I am German and speak German perfectly. I'd be a logical choice.'

'I'm sure you would be,' said Harrison. 'The problem is arranging time for you to speak privately with Prince Henry. He's going to have a tight schedule.'

'What are you planning for his evening here?'

'Why, a formal banquet, of course. I haven't worked it out yet, but -'

'That's it!' Armbruster exclaimed. 'Let me host the banquet with you. By happy coincidence, I'm preparing a big banquet of my own. My son Alan is engaged to a lovely Southern belle from Kentucky - Cathleen Lester, the niece of two socialites in Chicago. They will be married at my home about the time of Prince Henry's arrival. I should like to have Prince Henry attend the wedding and the banquet and ball to follow. At such a sentimental event he should be most responsive. I can draw him aside and bring up the ambassadorship. How does that strike you, Mayor?'

Mayor Harrison stood up, smiling broadly. 'I like it very much. It takes a great burden off my shoulders. I'm sure it can all be arranged, subject only to Prince Henry's approval. How's that?'

'Capital! Splendid!'

Shortly after lunch, Mayor Harrison summoned his immediate staff to a crucial meeting in his office.

Harrison lay back in the tall chair behind his desk, faced by a semi-circle of aides. The only woman in the room was the attractive young secretary, Karen Grant, whom he had hired several months before the election.

'It's about my major campaign promise,' Harrison began. 'I made many secondary promises to the public, and they will eventually be fulfilled. But my primary promise to the electorate, as you all know, was to introduce sweeping moral reforms in this city. All houses of ill repute in the Levee must be eliminated. Of these houses I focused on one in particular. I refer to the Everleigh Club. I am determined that the Everleigh Club must be my first target. The Everleigh Club is the one brothel known throughout the United States and Europe. I want to go after it immediately, shut it down, and prove to the voters that I meant what I said in my campaign. There is one problem.'

Harrison halted, opened his humidor, and extracted a cigar. He clipped one end, put the cigar in his mouth, and waited as one of his aides jumped forward to light it.

'Thank you, Evans,' the mayor said. He addressed the entire group once more. 'I have been informed that the Everleigh Club had been a full-fledged brothel, yet now the Everleigh sisters claim it is no longer a brothel. This information was conveyed to me early this morning. Miss Grant 18

was in this office with me when the two aldermen from the First Ward so informed me.' Harrison turned to his secretary. 'Miss Grant, you have your notes at hand?'

'I do, Mayor.'

Karen Grant placed her note pad on the edge of the desk, picked a folder off the floor, and pulled out a sheet of paper.

'Read aloud what transpired,' Harrison instructed her.

Karen bent her head over the paper. 'Mayor Harrison met with Alderman John Coughlin and Alderman Michael Kenna, who stated that while they were supporters of the mayor, they were also long-time friends of Minna and Aida Everleigh. "We must tell you, Mayor," Alderman Coughlin said, "that the Everleigh Club has mended its ways. It has given up prostitution. This was a direct result of your reform campaign. The Club has converted itself into a fancy restaurant -nothing else." The mayor said, "I happen to know there are thirty women in the Club. What are they doing there?" Alderman Coughlin replied, "They are not prostitutes. They may have been at one time, but they are not prostitutes today. They are simply performers, dancers, singers, actresses, putting on a nightly floor show for restaurant diners." Alderman Coughlin stated that the Everleighs reap their profits from their expensive restaurant, with its floor show and two orchestras. "Since it is a legitimate restaurant, there would be no cause to shut it down," Coughlin said. "Alderman Kenna and I advise you to abandon the effort." The mayor thanked his aldermen and dismissed them.'

Harrison puffed on his cigar, then turned his attention to his aides.

'Gentlemen,' Harrison resumed, 'I have thought about this information and I believe it to be false. I do not believe the Everleigh Club is merely a restaurant. I believe it continues to be a house of prostitution - the biggest, the richest, the most important one in our city - and I have every intention of proving that I am right and of shutting the brothel down. The one problem I am faced with is obtaining proof. How do I prove the Everleigh Club remains a house of ill repute? I must have real proof before I can lock its doors for ever and show the voting public that Mayor Carter H. Harrison keeps his campaign promises. That is why I have assembled all of you here - to solicit your suggestions about how I can obtain the necessary proof.'

Mayor Harrison's eyes moved around the room.

'Any suggestions, gentlemen?'

Jim Evans held up his hand. 'Why not question the girls? Even offer them a little something? Surely one of them might talk.'

Harrison shook his head. 'Useless. None of them will speak against the Everleighs. They're paid five or ten times what other prostitutes get. They won't risk losing their income.'

'What about the servants?' asked Jim Evans.

Again, the mayor shook his head. 'They're well paid also.'

'Why don't we question some of the regular customers?' someone wondered aloud.

'Negative,' Harrison replied. 'A sure strike-out. Customers enjoy the Everleigh Club. They want it to remain open. Even if one wanted to talk, he couldn't afford to be a witness in front of the police.'

He'd be worried about his wife or sweetheart or family finding out he frequented a brothel. No chance. Forget it.'

'Why not try to locate ex-Everleigh girls and get one of them to talk?' said aide Gus Varney.

'No good,' countered Harrison. 'Even if we could find them, they'd only be able to talk about the past, not about what is going on there today.' Harrison was briefly thoughtful. 'Something else just occurred to me. A better idea, if it can be made to work.'

'What's that?' inquired Gus Varney.

'The old Trojan horse trick.'

Varney appeared puzzled. 'Trojan horse trick?'

'Filtering someone from our side into the Everleigh Club. Letting that person find out first-hand that the Everleigh girls are still taking men to bed for pay. That would be solid proof.'

'It would be, indeed,' agreed Evans. 'But how could you

get such a person in without arousing suspicion? I imagine the Everleighs will be doubly cautious about customers right now.'

Harrison nodded. 'They've always been cautious. They've admitted only persons well known to them, or customers who were recommended by trusted friends or who could prove their social standing and respectability.'

'How does a man make himself obviously respectable?' asked Jim Evans.

'Many ways. It could be his manner of dress, a refined voice, even something as simple as a fancy business card.' Harrison put down his cold cigar. 'Definitely a business card,' he said with certainty.

'Simply print an embossed card with a name on it, the name of a real factory in - in, say St Louis.

Who could tell it was fake? I'd say the Everleighs would believe it immediately.'

Several aides voiced their approval.

'One of you, properly attired for the evening, could present this card for admittance. First, you'd ask for a girl, and the two of you could have a real costly dinner to prove you're a sport. Then the two of you could go upstairs and have your fun. After that, you could be a witness before Chief of Police O'Neill.'

'Wouldn't that be entrapment?' someone called out.

'I think our friendly courts might shut their eyes to that. Of course, it would be better, once finished, to tell the girl what you're doing. Since she'll be out of a job anyway, you could suggest she come along as a witness to back you up -in return for a sizeable bribe. That would be perfect.'

'Who's the lucky man?' Gus Varney wanted to know. 'Who gets the call?'

'Well, let me think a moment -'

Harrison examined each of his aides carefully, trying to imagine which one might be able to carry out the infiltration best. Most of them had been on his staff too long a time and might be recognized by another customer at the Everleigh Club. At last, his gaze fixed on Gus Varney.

'You,' said Harrison. 'You're the lucky one, Gus. Not because you're so beautiful and sexy.' Varney was, in fact, a beanpole and almost chinless. 'You've been on my staff the shortest time. You're 20

from Detroit and haven't been around Chicago very long. Not that many people are familiar with you. You're the least likely to be recognized. Yes, I should say you'd be about right. You want the job?'

Varney grinned. 'If you're willing to pay for the evening, I'd love to have dinner and drinks, and a tumble in the hay with a beautiful girl.'

'Then you've got the job,' said Harrison. 'Get yourself dressed neater than you are now, get that business card printed, and find out from Coughlin and Kenna how things are managed in the Everleigh Club. Let me work out the amount we can spare for a bribe, presuming anyone can be bribed. Are you sure you can do what you have to do in bed?'

'Haven't failed yet,' said Varney.

After worrying for twenty-four hours about bringing the matter out into the open, Minna Everleigh finally decided that she had no choice. She sent Edmund around the Club to inform his fellow servants, the musicians, and all the girls that Minna wanted to meet with them at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Minna was in the Turkish Room, rearranging the pillows and divans and shutting off the gushing water fountain in the centre of the room, when the girls and servants began to appear.

The coloured servants arrived first, most coming from their comfortable quarters in the basement.

Next, the five members of the Everleigh Club orchestra arrived. Standing at the perimeters of the Turkish Room, they watched as the girls filed in, a few fully dressed, most still in peignoirs, a dazzling array of youthful brunettes, blondes, redheads. As they came in to take their places, Minna stood at the head of the room and

greeted each by name. 'Hello Virginia ... Avis ... Margo ... Fanny . . . Belle . . . Phyllis ... Cindy,' and so on until she had welcomed them all.

When the entire group was settled, and with all curious eyes on her, Minna began speaking in her deep voice.

'Aida is tending the front door, so I'm handling this gathering alone,' Minna began. 'It is of great importance, this meeting, and I thought I had better let you in on our problem as soon as possible.'

Minna scanned the still-puzzled faces before her and then she resumed.

'As you all know from yesterday's papers, Mayor Carter Harrison is our sworn enemy. I need hardly remind you that he won re-election on a reform platform. He had pledged to clean up the Levee, and his first priority was and is the Ever-leigh Club. Can the mayor shut us down? The answer is a definite yes, if he can prove that our Club is a house of prostitution. You and I know that is absurd . . . !'

There was a ripple of laughter in the Turkish Room.

'. . . and so I am glad we all know what this is,' continued Minna, also laughing. 'From now on, the Everleigh Club is a very fine, exclusive restaurant and all of you - I address the girls now - are floor show entertainment. That fact has been conveyed to the mayor by two of our friends, Aldermen Coughlin and Kenna. Now the mayor must try to prove that we are more than a restaurant. He will need actual witnesses if he hopes to shut us down. We must make sure that no investigation will reveal that we are anything but the soul of purity and innocence.'

Phyllis, a tall blonde, came to her feet. 'Minna, what happens to our earnings if we can't have men upstairs?'

Minna chuckled. 'Who says you can't have men upstairs? I just say no one must ever know about it.'

Finding her package of Sweet Caporals, Minna shook a cigarette free and lit it.

'There will be business as usual,' Minna went on, 'but

maybe not quite as usual. While we can trust our regular customers, we will have to be entirely wary of strangers. Unless they come in with bona fide referrals, or with suitable identification, we will have to turn them away. This may lead to a slight cut in your income, but you will still be doing well enough, certainly better than any other females in the Levee. Aida and I can screen the customers. You can leave that to us. What we cannot screen is your own behaviour away from the Club when you go strolling in the afternoon or when you have your day off to shop, attend the theatre, or whatever. If any one of you even hints that the Everleigh Club is continuing as a brothel, and a witness to your words goes to Harrison or to the police, then we are lost. If loose talk gets us shut down, then we will be forced to close. That will mean all of you will be out of work. You'll be struggling to get any kind of low-paying and degrading job in some shack in the Levee.'

Avis, a small, curvaceous brunette, rose to her feet. 'Minna, how long do we have to live under these conditions? I mean, worrying about everyone who comes in here and being quiet with everyone on the outside. How long?'

'Not long,' said Minna. 'Just long enough to let the mayor be satisfied that his reform effort has worked, and that he has satisfied voters he has kept his campaign promise. By then he will relax, and devote himself to larger matters. It won't be long.'

'But how long?' Avis persisted.

'Let's say maybe two weeks,' Minna said. 'Think you can stand that?'

There was a chorus of assents.

Minna was pleased.

'All right,' she said, 'our policy of caution goes into effect immediately - today - tonight. Tomorrow I intend to hire a new doctor, who will be instructed to observe the same cautions. If all of you do as you're told, we have not a thing to worry about. We can go forward and continue to live the good life.'

After deciding to get rid of her horse and carriage, Minna Everleigh had gone shopping for the ever more popular horseless carriages or automobiles. She had liked the Peerless, but had found it too expensive at \$4,000. Finally she had narrowed her choice down to either the Haynes-Apperson, the

Columbia Electric car, or the Model A Ford. The Haynes-Apperson was also a trifle expensive. She had been drawn to the silent, ladylike Columbia coupe, with its curved plate-glass windows, silk curtains, broadcloth upholstery, and vanity compartments, but decided against it because it could drive only five miles before requiring a battery recharge. She had settled on the Model A Ford as the most practical vehicle. Despite the fact that it was a slow car, with a speed of not quite ten miles an hour, and therefore needing no windshield, horn, or lights, Minna had bought one of the 200

produced in 1903. It had cost her \$900, and she adored it. Although Minna had never driven it herself, she allowed Edmund to chauffeur her wherever she went.

Now, this morning in the front seat to the right of the begoggled Edmund, with the tonneau seat in the rear unoccupied, she was enjoying the drive to Englewood for her interview with Dr Herman H.

Holmes. She was enjoying, also, the attention her Ford attracted, with its red body striped in gold, its vase of flowers near the steering wheel, and gleaming black fenders.

Consulting the address in her hand, Minna watched the house numbers glide past, then tugged at Edmund's sleeve. 'There it is,' she called out, 'on the south-west corner of Wallace and Sixty-third streets. See it? The three-storey brick building with those battlements and towers on top? No wonder Bathhouse told me it was named the Castle. Pull up in front of it, Edmund, and park. I won't be long.'

After descending from her Ford, Minna walked around it to the front door of the peculiar building and used the doorbell. Moments later the door opened, and Minna found herself confronted by a surprisingly attractive middle-aged man in dapper suit and vest.

'I'm Minna Everleigh,' she announced. 'I have an appointment with Dr Herman Holmes.'

'I am Dr Holmes,' he said, stepping back to admit her.

He was a rather small man, she saw, perhaps five feet eight and 150 pounds. He was strikingly handsome, with a high forehead, hypnotic blue eyes, and bushy moustache upturned at the ends.

When he spoke, his voice was soothing, melodious. Everything about him was gracious and charming.

'Do come in and make yourself comfortable, Miss Everleigh,' he added, gesturing her past the two fluted columns inside the front door. As she came into the foyer, he went on, 'If my little residence seems excessive - there are, indeed, ninety rooms, about thirty on each floor - do not be put off. I built it myself, as a hotel for the Columbian Exposition. When the fair was over, I decided to stay on and to return to medical practice. I won't exhaust you by showing you around. Why don't you come with me to my office, where we can be cosy and have our little talk.'

Walking to his office, Minna was bewildered by several staircases seeming to lead nowhere.

'I never quite got to finish them,' Dr Holmes explained. 'Now, into my office.'

Except for an oak table desk with eight drawers, a white-sheeted examination table nearby, an elaborate fireplace holding a heavy yellow vase shaped like Venus de Milo and filled with dried flowers backed by a high mirror above it and blue drapes on either side, and a square table piled with medical books and folders, the room was relatively austere. There were two wooden side chairs in front of his desk. Dr Holmes drew one chair closer to the desk, indicated that Minna should sit there, and settled into the other chair.

'Alderman Coughlin telephoned and told me to expect you,' Dr Holmes said. 'Do you know him?'

'Not really. He called, introduced himself - of course, I'd heard of him - said he'd heard I was a reputable physician

with a special interest in female problems, and that you were dismissing one doctor and seeking another.'

'Did he inform you why I am seeking a doctor?'

Dr Holmes smiled winningly. 'The alderman reminded me - although it wasn't really necessary - that you and your sister own the most elegant brothel in America.'

'Yes, the Everleigh Club on Dearborn. We have thirty very beautiful, high-class girls on the premises. I need a doctor for them. Does the idea of working as a doctor for a brothel offend you?'

'Offend me?' said Dr Holmes. 'I'd be privileged. Attending to the concerns of thirty young women would be a delight and a challenge.'

'Well,' said Minna, 'do you know anything about my present situation?'

'Not much, really. Only that you require a physician who is discreet.'

'Someone who won't talk about what is going on in the Club.'

'It is a basic rule in my profession to keep patients' histories private.'

'There is more to it than that,' said Minna. 'Mayor Harrison won re-election on a reform platform.

His major pledge was to shut down the Everleigh Club. He has been advised it is no longer a brothel, but merely a restaurant featuring a floor show.' She paused. 'The truth is, Dr Holmes, it will continue to be a brothel, as long as the mayor has no evidence of it. Henceforth, we will screen customers, and my servants and girls have promised not to discuss their activities. The only hole to be filled is to find a doctor who could be equally discreet.'

Dr Holmes offered his winning smile once more. 'Miss Everleigh, rest assured that in me you have found such a doctor.'

'Well, that's the main thing.'

'You'll find I never discuss women I'm involved with.'

Minna nodded. 'Good. Your duties would be to come to the Club two days a week, mornings and afternoons — the girls are otherwise occupied evenings — to examine the girls and report to me if anything is amiss.'

'You mean if any one of them has a venereal disease?'

'That is my sole concern,' said Minna. 'These girls of mine are the best and most expensive, and they must be clean.'

'I presume, Miss Everleigh, your real concern is syphilis.'

'Exactly. Are you familiar with the latest treatment of syphilis?'

'It is one of my specialities, of course,' said Dr Holmes.

'I am familiar with the symptoms,' said Minna, 'but I am not a medical person. I don't know how one examines for this and the latest methods of cure. Can you enlighten me?'

Dr Holmes seemed at ease and perfectly frank as he answered her. 'The big problem in examining your average female who may be afflicted is a prevailing sense of false modesty. This infectious disease is usually the result of so-called impure sexual intercourse. The male's poison enters a female's minute wound or lesion. Syphilis is rarely fatal, but the effect on a female is extremely debilitating. She suffers from the disease and she passes it on to other partners. Faced with false modesty, I often find it impossible to examine a patient's genitalia. It must be more possible to touch the inflamed area to locate syphilitic chancres, but this female delicacy makes real effectiveness all too difficult.'

'But you wouldn't have the same problem of modest resistance in examining a prostitute, would you?'

'No, I wouldn't. That would make it much easier for the patient and myself. I merely look into the vagina with a speculum. If I find a chancre, I will prescribe the standard medication - mercury, in pill or ointment form. It will not be difficult for me.'

Minna stood up. 'Dr Holmes, you sound capable and I feel you can be trusted. You have the job, if you want it.' Dr Holmes came to his feet. 'It would be an honour and my pleasure to serve you and your ladies. Definitely a great opportunity.'

'There's still the matter of your fee. If you will come to the Everleigh Club at eleven tomorrow morning, you can meet my sister Aida, and she will work out a satisfactory arrangement. Then I'll take you around and introduce you to our girls. Is this agreeable?'

'Most agreeable, Miss Everleigh.'

Minna allowed Dr Holmes to see her to the door, then walked to her Model A Ford, where Edmund was waiting to assist her into the seat.

As they drove away from Dr Holmes's Castle, Minna felt pleased. Dr Holmes was a professional, a gentleman, and her instinct told her he would be trustworthy in protecting the Club against Mayor Harrison's incursions.

As the Ford continued away from the doctor's Castle, Minna glanced back at it. The third storey could still be seen from a half-mile's distance. The chimney was visible also, and it was odd that the chimney was emitting smoke.

Crazy, Minna thought, to be using a furnace in the spring. Still, admittedly, there was a chill in the air, and whatever he was doing to warm himself, Dr Holmes certainly knew what was best for his own health as well as theirs.

The minute Dr Herman Holmes was certain that Minna Everleigh had departed the area, he hurried to his office, reached under a drape beside the fireplace, and pressed up a lever on a concealed panel to release pent-up gas.

After a while, he strode into the hallway to a metal wall with a wood grain finish over it, reached behind a thick-leafed rubber plant, pressed a button, and watched the door slide open to his secret soundproof chamber in the rear. He went inside the dimly illuminated, gloomy room, sniffed to be sure the gas had cleared, and found his sixth wife, Georgianne, still sprawled on the floor where he had left her.

He had decided at noon, after he had learned Minna Everleigh was coming to interview him, that once he had the job, Georgianne would no longer be useful to him. She would be in the way when Minna appeared, and create too many problems when he had access to the Everleigh Club and its fantastic

girls. As Georgianne had bent her thick head of hair over her lunch, Holmes had come up behind her and whacked her on the back of the head with a crowbar. He had caught her before she slumped to the floor, dragged her into his gas chamber, stripped off her clothes, then sealed the windowless chamber lined with sheet iron. From his office he had turned on the gas.

Minna had arrived punctually and - as expected - he'd earned the job at the Everleigh Club. Getting the job thrilled him. It would be a feast. He would have all those flawless young women to choose and pick among — some for love, some for money — and when necessary, he would dispose of them too.

Now, staring down at Georgianne's corpse, Holmes suffered no remorse. She had served her purpose, given him her money and many nights of acrobatic love-making. Alive, she would have been in the way. Georgianne was just another corpse. There had been so many before her, a few men, mainly women, whom he had bilked of their savings or used for the pleasures of his body.

One human being more or less meant nothing to Holmes. There was pleasure in taking advantage of stupid human beings, using them, and getting rid of them when they became burdensome. He had read in a medical book that all serial killers were insane. Holmes felt positive that he was totally sane. He simply derived happiness from what he did. It was, perhaps, a strange but wonderful kind of lust.

Without wasting any more time, he lifted Georgianne's limp corpse off the floor, carried her across his shoulder to the first trap door, pulled the door open with his free hand, and dropped her down a greased chute to the basement.

Closing that trap door, he tugged at a second trap door which opened to a narrow stairway that also led down to the basement.

Once in the seven-foot high basement, Holmes worked efficiently. He carried Georgianne to a fourteen-foot cedar tank lined with zinc and filled with quicklime. He dropped her body into the quicklime, which rapidly began to dissolve her flesh.

After a short time he emptied the tank, drew on his rubber gloves, removed what was left of Georgianne and settled her remains on his surgeon's table. He found his scalpel, lancet, other knives. He was proud of his skills with a scalpel, which he had first learned in his youth at the Medical School of the University of Michigan. Expertly, he began to dissect Georgianne's remains.

There was a little blood, not much, and when his wife lay in seven parts on the table, Holmes went to his large kiln, revived the fire, methodically took the seven parts of Georgianne and threw them on the flames. In half an hour, there would be no more of Georgianne except the smoke coming out of his chimney and a few charred bones among the ashes.

After that, Holmes washed his hands, then climbed back up to his asphyxiation chamber to put everything there in order.

With everything neat and in place, Holmes left his secret chamber, closed it, and returned to the office.

He surveyed his office, his expression as innocent as when the crafty yet gullible Minna Everleigh had sat there to question him.

He settled down behind his desk and enjoyed a pipeful of Dutch tobacco. He was now a free man once more, free to enjoy and profit from the Everleigh Club's harem of pleasures.

THREE

It was early evening when Gus Varney entered the foyer of the Everleigh Club. Although well dressed, from bow tie and waistcoat to striped trousers, he felt awkward and strange. He tried to give no sign of nervousness as he removed his derby hat. He patted his pockets to reassure himself that he had no means of identification except for a wallet bulging with the money the mayor had given him and his beautifully embossed but fake calling-cards.

A rather plump, brown-haired, plain young woman approached him. She extended her hand. 'I'm Aida Everleigh,' she said. 'I can't remember seeing you before. Have you ever been here?'

'No, I haven't, but many of my friends in St Louis have, and they insisted I not leave Chicago without dining at the Everleigh Club.'

'That's lovely,' said Aida. 'May I ask your name?'

Varney fumbled inside his jacket for his wallet, and tugged it free. He made a show of displaying the fifty-dollar bills in his wallet as he searched for his packet of business cards. He withdrew one card and handed it to Aida Everleigh. 'I'm Jack Simon, president of the Quality Beer Company.'

Aida studied the card, surveyed Varney carefully from head to foot, then smiled and pocketed his card. 'We're pleased to receive you, Mr Simon. What do you have in mind for this evening? Have you had supper yet?'

'As a matter of fact, I haven't had a bite all day. A good meal would sit well with me, along with some wine.'

Aida turned to lead Varney into the Club. 'Do you have anything else in mind?'

'I ... I heard you have some rather attractive girls here. I wouldn't mind having one join me for dinner.'

'That can be arranged right now. There are three or four young ladies in our Blue Room. It's early and the other girls will be down later. But I'm sure you'll find someone available who will be suitable to your taste. Follow me. I'll introduce you.'

When they entered the Blue Room, what Varney saw was utterly unexpected. The parlour was furnished with three blue divans appointed with leather pillows on which were attached attractive pictures of Gibson Girls. On the walls all around were hung college pennants — Yale, Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton — giving the chamber a decidedly youthful and lively appearance. The nearest blue divan held three young women, each smartly dressed in stylish variations of mousseline blouses and voile skirts. They ceased their chatter as Aida took Varney by the hand and approached them.

'Girls,' Aida said, 'I want you to meet Mr Jack Simon, who heads one of the most famous beer companies in St Louis, Missouri. Jack, I want you to meet three of our loveliest entertainers. This is Fanny . . . Avis . . . Margo.'

Varney acknowledged their friendly greetings.

'Girls, Jack has come here to dine and have some pleasure. He tells me he's famished. He'd like a companion during dinner.' Aida faced Varney. 'They're all famished too. You may have your choice.'

Varney's eyes fastened on the first of the trio, introduced as Fanny. She was an extremely busty blonde, with a narrow waist and obviously voluptuous thighs.

Before he could speak, Aida spoke. 'I see you can't take your eyes off Fanny. Can't say that I blame you. She's one of our most popular girls. Would you like Fanny to dine with you?'

Varney could hardly find his voice. His eyes feasted on the lush creature. 'That - that would be wonderful.'

'She's all yours, then,' said Aida. Fanny jumped gaily to

her feet as Aida told her, 'Dear, take Jack to the restaurant and acquaint him with what's available.'

Aida shook hands with Varney once more. 'Have a good time in the Everleigh Club. I'll see you again later.'

Fanny slipped her arm through Varney's and cheerfully led him off.

Momentarily, at the entrance to the large restaurant with its silver candelabras, glistening crystal goblets, and lavish floral centrepieces, Varney was intimidated. He'd once eaten at the Palmer House with the mayor's staff, but the Everleigh restaurant was much more splendid. Fanny had him by the arm as she drew him inside. Passing several other diners, Fanny waved familiarly to one obese, elderly man and his two male companions.

Fanny settled Varney at an isolated table in a corner, and instead of taking the chair opposite, she brought her chair closer to his and sat down beside him. A coloured waiter materialized with the menu, but Fanny ignored him.

'I think it would be nice to start with a bottle of Mumm's champagne. Would that suit you?'

'Fine.'

'Now, unless you have some dish you prefer, I could make a few suggestions.'

'I'll trust you,' said Varney. 'I'll have whatever you have.'

Fanny was pleased. 'I'd suggest we start with Romano-Beluga caviar. After that, prime roast beef.

How would you like yours done?'

'Rare.'

'Me too. I love rare meat. It gives one energy. Then we might have some crepes Suzette. How's that?'

'Perfect, Ma'am.'

'Jack, my name is Fanny. You needn't be formal with me. I hope we get to know each other much better.'

'I hope so too, Fanny.'

When the silver bucket appeared with the Mumm's and the bottle was uncorked and poured, Varney tried to

concentrate on his mission. He was here because Mayor Harrison wanted to prove that this was still'

a whorehouse. Varney's assignment was to go to bed with a whore. How did one go about it?

Fanny seemed too ladylike, yet she had served up several double entendres. Varney determined to relax and play it by ear.

'I know you're a beer king,' Fanny was saying as they sipped their drinks. 'I hope you don't mind that I ordered champagne. It just seemed more appropriate for a good time.'

'It is, it is,' Varney agreed.

She had said a good time. He wondered if he dared read what he hoped to read in those words.

As the supper was served, Varney tried to answer Fanny's questions about St Louis. He had never been there, but neither had she, so he was safe. Then they talked about entertainment in Chicago.

'Do you like stage plays?' Fanny asked. 'Very much,' said Varney. 'Especially Trelawny of the Wells with Ethel Barrymore. I saw Peter Pan with Maude Adams.'

'Actually, I prefer vaudeville,' Fanny confided. 'The last stage play I saw was Uncle Tom's Cabin, with real live bloodhounds.'

'No kidding?'

'But give me vaudeville any day. Harrigan, the tramp juggler, or that magician, Herrmann the Great, or Princess Rajah, who dances with a python around her. I think the best act is "Sober Sue -

You Can't Make Her Laugh". A \$1,000 reward if you can. All the comedians try and fail. The rumour is that Sober Sue has paralysed facial muscles. You know what my favourite fun thing is?'

'No, what?'

'That new invention - movies,' said Fanny. 'At the Chicago Opera House I saw The Great Train Robbery, starring Bronco Billy Anderson. It was my first movie ever, but it was too short. Only fifteen minutes. Since then I've seen Cinderella,

which has wonderful camera effects. There's a scene where the pumpkin changes into a carriage.

The best one is The Passion Play, which is ten times longer than the average movie. You should try a movie some time.'

'I will,' promised Varney. 'I heard they were coming to St Louis.'

They had run out of entertainment topics to discuss, and silently swallowed the last of their crepes.

Fanny touched her napkin to her mouth and murmured, 'Yum, that was good.'

'Very good,' Varney agreed.

'I should thank you for a marvellous meal,' she said. 'I want to thank you.'

She leaned over, across him, her full breasts pressing like twin cushions against his arms, and she planted a delicious kiss on his open lips. Her tongue darted out to find his and then teased against his tongue.

Varney could feel an immediate erection.

Fanny reached down and patted his stomach. 'How does it feel? Have you had all you want?'

Before he could reply, her palm slid down his stomach, and reached his crotch and curled around his

erection.

Withdrawing her hand slowly, she gave him a seductive smile. 'Or would you like more?'

'More,' he gulped, relieved that he didn't have to ask her to bed. She was plainly asking him. His confidence grew along with the size of his penis, and he added firmly, 'Much more. I want you, Fanny.'

'You have me,' she said simply, taking his hand. 'It's only a short walk.'

They went up the thickly carpeted mahogany staircase, between the potted palms and the statues of nude Grecian goddesses, to the upstairs corridor. There Fanny led Varney along a row of doors until she reached her own.

Opening the door, she turned on a lamp and beckoned Varney inside the boudoir. Its magnificence stopped him in his tracks. What caught his eye first was the Turkish-style

headboard of brass, inlaid with marble. Nearby was a window covered from floor to ceiling by red velvet drapes with silk borders. On one wall stood an elaborately carved wooden mantel splashed with gold paint. There were freshly cut roses in two iron urns on the mantel.

This, thought Varney, is paradise.

Fanny was undoing the jet buttons of her blouse. As Varney moved to assist her, she said, 'It would take you too long to undress me, Jack. These buttons, then the hooks and eyes, and after that my blouse and skirt, and the petticoats, ruffles, and whalebone stays, and then my shoes to unbutton, and my stockings to roll down. It would take you half an hour, and by then you'd lose your erection.'

'I wouldn't,' he said adamantly.

'Believe me,' Fanny said. 'But I can go to the bathroom and get unpeeled in five minutes. I know how to do it. So you stay here and take your clothes off. I'll be with you in a jiffy.'

When she was gone, Varney took his clothes off slowly. When he was naked, he could feel that he was losing his erection. He glanced at the bathroom door, imagined what she'd be like, and immediately his penis began to rise.

Moments later she emerged wearing only a filmy pink dressing-gown. She considered his nakedness, nodded approval, and padded straight to the bed. She threw off her dressing-gown, and dropped to the bed on her back. The instant Varney's gaze moved from her blonde hair and beautiful face to the huge mounds of breasts, the sleek pinkish-white abdomen, the great pubic patch, as she lifted her fleshy thighs and spread them apart, Varney's penis hardened fully and stood straight out.

'Come on, young man,' Fanny beckoned. 'Let me enjoy that.'

Varney was on the bed immediately, atop her, and between her legs.

She shut her eyes, squealed with delight, put her arms around him to draw him in tighter.

He began to pump away, and as he did so, she began to undulate her bottom beneath him, until he felt he was going crazy.

Along the way, he had one fleeting thought of his real mission.

So much for the Everleigh Club as a chaste restaurant.

Soon, Mayor Harrison might be as happy with the word as Varney himself was right now with the proof.

Varney went on with her for - he didn't know — maybe ten minutes or so. She was the best, most experienced girl he'd ever coupled with. She pushed all the right buttons, until he was frenzied.

When he had his orgasm, she made sounds of a prolonged orgasm too — but when his senses returned he knew it wasn't true. She was a prostitute, a sweet, loose girl, but a prosty nevertheless, and they never came for pay.

When they lay under the blanket, recovering, she was ready to listen to him and to talk herself. No rush job. The Ever-leighs had a class act going.

'You're the best I've ever had,' admitted Varney. 'Whatever you get, you should get more.'

'I think so too,' Fanny agreed ingenuously. 'You'll pay fifty dollars, and I'll get half. Usually, I accept that as fair. But now I'm going to be earning less, because - because for certain reasons —

Minna and Aida are screening customers more closely and will be turning more away. I don't like that. It's the first time Minna has been unfair.'

'Why don't you leave the Everleighs?' Varney asked.

'And go where? This is the best-paying house in Chicago. If I had somewhere else to go that paid better, I'd certainly do it right now. That's how I feel.'

Varney had full command of his senses at last. His mind was on his mission. He could now testify that the Everleigh Club was a whorehouse. But Harrison had reminded him that if he could get one of the girls as a witness, their case for a shutdown would be perfect, a cinch.

There was a gamble involved in confessing his mission, Varney realized, but given this girl's mood, it might be safe.

'Maybe I can see that you're better paid,' Varney blurted.

The girl stared at him. 'How? By living with you?'

'No. It's something else. What if I told you I could pay you \$3,000 cash if you did something for me?'

'For doing what?' she asked suspiciously.

'For telling the mayor what you just did with me, and then testifying to the same before the chief of police.'

Fanny blinked at him. 'They'd shut down the Club. I'd hate to be responsible. Well, at least not for \$3,000.'

With her last sentence, Varney knew that he had her on the hook. He propped himself on an elbow and prepared to negotiate.

Dr Herman Holmes, gripping his black medical bag, was proceeding along the upstairs corridor of the Everleigh Club, about to conclude his first day at work, and was now running late. A pleasurable and sensuous day it had been. He had closely, intimately, and lingeringly, examined fourteen of the healthiest and most breathtaking girls he had ever seen.

It was a bonanza of a job, with the most exciting prospects on earth, and from the easy manner of the girls, there would be none to resist him.

He had one more vagina to examine this evening, the fifteenth. He glanced at his list. This one's name was Fanny. He reached her door. About to knock, he realized that she might have a partner inside and he did not want to disturb her until she was finished. Instead, he tried the doorknob. The door was unlocked, and he opened it a few inches to peek in.

'Yes, \$5,000,' he heard a male voice say.

About to shut the door, Dr Holmes heard Fanny speak out. 'Actually \$5,000? In cash? You mean that? Just to testify against the Everleighs? Why, even if they shut the Club down, it wouldn't matter to me. With \$5,000 I could set up my own dress shop in the Loop and never hustle again.

Tell me again, Jack, so I understand for sure.'

Dr Holmes did not shut the door. He left an inch open so that he could hear the rest.

'I told you,' the male voice resumed. 'I work for Mayor Harrison. He guaranteed me that if I had sex with any Everleigh girl I could offer her \$5,000 if she would testify that the Club is still a brothel.'

You were smart enough to take me up on it.'

'What happens next?' Fanny inquired.

'We get dressed. I leave the room first and find Aida and pay up for the evening. Then I'll step outside and find a public telephone and call the mayor's office. I'll say we're coming right in. Then I'll go to the corner and wait for you. Any problem getting out?'

'Of course not,' said Fanny. 'This isn't slavery. I'm allowed to go out and get some air.'

'Let's get moving.'

Grimacing, Dr Holmes softly shut the door. His heart was beating fast. That stupid girl in there was about to double-cross the Everleighs. Holmes didn't give a damn about the Everleighs, but he did give a damn about the Club and keeping it open for ever as his fleshy playground.

Dr Holmes's first reaction was to race downstairs and inform Minna Everleigh, but he thought twice about that. Minna would not know the proper way to handle the mayor's secret spy. He could not see her killing the man or hiring someone else to kill him. She wasn't the type. She'd try to reason with him or bribe him. Holmes was afraid the man would get away, contact the mayor, and close the whole Club down. Holmes knew that for his own sake he could not risk letting the man go free or let that double-crossing Fanny out on the loose.

Dr Holmes knew what to do. He alone could do it.

He rapped sharply on the door, then pushed it open slightly.

'Fanny?' he called out. 'This is Dr Holmes, your new physician. I'm here to give you a routine examination. I'd like to come in.'

'Can't it wait?' Fanny called back. 'I still have a customer here.'

'I don't mind the customer,' said Holmes. 'I'll just give you a brief examination and leave.'

He pushed the door fully open.

They were both staring at him. The thin man had one leg in his trousers, and Fanny, entirely nude, was heading for the bathroom.

'Can't you see we're busy?' she shot out irritably.

Calmly, Holmes advanced towards her. 'It seems to me you've finished your business.

Unfortunately, I haven't finished mine. I promised Minna I'd examine fifteen girls today, and I've done fourteen. You're the last, Fanny. Please be cooperative. It'll only take a few minutes.'

'What am I supposed to do?' she said, still irritable.

'What you've done with the previous doctor. It'll be a similar examination.' Dr Holmes turned to the man. 'Once you're dressed, sir, I'd suggest you wait, just in case there is something wrong which you may have contracted ... All right, Fanny, let's have a look.'

Pouting, Fanny returned to the bed and lay back, legs apart.

Dr Holmes knelt down between her legs. What he saw was truly mind-rending.

A pity to do what he had to do, he told himself, but it was a dire necessity.

Using his speculum, he tried to look inside. Then he inserted two fingers into her vagina.

'Hey,' Fanny protested, 'what are you doing? The other doctor never did that.'

'I have to because I'm afraid I see something. I've got to be sure.'

After a few moments, he removed his fingers.

'Just as I suspected,' he said. 'Give me a moment in which to wash my hands. You can sit up now.'

When Dr Holmes returned to the bedroom, Fanny was sitting up, eyes fixed on him.

'What's going on?' she said. 'You found something wrong?'

'Yes, definitely,' Dr Holmes said. 'There's an infection, sores, a febrile disturbance that would indicate secondary syphilis.'

'That can't be,' Fanny protested again. 'I'm clean, always have been, and so is everyone who works here.'

'How can you be certain?' said Dr Holmes, putting aside his speculum. He looked up at the young man seated on the chair, nervously watching. 'As for you, sir, you may have contracted Fanny's syphilis. We'll find out soon enough, and I'll do what I can to help you both.'

'You're not going to tell Minna, are you?' Fanny wailed.

'No, I won't. But I will have to ask you and your friend -I didn't get his name —'

'Jack Simon,' Varney croaked.

'I'll have to ask you and Fanny to come to my office where I can treat her - and examine you.'

'Can't it wait?' asked Varney. 'We had another appointment.'

Dr Holmes wrote out his address and handed it to Fanny. 'Meet me there in a half hour. No, Mr Simon, it can't wait. Allowing the infection to remain untreated will only endanger both of you.

Once I've treated her - and possibly you - with mercury, you will be free to keep your appointment.'

Dr Holmes went to the door. 'A half hour from now, at my office.'

When they were alone, Varney turned to Fanny. 'Why don't you dress? I have to pay my bill and make a phone call. I'll wait on the corner, and then we can see the doctor together.'

When Varney came down the mahogany staircase to the street floor of the Everleigh Club, he found a diminutive, thin, pretty young woman waiting for him.

'Mr Simon, I presume,' she said.

'Yes.'

'I'm Minna Everleigh,' she introduced herself. 'You met my sister. Did you enjoy yourself?'

'Immensely,' Varney said. 'The supper was superb. The girl, Fanny, my companion, was even more superb.'

'I'm glad,' said Minna. 'Then you won't mind paying the bill for the restaurant and the entertainment upstairs.' She fished into a pocket, brought out a bill, and handed it to Varney.

He noted the total, took out his wallet, extracted \$150 and handed it to Minna. 'I suppose a tip is in order,' he said, and pulled out another five dollars.

'Very good, Mr Simon. I hope you will remember us the next time you're in Chicago.'

He grinned. 'My first stop will be the Everleigh Club.'

He watched Minna leave for a room that was presumably her office, and then he turned into the foyer. He spotted the telephone, and glanced about him. No one was in sight. He considered risking a call from here when suddenly the valet appeared to show him to the door.

Continuing on to the exit, Varney hesitated as Edmund opened the door.

'I'm looking for a public telephone,' said Varney. 'I have a number of business calls to make. Is there a public telephone in the neighbourhood?'

'Just a half block away,' said Edmund. 'As you leave, turn right. From the corner you'll see a small hotel across the street. There's a public telephone in the lobby.'

Once outside, Varney turned right and walked to the corner. He saw the Zion Hotel, crossed over to it and entered.

At first he could see no public telephone, and then at the far end of the narrow lobby he saw a telephone switchboard with a young lady behind it.

Varney went to her. 'Is this a public telephone?'

'Yes, it is.' She held up a telephone. 'Give me the number you want and I'll get it. That'll be ten cents.'

As he fumbled for the dime, Varney was startled by the costliness of the call. His entire lunch at noon had amounted to three cents — two cents for the hot dog sandwich and one cent for the coffee.

Nevertheless, he turned over the dime and gave the young woman the phone number to the mayor's office. Waiting, he felt an undercurrent of real excitement at what he had accomplished. He knew that the mayor, or whomever was in his office awaiting this call, would be just as excited.

'Here's your party,' said the operator, handing up the telephone and receiver.

He heard a feminine voice on the line. 'Hello, hello.' He realized that it was Karen Grant who was on the line.

Aware that the public operator could overhear him, he decided to make his own tone as inaudible as possible and made his words cryptic.

'It's Gus,' he said.

Karen replied, 'The mayor asked me to stand by for your call, and to phone him at once if there is

good news. He'd come over to meet with you.'

'Good news,' said Varney softly. 'Very good news.'

'Oh, that's wonderful. I'll see that the mayor is here to meet you.'

'Tell him not to rush. It would take me half an hour to get to the office, but I have to make one other stop first. I can't explain. It'll delay me another half-hour.'

'I'll tell Mayor Harrison.'

'Tell him. See you.'

'See you,' said Karen Grant.

Varney hung up, and returned the telephone to the public operator.

Quickly, he left the Zion Hotel lobby to cross over to the opposite corner and await Fanny before taking a detour to Dr Holmes's office and then going on to Mayor Harrison's office.

He felt triumphant as the hotel door closed behind him. He just hoped that he had not contracted syphilis too.

Dr Herman Holmes had no sooner pulled on his white medical jacket than the doorbell rang.

He went from his office to the entrance and opened the door.

Fanny, whatever her last name was, stood there, wearing a great feathered hat. She was with the man called Simon, whatever his real name was. Both were unable to conceal their nervousness.

Dr Holmes beckoned them inside, led them to his austere office, and ordered them to be seated.

He lowered himself into a chair behind his desk. 'It won't take long,' he said, 'but allow me to explain the procedure. I'm going to examine you once again, Fanny, in better light, just to be absolutely sure of my diagnosis. Then if necessary, I'll examine you, Mr Simon, to learn if there are any signs of your having the disease.'

'I certainly hope not,' said Varney.

'There's a fifty-fifty chance. If you show no evidence of the disease, you have not a thing to worry about. If you do show any signs of syphilis, I'll treat you just as I'll treat Fanny.'

'I've never had it before,' said Fanny. 'What are you going to do to cure me?'

'If the syphilis has been absorbed into your blood, I'll prescribe the mercury treatment,' explained Dr Holmes. 'I'll give you mercury in the form of pills, and then you'll need — your friend as well - a mercury vapour bath.'

'It won't take long, will it?' asked Varney.

'No more than the examination itself.' Dr Holmes stood up. 'Now follow me down the hall to my examining-room.'

'I thought you were going to examine us here,' said Fanny, rising.

'I prefer to undertake examinations of this sort in an isolated room,' said Dr Holmes. 'Please come along.'

He walked them both to the rear and pushed a button, sliding open the door to his airtight room.

'Come inside,' he ordered.

Dr Holmes went into the chamber, followed by a bewildered Fanny and Varney.

The physician led them to an oversized examining-table in the centre of the room, and waved his hand at the features of the room around him.

'The sheeting and covered windows are to give absolute assurance of privacy. I suggest you both undress and seat yourselves side by side on the examining table.'

'Together?' Fanny asked. 'Both of us at the same time?'

'Do it,' Holmes replied sharply.

Turning his back, he left the room. Once outside the room, he secured the heavy door.

He walked leisurely to his office.

Once at his desk, he took up a pipe, filled it, lit it and smoked, taking his time to give them the interval to undress. Their nakedness would save him a lot of time later.

After three or four minutes, he put his pipe down in a copper ashtray, and strolled over to the concealed levers.

Coolly, he flipped on the lever that would send gas into the room where Fanny and Varney awaited his reappearance. The poisonous gas would begin to pour from four jets into the airtight room. In seconds Fanny and her friend would become aware of it. In a minute, they would realize that something was amiss. In a few minutes, they would begin choking, strangling, crying for help.

But no one anywhere would hear their pleas.

Dr Holmes smiled broadly. He pulled out his watch. In five minutes they would be asphyxiated.

First one, then the other, would drop to the floor.

He peered at his watch.

One more minute and they would be dead.

The Everleigh Club would be safe for Dr Herman Holmes.

The watch in his hand ticked on. A full minute had passed.

The two of them were dead. The double-crossers had been silenced for ever.

Dr Holmes turned off the gas. Then he pressed a second lever upward to open the narrow windows on top of the secret room. This clearing process usually took about ten minutes.

In fifteen minutes, the chamber would be safe for the return of Dr Holmes.

Waiting, Holmes shuffled through several medical journals, but had no patience with them. He had recently purchased two novels by E. P. Roe and George Barr McCutcheon. He picked up the Roe book and tried to begin reading, but his excitement made it too hard to continue. He brought up his watch twice, and after twelve minutes had passed he threw the novel aside, walked out of his office, and made for the lethal chamber.

Parting the sliding doors, he stepped inside. A faint aroma of gas was still in the air. Inhaling, Holmes

was satisfied the chamber was clear enough. His eyes held on the two bodies crumpled on the floor in front of the examining table. Fanny was nude, but, curiously, the man named Simon had not undressed.

Holmes went to them, kneeled, and felt for a pulse.

No beat in either.

Dead. Both dead.

Pleased, Holmes took hold of Fanny underneath her armpits and dragged her to the trap door leading to the basement. Lowering her to the floor, Holmes tugged open the trap door.

Unceremoniously, Holmes lifted Fanny's corpse, settled it into the chute, and let go. It slid down and away and out of sight. Then he sent her clothes down after her.

Holmes decided he'd dispose of Fanny first, before coming back to get rid of Simon. Holmes strode to the second trap door, yanked it free, and carefully descended the staircase.

Once downstairs, Holmes opened the furnace and started a fire. He turned to lift up Fanny's body, carried it to the tank of quicklime, and lowered it inside. After a short interval, he emptied the tank, and, donning long rubber gloves, picked up Fanny's corpse and carried it to his dissection table. He stretched the remains out flat, peeled off his gloves, picked up a scalpel, and resumed his work.

Slowly, with considerable precision, Holmes dismembered the body part by part, until seven parts lay before him.

Opening the furnace, he took each part and tossed it into the blazing kiln. Then he threw in her clothes.

He shut the furnace. While the remains were being cremated, Holmes carefully washed and cleaned the dissecting-table. When he was satisfied, he went to the staircase and climbed up into the secret chamber.

There was still the man to be dealt with. Holmes headed for this second corpse, prepared to cast it down the chute, when he hesitated.

Simon's complete disappearance might not deter Mayor Harrison's investigation, Holmes decided.

He thought about it some more. If Simon's body could be found, and identified, the mayor would somehow learn about it. This would shock Harrison, and remind him that his effort to infiltrate the Everleigh Club had been of no avail. This might deter Harrison from risking another agent to expose the Club.

Holmes stared down at the lifeless body. Finally, Holmes went to his knees and began to search Simon's trousers and jacket. There was only a wallet stuffed with money and a pack of richly embossed calling-cards that plainly identified the man as Jack Simon, president of Quality Beer Company in St Louis. Obviously a fake — but it had been enough to gain Simon entrance to the Everleigh Club, and it would be enough to have the corpse brought sooner or later to the mayor's attention.

Instantly, Holmes's mind was made up.

No chute, no quicklime, no dismemberment, no cremation for Jack Simon.

His corpse would be found whole, a victim of murder, but whole and identifiable.

That surely would give Harrison pause and make the mayor quit his investigation.

Dr Herman Holmes would then have the Everleigh Club to himself.

He put his mind to the problem of disposing of the body.

At three-twenty in the morning, Dr Holmes drove his new one-cylinder Packard touring car to the front door of the Castle. Even though the car was a bit conspicuous, it had the advantages of a roof, as well as separate back seats.

Leaving the automobile, Holmes stood in the street and surveyed the neighbourhood. There was not a human being in sight. It was sleep time, the silent time of the night -perfect for his purpose.

Going into the Castle, Holmes continued past his office to the sliding door of the death chamber, pushed the button, and went inside. The corpse lay sprawled on the floor. The body was thin, but it 37 was dead weight; with an effort Holmes carried it out of the chamber and up the hallway to the front door. He propped the body half-seated against the pillar inside the front entrance, opened the door, and stepped outside.

He looked around the area.

No movement. No one anywhere.

There would be minimum risk.

With growing confidence, Holmes hoisted the body upwards, keeping it upright - if someone noticed, he could claim his companion was drunk - and pulled the body outside, to the rear of the Packard. The car had a tonneau entry from the rear, leading into the back seat. After pulling out this extra door, Holmes strained hard to lift the body higher, and

with difficulty succeeded in stuffing the corpse inside the car. Quietly, Holmes closed the door.

Wiping his brow, he once more cast his eyes about the neighbourhood to observe if there had been any witnesses. He could reassure himself there had been none.

He went to the entrance to the Castle and locked the front door.

Holmes hurried back to the Packard and climbed up, set-ding in behind the wheel. He started the car and sped off to the downtown Loop area.

As he came closer to the hub of the city, he noticed a few isolated late-nighters here and there, but not enough to cause concern.

After half an hour had passed, Holmes realized he was approaching the grey building that was the City Hall and also the main police station. He remembered the thickly wooded park in front of it, large and dense with foliage and trees. This was the place he was seeking.

The wooded park, black except for a few scattered electric carbon arc lights, came into view.

Holmes watched for one of the dirt paths into the park, and turned a sharp left at the first path he spotted. The candles in the car's headlights illuminated his way as he drove deeper into the woods.

At last he saw an opening, and turned right again for a short distance. Manoeuvring his car into the trees and bushes, he brought it to a halt. Stepping down from the driver's seat, Holmes hastened to the rear. He opened the auxiliary door, reached in for the body, got a firm grip on it, and started to drag it out.

There was the sound of laughter nearby. His heart hammering with surprise and fright, Holmes shoved the body back into the car. Ducking behind a tree closer to the foot-path, Holmes strained to see and finally saw a stylish young man in a suit and derby hat, arm around a young woman. They were strolling along to the edge of the park.

Holmes waited breathlessly until they were out of sight.

He heard the woman's laughter once more, but it was distant. Soon no other sound could be heard.

Quickly, Holmes went back to the rear of the Packard, unlatched the tonneau door, and, wasting no more time, he dragged the corpse on to the grass. Then, holding it under the arms, he yanked it back farther, pulling it deeper into the woods.

At last he dropped it before a clump of bushes.

This, he decided, was an excellent spot. The body would be out of sight, but sooner or later - most likely sooner - some strollers would wander off the path and stumble upon the dead man.

Hastily, Holmes made his way to the Packard, checking his jacket to make certain it had not caught on a bramble and left a shred behind.

At the Packard, he paused to catch his breath again. There were no clues whatsoever, except for the markings of his automobile tyres and footprints, which he hastily erased with the side of his shoe.

Holmes got into his Packard and backed the car out to the footpath, pleased in the knowledge that he had left an anonymous warning to the meddlesome Mayor Carter Harrison - and that the Everleigh Club and its lush inhabitants would live on to be constantly enjoyed by Dr Herman Holmes.

It had been a bad night and a mystifying morning for Carter Harrison, Mayor of Chicago.

The previous evening, as he had been readying himself for bed, the mayor had received an excited telephone call from Karen Grant at the City Hall office.

'I just heard from Gus Varney, and it is good news,' she had cried out. 'He telephoned me from somewhere to report - these were his words as I remember them - "Very good news. Tell the mayor. I'll see you." When I told him I'd notify you, he said, "Tell him not to rush." Gus said it would take him at least an hour, because he had to make another stop before coming in, and he couldn't explain.'

'Why the delay?' Harrison had wanted to know. 'What's keeping him?'

'He just wasn't able to explain,' Karen had repeated. 'But he made it clear he would be here in an hour to tell you what he found out about the Everleighs. He insisted that what he had found out was what you wanted.'

'Perfect!' the mayor had exclaimed, fully awake and with rising enthusiasm. 'I'll get dressed and be over in less than an hour.'

Harrison had joined Karen Grant in his office, and together they had waited for the appearance of Gus Varney. Half an hour had passed, then two. Eventually it was after midnight, and still no Gus Varney.

By one o'clock in the morning the mayor had become discouraged. 'I don't know what could have happened to him.'

Karen had tried to soothe the mayor. 'I'm sure it is that stop he had to make. Whatever it was, that must have delayed him. Why don't you go home and catch some sleep? I'll remain here for another hour. Don't worry, Mayor, I'm sure Gus will turn up.'

The mayor had gone home. After another hour, Karen had called it quits and also gone home.

Now it was just before noon on the following morning, and Gus Varney had not turned up with his good news.

They had waited in the executive office, Harrison and Karen, from eight-thirty until twelve. Varney had not appeared and there had been no further word from him.

At last the mayor threw up his hands in despair. 'I don't like this,' he told Karen. 'I'm worried that something happened to him, something I don't like to think about.'

'But what could happen?' Karen wondered aloud.

'We'll find out. I'm going to start checking around. Karen, call the chief of police for me.'

'You mean Francis O'Neill?'

'Himself. Get him on the telephone right now.'

Karen moved to the telephone, gave the operator the number for the main police station downstairs in City Hall, and waited. When someone answered, she stated that she was calling for Mayor Carter Harrison, who wished to speak to the chief of police immediately.

After a short wait, Karen spoke into the phone. 'Chief O'Neill?'

'Yes?'

'This is Mayor Harrison's office. I'm calling for the mayor. He wishes to speak to you on an urgent matter.'

'Put him on,' said Chief O'Neill.

'Here he is.'

Karen handed the telephone to Mayor Harrison, who was now seated behind his desk.

'Chief,' said the mayor, 'there's something troublesome I want to discuss with you.'

'I'm listening.'

'Yesterday I assigned one of my aides, Gus Varney, to go out on an investigation. When he completed that investigation around ten o'clock, he telephoned my secretary and told her that he had good news for me. He told her he was on his way to City Hall to report to me. Oh yes, he had one stop to make following his phone call, and then he was proceeding to City Hall to report to me.'

Well, he never showed up. I waited three hours last night. No show. Then, from early this morning I expected Varney. He never appeared.' Harrison paused. 'Chief, I don't like this.'

'Was Mr Varney generally reliable?'

'Totally so. The most punctual person on my staff.'

'Well,' said the chief, 'he could have suffered an attack of amnesia. It happens, you know.'

'Not often, Chief.' At last Harrison spoke what was on his mind. 'Chief, I suspect something worse.'

He hesitated. 'Were there any suspicious or fatal incidents this morning?'

'I haven't heard of any from our other police districts. In

this district we had only one this morning. There was identification, but it wasn't Varney. The corpse had a calling-card in his wallet. A man named Jack Simon, president of some beer company in St Louis.'

Harrison gasped. 'Chief, I had that card printed for Varney as a cover.'

There was a brief silence. 'Then it's your Mr Varney we have in the morgue.'

'You're sure?'

'Absolutely. You'd better come over to the County Hospital for positive identification.'

Harrison shuddered. 'I'll be right over,' he said.

They left the coroner in the morgue, and after closing the door, Mayor Harrison and Chief O'Neill stood in the hallway, their eyes meeting.

'You're certain?' the chief asked once more.

Mayor Harrison's face was ashen. 'It's Varney in there, all right. But he looks practically alive. No injuries. What was it the coroner told us? Suffocation?'

'Yes, asphyxiation. I'm sorry about your loss, terribly sorry.'

'How could that have happened?'

'Many ways. Anything from someone holding a pillow over his face to someone gassing him.'

'Incredible.'

'Mayor,' said the chief, 'if you want us to be of help, you'd better give us more facts. You sent Varney on an investigation. He completed it successfully and was about to report to you when he was interrupted and murdered. You want to tell me what that's all about?'

'It would have to be strictly between us.'

'You know you're safe with me, Mayor,' said the chief.

The mayor, lost in thought, took a few short steps down the corridor, then stopped and turned to face the chief of police.

'All right,' said Harrison, 'I can't let anyone get away with this. I'll tell you the whole thing. You know I ran for reelection on a reform ticket. I said I wanted to close down all those whorehouses in the First Ward. My prime target was the Everleigh Club, because it's the best known. But the Club's been claiming it's no longer a brothel. Only a restaurant.'

'Fat chance,' said the chief with a snort.

'Exactly. Yet I had to have proof it was still a whorehouse before I could ask you to close them down.'

'I'm afraid so,' agreed the chief.

'I did what I could. I decided to work from the inside for evidence. Varney volunteered to go into the

Everleigh Club, posing as a beer company president from St Louis. He was to have supper there with one of the girls, then go to bed with her. Well, he called in to my secretary and announced he had succeeded. He was on his way with the evidence when ... when he disappeared.'

The chief nodded. 'Then we have a lead. We go to the Everleighs and put pressure on them. We tell them the truth and extract a confession.'

'That they themselves murdered Varney or had someone else do so on their behalf?'

'Why not?'

'It doesn't make sense,' said Harrison. 'I'm a fairly astute student of human nature. True, I've never met the Everleighs, but I know a good deal about them. They're two young and genteel Southern ladies. There has never been an instance of violence attached to their operation.'

'Well, if you ever happened to learn that you were about to be shut down, be put out of business, you might feel a little violent. I still say that's where we start.'

'No, Chief,' said Harrison firmly. 'I don't want to alert the Everleighs to what I tried. They may not know, and any action we'd take now would put them on their guard. I don't want them on their guard. I still want to find some other

means of investigating them, and I don't want them prepared for it.'

'Then we won't find out about Varney.'

'Yes, we will. I think he was waylaid on that side trip. There must be other clues.' Mayor Harrison put on his hat. 'The problem is Varney had no family. He was new to the staff. He was a loner.

There's no one to notify, no one to inquire about. You'll have to think of something to tell the boys in your department. But not a word about the Everleighs - not yet.'

'If you insist.'

'I have to insist. Thank you, Chief, and good day.'

Mayor Harrison had called the meeting in his office for three o'clock sharp.

Now, at three-fifteen, the mayor had finished telling his remaining staff members and Karen Grant about Gus Varney's disappearance.

'So there you have it all,' he concluded.

'You mean the Varney case is to be considered closed?' said aide Jim Evans.

'I'm afraid so,' replied the mayor. 'At least for a time. I repeat, we're not going to accuse the Everleighs of anything. Not while there is a possibility of exposing them. And that is still what I intend to do. Get evidence against them. Apparently, Varney learned the truth. He said he had good news. That could only have meant he had found out the Everleigh Club remains what it always has been - a bordello. I mean to find the truth once more, prove it, and close them down for ever.'

'But how?' Evans wanted to know.

'I haven't the faintest idea yet. That's why I called all of you together. To find out if any of you had any suggestions.'

'You could send one of us into the Club, just the way you sent in Varney,' said Evans.

The mayor slowly shook his head. 'No, I can't risk it. Even if one of you got in and verified the truth, you might not come back alive. Look what happened to Gus Varney. No, I can't risk sending another man in.'

Karen Grant was raising a hand. 'But, Mayor Harrison, you could send in a woman. You could send me to the Ever-leigh Club.'

Mayor Harrison was openly surprised. 'You?'

'Yes, me,' repeated Karen, coming to her feet. 'I could get into the Everleigh Club posing as a girl who's down on her luck and needs a job. Maybe I'd get that job.'

'As a prostitute?' said the mayor, looking a trifle shocked. 'Never. You . . . you're far too refined.'

'Am I?' said Karen, fluffing her hair and adopting a sultry voice. Slowly she pirouetted between the staff and the mayor, clearly emphasizing her figure. 'Think it over.'

The mayor had never thought much about Karen since hiring her a few months before the election.

He had known her mother, Naomi, long before his own marriage - known her mother very well -

and enjoyed her, a reckless, wild woman, a suffragette actually, who had advocated the cause of female independence. Naomi had married an artist and Karen had been their only child. The artist had died when Karen was quite young, and last year Naomi herself had died of tuberculosis. Karen, grown up, had studied stenographic skills, and when she had heard that Mayor Harrison needed a new secretary, she had applied, invoking the name of her mother. Harrison had meant to hire a male secretary, as most executives did, although young women were beginning to enjoy a new freedom and gain a foothold in the workplace.

Harrison had hired Karen, not only because he could not resist the memory of her mother but because Karen had seemed so self-assured and competent.

No, Harrison had not thought about her much after hiring her, and he certainly had not had the time to look at her carefully.

Now he did look at her carefully as she stood before him in the centre of his office. Examining her from head to toe, he was quite astonished at what he saw. Karen Grant was tall, perhaps five feet seven. Her silken brunette hair was long, her widely spaced grey-green eyes, overly delicate nostrils, generous rosy lower lip, attractive and pouting — somehow it all added up not to a look of refinement but to something wanton. With the clothes women wore, their shapes were none too revealed - although Karen's blouse was somewhat diaphanous, hinting at full, young breasts. Her sewn-down pleated skirt clung to the contours of full hips and thighs, and draped closely around slender calves.

The mayor knitted his brow and pondered on what was before him.

An Everleigh girl. No doubt she could pass. But still -

'All right, Karen,' the mayor said, 'I take it all back. I'm sure they'd find you qualified at the Everleigh Club. You could fit in as one of their more attractive girls and get a lot of information for me. But have you any idea of what you'd be letting yourself in for?'

'Of course I do.'

'You'd not be behaving as a secretary. You'd be performing as a prostitute.'

'I'm aware of that,' said Karen. 'I'd have no problem with whatever happened. You only need one witness for proof. I think I can manage it. After I was assigned a customer, I'm sure I could get out of it with sufficient proof of what the Everleighs are up to. If I couldn't, well, e'est la guerre. I'll still feel pure when I come back to you with the evidence.'

'Evidence,' repeated the mayor, savouring the possibility. He sat up. 'I don't know. I might let you go ahead, if you think you can get a job there.'

'I'd like to try.'

'How would you get the job? Just walk in?'

'I'm more clever than that, Mayor. There's a Tribune reporter who I've become friendly with. He's covering City Hall. Thomas Ostrow.'

'Oh, yes. Good man.'

'I've heard him speak of Aida and Minna Everleigh. He seems to know them well, and he has the run of the Club. I'll ask him to help me.'

Mayor Harrison smiled. 'Mr Ostrow might be startled at what you're proposing.'

'I'll let him know that underneath I am that kind of girl. And that I want some of the big money, no matter what it costs. Let me try it, Mayor. What do you say?'

'What can I say - except go to it and good luck!'

FOUR

When Thomas Ostrow arrived at the Everleigh Club with Karen Grant, he left her comfortably seated in the foyer and went on alone to keep his appointment with Minna Everleigh.

Across from Minna, the political reporter from the Chicago Tribune said, 'You want to know why I came to see you?'

'You never have to have a reason, Tom.'

'But I have one,' said Ostrow. 'She's outside. Minna, I have a sensational girl for you.'

'That's like bringing coals to Newcastle. Still, I'm always interested in someone new. What about her?'

'Her name's Karen Grant. She worked briefly in a house in New Orleans. Then she decided to make a change, so she came to Chicago. She had a letter of introduction to me from an old newspaper friend down South.'

'Has she been working in any house in Chicago?' asked Minna.

'No. She tried to go straight. Went to work as a clerk in a milliner's shop here. You know what they pay.'

'Starvation wages.'

'So then she came to me. She decided to be one of the girls again. She doesn't want to work just anywhere. She only wants to work in the Everleigh Club. She wanted to know if I knew the Everleigh sisters. I told her she'd come to the right person, and that I'd introduce her to you. But that's not the point, Minna. As you know, I have an eye for the ladies. This Karen Grant is the best-looking young woman I've seen in years. I thought you might want to have a look at her.'

'Of course I do,' said Minna. 'But I have no place for her right now. My limit is thirty girls.'

However, the other day,

one of the girls — Fanny, you remember her — went for a walk and didn't come back. Now she may come back, and if she does I'm full up again. If she doesn't, there may be an opening.'

'Well, Minna, see for yourself.'

Minna stood up. 'I will, in a few minutes. Tell you what, you take Karen to room seven upstairs.

Fanny's room. Have her wait for me. You can come back down and have yourself a drink.'

'Thanks, Minna.'

'I may be thanking you, Tom,' Minna said.

Ostrow left Minna in her office, and went off to the foyer to find Karen Grant and take her upstairs to await Minna Everleigh.

Karen Grant was seated on the brass bed in the boudoir, her apprehension mounting. The door of the bedroom opened and a small, attractive, auburn-haired woman entered.

Immediately, Karen came to her feet somewhat nervously, as the woman approached her with hand extended.

'I'm Minna Everleigh.'

Karen shook her hand. 'I'm Karen Grant.'

Minna sized her up briefly. Karen was shapely in a street dress of grey cheviot with a white mohair blouse, a white vest with pearl buttons and a wide suede belt. 'Not bad,' Minna observed. 'Despite all that padding you're wearing, I think Tom Ostrow is right. You're a well-put-together young lady.'

'Do take a chair. Let's talk a minute.'

'Very well.' Karen sat down in an easy chair, while Minna dropped into a chair across from her.

'Now then,' began Minna, 'I rarely take on a girl if she is over twenty-three. My customers like young ones. I often think they are mistaken, but that's what they like, so I cater to their wishes.'

'How old are you, Karen?'

'Twenty-one.'

'Tom tells me you've had experience. Amateurs wouldn't

do well here. Our customers are generally men of the world. They know a good romp when they meet one. That's why they leave their wives and come here.'

The talk - the reality of what she might be getting into — was unsettling, but Karen tried hard to quell her nervousness. 'I'm experienced enough, Miss Everleigh,' Karen said. 'I had a fair amount of activity in New Orleans. I ... I don't remember a man who was dissatisfied with me.'

Minna laughed. 'Well, I guess you'd know. Tell me, Karen, are you a widow?'

'A widow? Oh, no. I'm single.'

'I threw that one in,' said Minna, 'because widows usually don't work out. They're always looking for another husband, and when they find one, they leave me. I really like to take on someone I think can be

permanent.'

'I am very serious about wanting to work for you, and to work for you as long as you want me.'

Minna nodded. 'You have decent enough manners. You sound like a lady. Are you well versed in - well, what's your background?'

'You mean, am I educated? I am. I had a private education in Boston.'

'Do you keep up your reading?'

'I do. Books - especially poetry — and newspapers.'

'Fine. About your attitude towards sex. Do you have any particular problems?'

'What do you mean, Miss Everleigh?'

'I mean, among our older visitors, fellatio is very popular. Have you practised it?'

'I have.'

'Does it give you any misgivings?'

'I rather like it. I like to see a man happy, no matter what he wants. You needn't worry. I'd do almost anything to satisfy a customer.'

'Well, as far as I'm concerned, there's one thing left.' Minna paused. 'I'd like you to take off your clothes, Karen.'

Momentarily, Karen was startled. 'You want me to undress?'

'Yes.'

'Everything?'

Minna nodded. 'I want to see you completely naked. I want to see you without camouflage. I want to see what a man might see when he has you alone.'

Somewhat reluctantly, Karen came out of the chair. 'I'll be glad to undress.'

'Go into the bathroom and take off your things. I'll have a maid help you. When you're nude, step out here and let me have another look at you.'

Karen watched Minna Everleigh ring for a maid, then take up a magazine. After a moment, Karen headed for the bathroom.

Inside the bathroom, Karen was soon joined by a young coloured maid. With her assistance, Karen's gown was unfastened in the back. Having dismissed the maid, Karen began to strip slowly, removing her skirt, her white mousseline and Irish lace vest, her frilled bust improver attached to a narrow corset, and the sleeveless silk chemise that came to her knees. She unfastened her silk petticoat and underskirt, and after that her cotton drawers gathered just below her knees. Next, she removed her high-heeled, strapped kid shoes. Finally, she rolled down black silk stockings, patterned with embroidered red roses.

She caught sight of herself naked in the full-length mirror. She thought that she looked rather good.

At least, she hoped she did. Her first instinct, before leaving the bathroom, was to cover her pubic hair with one hand. But she realized that an experienced girl would never do that. With effort, she dropped her hands to her sides, sucked in her breath, and stepped out into the bedroom.

Minna was still seated, absorbed in the magazine. When she heard Karen enter the room, she stopped reading and threw the magazine to one side.

Leaden-legged, Karen brought herself to the centre of the bedroom, and then stood still at the foot of the bed.

Minna sat unmoving, peering up at her.

At last, Minna rose. She approached Karen, examining her more closely, from her face to her breasts, to her abdomen, to her pubis, to her thighs and legs.

'Turn around, Karen. Let me see how you look from behind.'

Karen pirouetted as gracefully as possible, and could hear -Minna behind her, clucking softly.

'Nice shoulders and back,' Minna said. 'Very nice ass. All right, you can turn towards me once more.'

'Yes, Miss Everleigh. Uh, are you satisfied?'

'To say the least, you'll do. However, there remains a problem.'

'What's that?'

'I have thirty rooms here and they were all full - until one of my girls left a few days ago. I have no idea where she went. I'm giving her until tomorrow to come back. If she does, we'll be a full house, and I'll have to keep you in mind for another time. If she doesn't, there'll be a slot open, definitely a place for you.'

'How will I know?'

'I'll call you at noon. Will you be at home?'

'Yes, I have a room not far from here. I'll leave you the number of the phone in the hall.'

'If I tell you to come in, it means you have the job, subject to one more formality.'

'What's that?'

'Our house physician examines my girls every week, over a period of two days. I think I can get him here for a third visit. If I hired you, it would be subject to your passing Dr Holmes's examination.'

'Examination? For what?'

'Venereal disease, Karen.'

'Oh, I have nothing like that -'

'How do you know? Let Dr Holmes decide, if I call you in. Now get dressed, and come down to my office and give me that telephone number.' She smiled at Karen. 'You are one beautiful young lady, no question. I'd like to employ you. We'll have to wait and see what tomorrow brings.'

Dr Holmes was excited about his next examination at the Everleigh Club.

He was going to see Avis, the small brunette he had first examined a week ago.

What he had found instantly erotic about Avis was the size of her breasts, huge yet rosy and standing absolutely straight out. Her fleshy hips tapered into smooth shapely legs.

Having seen what he had seen of Avis, and considering what he had heard from her, he knew that she must become his, in more ways than one.

He also sensed that this was a girl who could be pressed. With enough aggression and a fair amount of charm from the doctor, she might be had.

He knocked on her door. 'It's Dr Holmes.'

Muffled, through the door, he heard her voice. 'Come in, Doc, come on in.'

He entered with his bag, hoping that she looked as seductive as she had a week ago.

He saw at once that she looked even better.

She was lying sprawled on her back on the bed, wearing only a loose Japanese kimono. Her knees were raised, and the kimono had fallen aside to reveal her wide thighs and a slither of her backside.

She had been reading a novel with a lewd cover, and now she set it aside.

'I have nothing venereal, Doc,' she chirped, 'but I don't mind you poking around in there. You have good hands. I'll confess something - I find it rather stimulating. Does that sound naughty?'

'It sounds very female and I like it.'

Avis possessed hair tightly bunned at the back, almond-shaped grey eyes, pert nose, a slash of red mouth. As Dr Holmes neared her, she sat up, and threw off her kimono. The milky-skinned, outsized breasts stared back at him.

He set down his bag.

'How've you been, Avis?'

'Not too busy, Doc. The sisters have put a clamp on this place. I've had half as many customers as I had before. It's boring, lying around, and I don't like what it's costing me. If something doesn't change soon, I'm thinking of going elsewhere.'

Dr Holmes sought and found his speculum. 'You won't find any house half so generous as this anywhere in the Levee.'

'I know. I was thinking of doing what some of the other girls around have done. Taking a room in a hotel and inviting more action.'

'That's an idea,' Dr Holmes said casually. 'Want to take your position? Let's get on with the examination.'

Avis rolled off the bed, stood straight over the doctor and touched her breasts provocatively. She lay back on the edge of the bed, her feet barely touching the carpet.

'Open your legs wider, dear,' Dr Holmes directed her.

When she did so, he bent down on his knees. With his free hand he touched her soft vaginal lips, rubbing them slightly.

'Hey,' she called, 'let's not have any more of that. You're getting me going.'

'I'm sorry. I'll watch myself.'

'Well, don't overdo that. I don't mind your being friendly.'

With his fingers, he angled the speculum first downwards and then sideways to determine that she was healthy.

He extended the examination beyond what was necessary because he was enjoying himself.

Finally, he raised his head. 'You're fine, Avis.'

She sat up on the bed, lifted her knees, and wrapped her

arms around them. 'I knew I was. You're not leaving right away, are you?'

'Not yet,' said Dr Holmes, sitting down beside her and wiping the mirror of his speculum with a handkerchief he had dipped in alcohol.

'You seem like maybe you have something on your mind.'

'I do, Avis, if you feel like talking.'

'Talking to you is fun, Doc. You're a cute fellow.'

'Thank you, Avis. I can return the compliment. You're a cute girl, actually the cutest one in the place.'

'Well, now -'

'There is something I'd like to talk to you about. The first time I saw you a week ago, and just a little while ago, you voiced some displeasure with Aida and Minna. You spoke of setting up your own shop in a hotel. Were you serious?'

Avis shrugged her bare shoulders. 'I don't know. Just a thought I'd had.'

'Will you do it?' asked Holmes, putting away his speculum.

'Probably not. I'd like to. I don't think I have enough initiative. I can't do things on my own.'

Suavely, Dr Holmes posed a question. 'What if you didn't have to? I mean, have to do something on your own?'

'It would help, but still, for all the boredom, it's pretty cosy here. Having someone take care of you.'

'What if you left with someone's help and had that someone take care of you?'

She considered Dr Holmes curiously. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean I have an idea,' Dr Holmes went on. 'I gather, from something you mentioned last week, that you don't have any money worries. True?'

'True. I'm a small-town girl. I watch every penny. I've seen what happens to other girls in the Levee who spend every dime they have on clothes, on booze, on drugs. I've held on to my earnings.'

'I have something in mind,' said Dr Holmes. 'Can I ask you this? How much have you saved up?'

'A decent sum. About \$2,000, at my last count.'

'Just right for what I have in mind, Avis,' Dr Holmes continued. 'I have a suggestion to make, a proposition, really. Right now you keep half of what you earn every night. Isn't that so?'

'It's so.'

'How would you like to keep more, much more?'

'I'd sure like that. But how -?'

Dr Holmes proceeded more confidently. 'Like letting me set you up in your own house, maybe smaller than this one, but just as luxurious. We could be partners. You would be in competition with the

Everleighs, but you would be independent, your own boss, and keep most of what you earn. If you put up your savings, and I put up an equal sum, we could rent and furnish a really classy establishment. You could keep not half your income, but three-quarters, and I'd keep one-quarter for my investment. How does that sound?

'Too good to be true.'

'There's more,' Dr Holmes added. 'You wouldn't be alone either. You could move in with me, and stay with me after hours. I'd take care of you.'

'You would?'

'I'd like to. You're a very special sort of girl. We'd get along very well. Of course, only if you'd want to live with me. Would you?'

'And how! I already hinted to you, I find you — well, attractive, and someone I'd like to bed down with on the side.'

'Well, there you have it,' said Dr Holmes, exhilarated. 'Our own business, and our own home - together. You ready to do it?'

'Just say when!'

'Tonight, Avis. Tonight. I'll go back to my office and prepare the contract for our partnership. You pack up and meet

me at my place. Here's my card. Come at six o'clock. Bring all your things. Can you do that?'

'I'll manage.'

'Then we'll celebrate. I'll take you to the Palmer House for dinner -'

'Oh, my, I've never been there.'

'Just the beginning. Then you can look over our partnership contract and we'll both sign it. In a week I'll pay down on the lease of a building, and we'll furnish it together. In a month you'll be in business and making a fortune.'

'I'm so thrilled.'

'And you won't be alone at any time. We'll be together.'

He stood up. Immediately, she was on her feet in front of him, naked and wildly aroused. She hugged him tightly and kissed him.

'You'll never regret it,' she whispered.

'Neither will you, Avis,' he said wryly. 'We have a memorable date for tonight.'

'I'll be there,' she promised. 'I can't wait.'

It was early evening, and they were seated in the grand dining-room of the Palmer House.

Avis — decorously dressed in a pink blouse, and broad-lapelled Eton jacket, and tailored brown skirt — and Dr Holmes held hands across the table, as a uniformed waiter served them soup out of a silver tureen.

After the waiter had discreetly receded, Holmes was amused to see the awe on Avis's face as she

repeatedly scanned the rich furnishings of the room.

'This room,' said Holmes, 'is fashioned precisely after the dining-room of the Potsdam Palace in Germany.'

'That chandelier is a knockout,' Avis said.

'It's an Egyptian chandelier,' Holmes explained. 'The mirrors around the room are Venetian, and that staircase over there is made of Italian Carrara marble. Nothing is too good for you, my dear. Do you wish another bottle of Veuve Clicquot?'

'I'd better concentrate on my soup. What did we order? I forgot.'

'Terrapin a la Maryland for your main course. I ordered prime roast beef.'

They spooned their soup in momentary silence. Avis spoke up again. 'You saw I brought two suitcases into your house. I moved out of the Everleigh Club completely. They never saw me go.'

She hesitated. 'I hope you meant every word you said - about me moving in with you. And about our partnership.'

'I couldn't have been more serious. You can believe everything I told you.'

'I'm glad,' Avis said, 'because I took it very seriously.' She touched her purse on the table. 'I even brought my share of the investment. I withdrew my \$2,000 from the bank.'

'Excellent,' said Holmes. 'As I promised you, I'll match it.' He put down his spoon. 'I drew up the contract for your approval.' He reached into a pocket, brought out a piece of paper, and unfolded it.

'Here it is. Just as I outlined our agreement. Have a look.' She glanced at the page.

'You can see,' Holmes went on, 'exactly as I told you. Your \$2,000 and my \$2,000. You run the place we lease, and you keep 75 per cent of the profits. I keep 25 per cent for my share. Can you see that?'

'I'm not good at reading contracts. I'm sure I can trust you.' She handed the contract back. 'Why don't you hold on to it until we're ready to sign.'

He slipped the contract back in his pocket. 'We can sign right after dinner, when we get back to my place. How's that?'

'I look forward to it,' Avis said, watching the waiter as he removed her soup plate and then replaced it with an elegantly presented Terrapin a la Maryland.

After dinner, Avis waited for Dr Holmes to reclaim his hat and cape, and then she accompanied him outside to the corner of Monroe and State Streets. When the Packard was brought around, Holmes helped Avis into the front seat and took his own seat behind the wheel.

Avis patted the front seat. 'This is really living in style.' Holmes smiled. 'There is more, much more, where this came from.'

Neither spoke much on the long drive back to the Castle. One thing Avis said, that Holmes would remember, was, 'It's so good to get out of the Everleigh Club. I mean, the sisters were nice to me, and the Club was comfortable, but it gets tiresome sleeping with so many different men but no one who's special. It'll be marvellous sleeping with one man who cares for you.' She cast him a sidelong glance. 'You do care for me, don't you, Herman?' 'More than you can know.'

Once they had entered the Castle, Holmes took Avis's jacket and hung it up. Then he led her into his office, and found the contract again. 'Let's sign this right now and get business over with. I'll affix my

signature and then you do the same.'

He signed and waited for her to sign. Retrieving the contract, Holmes said, 'Why don't I make out my check for \$2,000 so that you can see I'm putting up a sum equal to yours.'

'Not necessary,' said Avis, unfastening her purse. 'You can have my part right now, if you wish.'

Actually, I don't like carrying around that much cash. You can put up your amount when we've found the house to lease and the furniture.'

He accepted her wad of bills. 'Very well.' He placed the money in a desk drawer and came to his feet. 'Enough of business for tonight. Time for a little pleasure and a celebration.' As she rose, he 51

put his arm around her waist and guided her out of his office towards the staircase that led to his master bedroom.

A flickering gas-lighted sconce kept the bedroom romantically shadowed.

Holmes turned to Avis. 'We should get to know each other intimately.'

'I'm for that.'

He reached out. 'Let me undress you.'

'Not necessary. I can manage faster. You undress yourself. You've seen me naked, but I've never seen you. I can't wait.'

She undressed with agility, quicker than he was able to, and faced him in the nude while he shed his last article of clothing.

Avis inspected his brawny body. 'Not bad, not bad at all,' she said quietly.

'Then let's do something about it,' he said. 'Let's not waste time.'

She rolled on to the bed and in seconds he was beside her.

She peered down the length of his body. 'That's a very big erection. You're not going to hurt me, are you?'

'I'm going to be very sweet and gentle.'

'Herman, let me feel it, let me hold it.'

'My pleasure.'

She reached down and taking his erection in one hand, artfully caressed it.

'Herman,' she said at last, 'let's -'

She let go, fell back, lifted her knees and spread her legs apart.

Although she was partially lost in shadows, he could recall the way she looked when he had last examined her at the Everleigh Club. The thought stimulated him even more, and with no hesitation he drove into her.

She gave a squeak of pain, and tried to pull back, but it would be her only movement in what followed.

He pumped vigorously, but she lay inert, not giving anything back. She just lay there on her back and let him do the moving.

He tried to get her to rotate her soft ass, but she just remained there unmoving, passive.

The Everleighs must have had complaints about this one, he decided.

He had expected more, far more, from one so experienced, but she was simply no good at it, satisfied to be an object, a passive taker, giving nothing in return.

He continued to be surprised and disappointed as he pumped away. Because of her sexy appearance and seductive come-on approach, he had anticipated a prolonged relationship with her. Maybe a few months, anyway. He had her money and he would have her every night. But now he didn't 52

want her every night. The money was enough. He vetoed the prolonged relationship. He would get rid of her as quickly as possible.

The thought of getting rid of her was the first peak he enjoyed in this one-sided coupling.

He drove away harder and harder, until he was ready to explode. Then, with a mighty heave, he did explode.

She sighed, and after a while she opened her eyes as he rolled off her.

'Hey, that felt good,' she said.

'I hope so,' he said. 'It did for me.'

He knew that he would have to endure ten or fifteen minutes of pillow talk, and patiently he did.

Then, getting off the bed, he pretended to examine himself, and said over his shoulder, 'Avis, I have a little blood on me. You may be bleeding down there.'

'I never have - except when I have my monthly, and I'm not due.'

'I think you did this time. I'd better have a look at you.'

'Oh, do I have to get up? It's so cosy here. I feel fine. A little sleepy, maybe, that's all.'

Holmes had stepped into his trousers. 'This'll be no more than a minute or two. I've got to see where your bleeding is coming from. Come on, let's go to my examining room.'

Avis sat up and stretched. 'If you insist.'

'I do.'

'Should I put on my nightgown?'

'No. I can examine you as you are. Then you can sleep. Come along, Avis.'

Dutifully, she left the bed, trailed him down the stairs, and followed him to a sliding door. He pressed a button to open the door and stepped into his secret chamber, beckoning her to follow him.

She came inside and surveyed the vast room. 'What a weird room.'

'I think patients prefer absolute privacy when they're being examined by a doctor.'

'Yes, that makes sense.'

Holmes signalled her to the examining-table at the centre of the room. 'Lie down here on your back.

I'll go and get my instruments.'

She was climbing on to the table as he left the room.

Delaying not a moment, he secured the sliding door. Then he rushed to his office, hurried to the control panel, and moved the top lever.

Gas would now be entering the chamber.

He sat down at his desk and leafed through several magazines. Presently he rose, shut off the gas and moved a second lever to release the gas from the room. He returned to his magazines, and, leisurely smoking his pipe, began to feel good. He had got rid of the dead-ass whore. He had her \$2,000 in cash. If the other girls at the Everleigh Club were as dumb as she, he would make a fortune in a few months.

He considered his watch. It was time to clear out the corpse.

Briskly, Holmes made for the sliding door, released it and it slid sideways.

Entering the chamber, he sniffed the air. He could detect only the slightest odour of gas. He marched straight to the examination table. The blob of flesh was still there, and on its back. Earlier he had thought her beautiful. Now, with eyes shut and mouth open, she looked repulsive. He felt for her pulse, then listened to her heart.

Dead as dead could be.

He moved over to the first trap door and yanked off the top. He returned to the table, pushed his hands and arms under her, and lifted her free.

She was small and easy to handle. He positioned the corpse over the trap, settled it on the greased chute, and let it go. Wobbling, the body disappeared from sight.

Pulling the adjoining trap door wide, Holmes eased himself on to the narrow staircase, and climbed down to the basement.

Without a thought, Holmes followed the procedure he had used so many times in the last few years.

He lifted Avis off the floor, carried her to the vat of quicklime, and dumped her into it. After much of her flesh had dissolved, he emptied the tub of the quicklime in the sink, and still wearing rubber gloves, he carried the distasteful remains to the examination table.

Tearing off his gloves, he found his scalpel and returned to the corpse that had once been the trusting Avis.

He cut into her with a practised hand.

It took him twenty minutes to dismember her completely.

There was a fire in the kiln, low burning, which Holmes stoked and fed with coal and wood until it was a red-hot blaze. Then he took the seven parts of Avis, one by one, from the table, feeding each one to the flames.

When he was finished, he cleaned up the basement. Once it was spotless, he climbed back up to the gas chamber. He closed both trap doors.

Satisfied that everything was orderly and clean, Dr Holmes walked out of the chamber, closed it tight, and crossed the hallway to his office.

Settling behind his desk, he reached into a drawer and withdrew the \$2,000 in bills he had earned tonight.

He began to count them one by one, making sure that she had not short-changed him.

Minna Everleigh, seated in her office with Aida, was deeply distressed.

'First Fanny,' she said to Aida, 'and now Avis. They both just took off and disappeared. Why?

Could they have been

offered better jobs?' 'Not in this city,' said Aida. 'Nobody in Chicago pays better than we do.'

'Then what is it? Well, whatever it is we've got to replace them. At least one of them, to start with.

We've booked a big crowd this evening, and we can't disappoint our customers. 'I have a long list 54

of girl applicants —' 'Not classy enough,' said Minna. She was thoughtful a moment. 'But I know one young lady who is. Fresh and a real beauty. Karen Grant, the one who worked in New Orleans.

I told you about her last night.' 'The tall one without a blemish?'

'Exactly. I think I'll call her right now. I have the phone number at her rooming house.'

Minna rummaged about her desk top until she found Karen's telephone number.

'Here it is,' Minna said. 'I'll tell her she's hired, subject to Dr Holmes's examination, of course. I'll tell her to come right over and bring a few things.'

Minna took the receiver off the hook, and spoke to the operator, giving her Karen's number.

After a few rings, Minna was pleased to hear a female voice answer. 'Hello?'

'I'd like to talk to Karen Grant.' 'This is Karen Grant.' 'Minna Everleigh here.'

'Yes. I hope that you're calling with good news.' 'I certainly am, Karen,' said Minna. 'The girl I expected to return before noon never showed up. We can use you as a permanent replacement starting tonight. Are you still interested?'

'I'm very interested.'

'Wonderful. But I remind you that you must first be examined by the Everleigh Club physician, Dr Herman Holmes. Can you make it about five o'clock? I'll get him over here, and if you're fine, you can go right to work in Fanny's room. We get a flood of customers between six and seven. Oh, yes, bring a suitcase of your best things. Two dressy changes, underthings, your own silk robe, if you have one.' 'I have one, Miss Everleigh.' 'Then I'll expect you, Karen.' 'I can't wait.'

Minna hung up, and spoke to Aida. 'She seemed eager. She said she couldn't wait to get started. I think she's one of those girls who loves her work. That would be a break for us.'

'What about Dr Holmes?' asked Aida. 'I intend to call him right now.' A minute later, Minna had Dr Holmes on the phone. 'Dr Holmes? This is Minna Everleigh.' 'I'm delighted. Anything I can do for you?' Minna's tone was firm, persuasive. 'Indeed there is something, Doctor, something important. I know that you were here the last two days doing your weekly examination. But I'd like to have you here once more today. It's important. We're hiring a new girl. She seems perfectly well, but I've got to be sure. I'd like you to look her over. I'm positive you can do it in less than fifteen minutes. I hate to bother you for a third day in a row, but we want this girl to start right away.' 'No bother. What time would you like me at the Club?' 'Around five. I trust you will be done with your office patients by then.'

There was a silence as Holmes obviously consulted his appointment book. 'As a matter of fact,' said Holmes, 'I'm scheduled to see two patients between four-thirty and five. But neither has a problem that can't wait. I'll postpone them. I'll come by very close to five.'

'Aida and I appreciate that, Dr Holmes. See you in a few hours.'

As the time neared four-thirty in the afternoon, Karen began to have an attack of nerves.

She had packed her bag. She had dressed herself in her most becoming garment. She was ready to take the streetcar to the Everleigh Club.

Yet she wasn't ready.

She had no concern about the doctor's examination. Her one concern was the scene that would follow after the doctor left. There would be a strange man she would have to take to bed. A stranger who would make love to her without love. She regretted that she had recklessly volunteered for this role. She wondered what had motivated her. She wanted to help Mayor Carter Harrison, of that she was sure. The mayor had once been kind to her mother, and she wanted to repay him. Also, since none of his male staff could assist the mayor, she had wanted to show those men and the mayor that a woman could do what their colleague, Gus Varney, clearly had failed to do.

The mayor had warned her that she might be unable to handle the disagreeable job. Offhandedly, she had assured him that she could get out of any situation before something truly dreadful happened.

Now she was less certain. She was afraid that what awaited her might be ugly, repulsive, and that her own lack of experience might lead to a terrible episode.

Still, there was one thing to feel triumphant about. She had made it with her own good looks and intelligence into the leading brothel in the world.

Standing in the entrance hall of her boarding house, she realized that she should inform Mayor Harrison of her initial success.

She had spoken to him yesterday, after her first interview

with Minna Everleigh. She had been able to tell him the meeting had gone well, but that she did not know for sure whether she would be hired. Despite the apprehension in his voice, the mayor had not been able to hide his pleasure at her progress and the possibility that he would have an informer inside the Everleigh Club.

Now, even if briefly, the mayor must know that Minna had accepted her for immediate employment.

She rang through to City Hall, and shortly after she had Harrison on the telephone.

'Mayor, this is Karen Grant.'

'Hello, Karen. Are you all right?'

'Better than all right. I'm calling from my rooming house, but I'm about to move into the Everleigh Club. I'm going to sublet my apartment for a short time to a woman friend. Depending on a clean bill of health from their doctor, I've been hired as one of the Everleigh girls.'

'Karen, I don't want you to get into trouble.'

'Don't worry, Mayor, I can handle myself.'

'Be careful. Be very careful.'

When Karen reached the Everleigh Club with her suitcase, she was greeted warmly by Minna Everleigh.

'I'm so glad you decided to be part of our happy family, Karen,' Minna said. 'Dr Holmes hasn't arrived yet. He should be here any minute. Meanwhile, you can go upstairs to bedroom seven - the one Fanny vacated - and undress completely for the examination.'

Karen hesitated. 'Do I have to undress completely? I've had intimate examinations before. The doctors always let me keep my blouse on. Couldn't I do that, and just let down my skirts?'

Minna frowned. 'No, I should prefer that you take off everything. Dr Holmes may want to examine your breasts. Why this sudden attack of shyness? You said you're experienced. You undressed completely for me yesterday.'

'That was different. You're a woman and I haven't been with a man for a while.'

Minna took her arm and gave it a reassuring squeeze. 'Karen, in this house you are going to be undressing completely every evening, for men only. So get used to it again.'

'You're right. I'm sorry, Miss Everleigh —'

'Minna. We're all one company now.'

'Minna, then.'

'It's not as if you haven't already been seen naked by dozens of men,' Minna went on. 'You did say you had experience in New Orleans.'

Karen gave a short laugh, aware that Minna was eyeing her keenly. 'I was being silly,' said Karen.

'It must be the change of scenery - a new place. Don't worry, Minna. No problem. Room seven upstairs -'

'That's the one. After you take off your things, you can put on your robe. I'll bring the doctor up as soon as he gets here.'

Karen went up the stairs, and at the landing she walked along the corridor until she found her room.

Inside, she rested her suitcase on a straight chair, unlatched it, and found her purple silk robe.

Slowly, reluctantly, she began to take off her garments, wondering how she would get out of this place unscathed. When she was naked, she slipped into her robe, then moved around the boudoir nervously, examining all the fancy furnishings and accessories.

Another five minutes had passed when Karen heard a knock on the door.

She whirled about just as Minna entered, followed by a striking, bearded man carrying a medical bag.

'Karen,' Minna said, 'this is Dr Herman Holmes. He'll examine you right now. I'm sure he won't be long —'

Holmes's eyes were fixed on Karen as he spoke to Minna. 'Fifteen minutes, no more.'

'All right, I'll leave you two,' said Minna. 'I'll be back for

your report, Dr Holmes. And Karen, you'll have a little while to rest before I bring up your first customer. In fact, when the doctor leaves, I want to give you my standard lecture.'

'Your lecture?' said Karen.

'On how to deport yourself with the men who visit you in the Everleigh Club.'

With that, Minna went out of the bedroom, and Karen was left alone with Dr Holmes.

He took his eyes off her and busied himself with his medical bag. He called out, 'Take off your robe, Karen. Sit on the side of the bed. I will examine your breasts first. Later, you will lie back on the bed with your knees bent and your legs spread wide. We must be certain you have no sign of venereal disease.'

'I do not have a venereal disease, Doctor.'

'Let me decide that, young lady.'

With a sigh, Karen pulled off her robe, walked up to the brass bed, and sat on its side.

She realized that Dr Holmes, speculum in hand, had turned from his bag and was watching her.

He advanced towards her, came to a halt before her, then stood over her, his dark blue eyes hypnotically fixed on her body.

'I will say this, Karen,' he began. 'You are certainly a beautiful specimen. I must remember to congratulate Minna Everleigh on her good taste.'

'Thank you.'

'I've examined all the girls in this establishment, and I confess you are by far the most beautiful.'

'I... I don't know what to say.'

'Just be happy to know how men will enjoy you. You should do very well here.'

'I... I hope so.'

'I can guarantee it.' Placing his speculum on the bed, Dr Holmes reached for her bosom. 'Here, let me feel your breasts for anything unusual.'

With effort, Karen thrust her full breasts out as Dr Holmes cupped one and then the other and lightly squeezed. Then, he used both hands to play over her breasts. Over and over his fingers fanned out from her nipples. 'Do you have to keep doing that?' Karen demanded. Dr Holmes ignored her, continuing to move his long fingers over the firm expanse of each breast. 'Absolutely soft, smooth, plump. I can assure you and Minna there's nothing to worry about. Now please lie back on the bed, then spread your legs — wider, my dear — and I'll have a look.'

Flushing with shame, Karen dropped on her back, and then gave in to the pressure of the doctor's hands as he pried her legs fully apart.

He reached for his speculum and bent down on to his knees between her thighs.

She could feel his warm breath on her.

He clucked his tongue. 'Perfect, perfect,' he said in an undertone. 'As healthy as any woman I have ever set eyes upon. Let me go deeper.'

She could feel the touch of his speculum. His inspection was interminable.

'Can't you hurry it up?' she protested.

'I have to be very certain.'

At last he seemed to be done.

'You can sit up now,' he told her.

As she sat up, he rose, and she felt something hard touch her knee. She looked to see what it was, and she saw that a portion of his trousers was protruding, covering a mammoth erection. Appalled, she averted her eyes, and he turned to place his speculum into the bag.

'Well?' asked Karen. 'Surely there's nothing wrong.'

He answered quietly, 'In a sense, there is something wrong, Karen.'

'What do you mean?'

'It is my understanding that to get a job for the Everleigh sisters, you have to be experienced.'

'Yes, that's right.'

Dr Holmes regarded her with a crooked smile. 'You're not experienced, young lady. You've never had a man. You're a virgin.'

'That's a lie.'

'Not according to my examination. Your hymen is still intact,'

'There must be a mistake,' Karen said falteringly.

'No mistake whatsoever,' Holmes went on smoothly. 'You lied about your experience to get this job. Yet the first man to penetrate you — if he's a customer — can cost you your job. He'll notice blood spots on the sheet, and be confused, and probably report to Minna or Aida. You'll lose your job in a minute. Now, it might be possible to prevent that.'

'How?'

'I can inform Minna I want you to accompany me to my office, and I can change your condition.'

'Do you mean surgically?'

'No. There's only one proper way to break a hymen. It would be enjoyable for both of us — and you'd be experienced. I could -'

'If you're saying what I think you're saying,' Karen interrupted heatedly, 'the answer is no! I wouldn't let you near me. You're supposed to be a doctor, not a —'

'I am a doctor, and thinking only of your own good.'

'You're a lecher.' She came to her feet and pulled on her silk robe. 'I'll accept you as a doctor, but not as anything else. I'll take my chances on - on my lack of experience.'

'Whatever you wish, Karen. I certainly have no intention of costing you your job. But I'm afraid you may lose it yourself. Anyway, I want you to know that I am not a lecher or something worse, only a professional you can count upon as a friend.'

Karen remained silent, when there was a rapping on the door.

'Come in!' Dr Holmes called out.

Minna Everleigh entered, glanced at Karen, and then held her gaze on Dr Holmes.

'Did you complete your examination?' Minna inquired.

'You are right on time,' said Holmes, picking up his bag. 'I gave Karen a thorough examination.

She's in perfect condition. Healthy and sound. You need have no concern on her behalf.'

Minna relaxed her shoulders. 'That's a relief. Thanks a lot, Doctor.'

'It was a pleasure,' said Dr Holmes. He winked at Karen. 'I enjoyed being with you. I'm pleased you are well.'

'Thank you,' Karen mumbled weakly.

They both watched a cheerful Dr Holmes depart.

Once the bedroom door had closed, Minna gestured Karen to a chair and sat down across from her.

'You have about an hour before your first customer arrives,' said Minna. 'Before that happens, I want to discuss your deportment here. The key to everything in this house is to remember you are a desirable young lady, not just some floozy off the street. If you want to remain an Everleigh girl, you must, when with a visitor, always be polite, be patient, and forget what you are here for.'

Minna took out a cigarette and lit it.

'Gentlemen who come here are gentlemen only when properly introduced,' Minna resumed. 'We shall see that each girl is correctly presented to each guest. In the Everleigh Club, there is no lining up for selection, as is the practice in other brothels. There shall be no cry from Aida or myself,

"Into the parlour, girls," when guests arrive. I'll personally accompany each man up to your boudoir and formally introduce you. After that, you'll be on your own. On other occasions, when there is more leisure, I'll request that you dress in your most becoming finery and come downstairs first to amuse our guests in a parlour or at supper. Above all, the one thing I ask is that you be attentive to your callers' needs. Remember one thing. The Everleigh Club has not time for the rough element, the clerk on a holiday, or a person without a chequebook. We have time only for gentlemen.'

Minna's cigarette had gone out and she lit it again.

'It is going to be difficult for you at first, I know, no matter how much experience you've had previously. Don't rush anyone and don't consider rolling them. We will permit no monkeyshines, no knockout drops, no robberies, no crudity of any kind whatsoever. Our task will be to supply the clients. Your task will be to amuse them in a way that they've never been amused before. Give, but give interestingly and with mystery. Karen, I want you to be proud you are in the Ever-leigh Club.

An hour from now, after I introduce you to your first client, you'll know you belong here.'

Throughout this recital, and especially Minna's last reminder that shortly she would be alone with a strange man, Karen had been quivering with fright. Soon, she would be cornered by a customer and expected to perform as a prostitute. There was plenty of verbal evidence, from Minna, that the Everleigh Club was still a brothel, but Karen did not possess the substantial evidence that would enable the mayor to shut the place down. The real evidence would come when a paying guest would strip off his clothes and get into bed with her. The thought was horrifying.

Karen hardly listened as Minna continued to speak. 'In addition to what I've told you, there are a few minor things you should know about your conduct in the Club. One of these is that -'

Minna was interrupted by a sharp rapping on the door. The door opened and Aida came in, carrying a note, her countenance ashen.

'Minna, I've got to speak to you at once,' Aida began. 'It's urgent.'

'Can't it wait a few minutes?'

'No,' said Aida firmly. 'Do you know who just walked in with their luggage and are waiting downstairs? Cathleen and Bruce!'

'Who?' asked Minna, bewildered.

'Cathleen and Bruce Lester, our niece and nephew from Kentucky. Charlie's children.'

Minna was more bewildered than ever. 'What are they doing here?'

'They've come to move in with us for two weeks. Until Cathleen is married to Harold T.

Armbruster's son, Alan.'

Minna was aghast. 'But they can't stay here -'

'I know they can't - but they're going to. We knew about it some time ago. That the Armbrusters had been down in Kentucky, and their son had met Cathleen and fallen in love with her, and that they were going to be married. Their father asked if we'd stand up for the kids -'

'I remember,' said Minna. 'I wrote Charlie a quick note saying, "Send them along." But I only meant we'd stand up for Cathleen at the wedding. God, I didn't mean for them to stay with us here.'

Aida waved a letter in her hand. 'Their father sent this along with Cathleen. He wants his daughter and son to live with their wealthy socialite aunts in Chicago until the wedding. A hotel won't do.

Even though their family in Kentucky is church mouse poor, they must give evidence of being well-off and respectable. All through the years we used to tell our brother we were rich socialites living in a huge mansion. Well, Charlie took us at our word, and now he's sent his children to stay in the mansion with their aunts. They're here now, Minna, and they can't be sent away. We have to live with this pretext for two weeks, until the wedding is over and Cathleen and Bruce are out of our hair. What should we do?'

Minna stood between Aida and Karen, lost in thought.

'We're trapped with our lie,' said Minna. 'We've got to play being their wealthy, respectable aunts, and we have to give them the hospitality of our mansion. Let me think -' She thought further. Then she addressed Aida. 'First things first. Have Edmund immediately post a sign on the front door announcing that our restaurant is open for business. A

floor show will be provided for diners, but other services will be unavailable until further notice.

The parlours themselves are closed for two weeks for remodelling. No men are to be permitted upstairs for the length of Cathleen and Bruce's stay.'

'But our girls?'

'They can remain as part of a restaurant floor show. Nothing more. Send two of them away on vacation and turn their bedrooms over to Cathleen and Bruce. Aida, you round up the girls at once and explain the situation. I want them to be sure there is not one word alluding to what they truly do here. They are dancers and singers entertaining supper guests - period. Do you have that straight? And get that sign on the front door.'

'Can I tell the girls they'll be paid?'

'We must pay them their usual income,' said Minna, 'no matter what the financial loss to ourselves.

The main thing is to keep Cathleen and Bruce believing we are actually respected socialites and this is our fancy home. We'll tell them that we conduct a fashionable high-class restaurant to keep

ourselves busy. Now off you go, at once. Gather the girls and tell them the truth and what we expect of them. I'll go down and greet Cathleen and Bruce.'

Aida darted to the door and raced away.

About to follow her from the room, Minna stopped, suddenly aware that Karen was in the boudoir.

'You heard it all, Karen, so you know what's going on. I know you expected your first customer to come to you in a little while. I'm sorry, but no man tonight or any night for two weeks. Get dressed, and come downstairs and join the other girls while Aida organizes you into some semblance of a floor show.' She held the doorknob. 'I am sorry about this turn of events, Karen. Even though you're new, you'll be well paid. You'll be better paid later. But for now, keep your chin up - and your bloomers too.'

FIVE

When Minna came down the stairs to the foyer, she saw the two of them waiting, suitcases beside them. Minna had not seen the pair since they were children, but she knew at once that these grown-ups were her niece and nephew, Cathleen and Bruce Lester.

Approaching them, Minna saw that Cathleen looked as she herself had looked not many years ago.

The girl was no taller than herself- meaning Cathleen was small, with blonde hair, luminous eyes, and a button nose set nicely in an innocent, smooth face. She was small-bosomed, slender, composed, not more than nineteen years old. The boy was older, probably twenty-two, with a shock of chestnut hair, brown eyes, pug nose, and a square jaw. He was quite tall, maybe six feet, and trim but obviously muscular.

'Cathleen!' Minna called out.

The girl smiled nervously.

Minna went straight to her and hugged her. 'I'm your Aunt Minna. How wonderful to see you at last and to have you in our home.'

Disengaging herself from Cathleen, Minna moved to her nephew and embraced him too. 'Bruce, you've grown - I don't know how many feet - since I last saw you in Louisville. Welcome to Lester House.'

'It's hospitable of you to have us in,' said Bruce.

'And what a joy for us. Now, you two, come along with me,' said Minna, taking each by a hand.

'Don't worry about your bags. I'll have a servant take them to your rooms, but first we'll have a little talk in the parlour. I want to get better acquainted with both of you.'

Minna led them into the Gold Room, which Minna

described as her favourite parlour, and one that she had decorated entirely by herself.

Entering the dazzling room, Cathleen held back for a moment, stunned by the glitter. 'It's — it's magnificent,' she whispered. 'That gold piano. I've never seen another like it.'

'I had it made in Paris some years ago,' said Minna.

Bruce went into the room more easily, less stunned than curious. 'Forgive me, Aunt Minna. Father told me you lived well, but I expected nothing like this.'

'I wish your father could see our place for himself,' said Minna, 'but he's never been to Chicago in all the time we've lived here.'

'You know he's not been ambulatory since his stroke,' said Bruce. 'Besides, he couldn't afford the trip.'

'Well, I intend to rectify that in the near future,' said Minna, leading the pair to a gold sofa. 'Do sit down, and let me sit where I can face both of you.'

After the two were seated, Minna settled easily across from them and resumed talking.

'We've been expecting you,' said Minna, 'because Charles wrote some time ago that Cathleen was coming to Chicago to be married, and that you, Bruce, would chaperon her. I know that your father would like us to look after you and stand beside Cathleen at the wedding. Frankly, I did not know he wanted the two of you to stay with us instead of in a hotel. Aida and I are delighted, of course —

but we hadn't been informed.'

'If this is any inconvenience at all. . .' Cathleen began.

'No, absolutely not,' Minna interrupted.

'Better let me explain,' Bruce intervened, coming forward. 'Since we are family, I can be frank.

Father's law practice is almost non-existent. He's been too ill to attend to it properly. Since Mother died and then his stroke, he seems to have lost all his spirit. We still have the old house, but we may have to sell that soon. In truth, Father is almost penniless. I work in a bank to help out. It was all he could do to gather money to

send us up here for the wedding. But Pearl and Harold T. Armbruster don't know that. They set much store by appearances. To reassure them that we're a good family and to impress them, Father wrote you that note asking you to take us in.'

Minna bobbed her head. 'Aida told me about it.'

'Father felt that if we could stay with his sisters, and circulate high up on the social scale — and if we could live under conditions the Armbrusters would find acceptable — it would cause no doubt in their minds that Cathleen was eligible for marriage to their son. Actually, Alan is very much in love with Cathleen. He would have no reservations whatsoever. However, parents can be a different matter. The Armbrusters are impressed by Cathleen's attractiveness and grace. Father had sent her to private schools -'

'Just as I had been educated,' said Minna. 'God knows that good manners count even more than money

in the South.'

'But not necessarily poverty,' said Bruce bluntly. 'I'm sorry to say this, but it's important to the Armbrusters that Cathleen be from a good family — meaning a well-to-do family.'

'I understand,' said Minna. A frown flitted across her face as she considered the situation. She began to reconsider how to handle her niece and nephew to make the right impression on the Armbrusters. 'Tell me one thing — how did you happen to meet the Armbrusters?'

Cathleen brightened and briefly lost some of her shyness. 'Mr Armbruster is a very rich man. He's a meat-packer.'

'I've heard,' said Minna.

'He's eager for social standing in Chicago, the kind that Armour and Swift already have. Since a horse-racing stable is one symbol of prestige in Chicago, Mr Armbruster considered establishing his own stable. That's why he came down to Louisville with his wife, Pearl, and his two children, Alan and Judith. He was planning to buy the finest horses in

Kentucky. Someone sent him to Bruce, since Bruce has knowledge of the best horseflesh available.

Bruce even has three horses of his own.'

'They're not much,' Bruce confessed. 'Mr Armbruster wasn't interested, but I was able to guide him to other breeders.'

'I'm sure he was grateful,' interrupted Minna.

'Actually, one of my colts is exceptional - he's a three-year-old named Frontier. I spent much of what I earned as a bank clerk to enter Frontier in the American Derby in Chicago.'

'Why bring Frontier all the way up here for the American Derby?' Minna asked. 'Why not enter him in the Kentucky Derby in your own state?'

'For a good reason,' said Bruce. 'Money. The Kentucky Derby pays the winner under \$5,000. The American Derby pays \$25,000 - five times as much. Earning a large purse sure would help the family. Since then I've learned that Frontier just doesn't have the size and strength to do well in the American Derby. I had already arranged to have him shipped here. Now I hope to sell him off to raise some money.'

'Let's hope you succeed,' said Minna. She addressed herself to Cathleen. 'What a romantic way to meet the right man.'

'Yes, Aunt Minna. You'll adore him. He's nearly as tall as my brother. Darkly handsome. When we met, it was love at first sight for both of us.'

'You saw each other often in Louisville?' asked Minna.

'Almost every night for a month, but always with his parents,' said Cathleen. 'They liked me enough to allow Alan to propose. When the Armbrusters heard about my wealthy aunts in Chicago, they were highly pleased. The wedding is set for two weeks from now, at their home. Bruce and I just arrived this morning. First we found a stable for his horse, then we came right over.'

'You did the right thing,' said Minna. 'You can have the

run of the place, except for a lovely private restaurant we keep open for our friends.'

'May I ask — is that where you made your money?' said Bruce.

'Heavens, no. After we left Kentucky, we inherited a fairly decent sum of cash. We had good advice about investing it, and we doubled and redoubled our money. We bought this house and furnished it. It seemed a good idea to turn part of it into a restaurant, not only to take care of our overhead but as a means of entertaining our business friends. We also had parlours for cocktails and conversation. We even hired six women, singers and dancers we'd known in our stage days.

They put on floor shows in return for room and board. Now, to get back to the Armbrusters —'

'Oh, yes,' Cathleen said happily, 'Mr and Mrs Armbruster are eager to meet you and Aunt Aida before the wedding. I hope you have time for that.'

'I do,' said Minna.

'They're hoping we can all have lunch at their home the day after tomorrow.'

'Aida and I will be happy to join you,' said Minna, rising. She gestured for Cathleen and Bruce to remain where they were. 'Just wait a little while until I can make arrangements to get you settled.

We'll have a quiet supper in my study later. Right now there are a few things that require my attention.'

Once she had left the Gold Room, Minna stopped a servant in the hall to ask if he had seen Edmund. She was told that Edmund was dusting in the library, and she went to find him.

'Edmund,' she said. 'Do you know where my sister is?'

'Yes, Miss Everleigh -'

'There is to be no more mention of the Everleigh name,' Minna said sharply. 'Not while my relatives are here. We're Aida and Minna Lester for the next two weeks. You know the situation, don't you?'

'Miss Aida told me to post a sign, and then she explained everything.'

'Good. Where is Aida now?'

'In the Japanese Room with all the girls, Miss Lester. She's giving them the same instructions she gave me.'

'Thanks, Edmund. I better get there fast,'

When Minna reached the Japanese Room, she paused to catch her breath, and then quietly opened the door and peered inside. Aida was the one who first met her eyes. Aida was seated on the carved teakwood chair on the dais beneath the yellow silk canopy. In a broad semi-circle were the girls of the Everleigh Club, seated on divans, chairs, and cushions, listening attentively as Aida spoke. The perfume fountain in the centre of the room was shut off.

After nodding a welcome to Minna, Aida resumed speaking. 'Now that you've heard what is going on and how we are to proceed, let me sum it up for you so that there can be no mistakes.'

Minna decided to intervene. She stepped into the Japanese Room and called out, 'Aida, may I break in with a few words?'

'Of course.'

Minna crossed the room and ascended the dais to stand beside Aida. She addressed her older sister.

'Aida, what we arranged so hastily has a few flaws. Now that I've spoken to Cathleen and Bruce, our niece and nephew, I have some afterthoughts, and would like to revise our plan.'

'Whatever you say,' said Aida agreeably.

Minna turned to face the small assemblage.

'I'm sure Aida has told you of our original plan to keep all of you here during this crisis. Well, I don't think that will work. With so many girls here, we and our relatives would be at great risk should one of you suffer a slip of the tongue. It would be hard for Aida and myself to pretend that this is our personal home. Furthermore, it would be difficult to pretend that you are all a floor show, since most of you can't sing or dance at all. I have a compromise in mind.'

She glanced at Aida, whose face registered only her usual gracious, slightly inscrutable expression.

Minna turned to the girls once more.

'We will keep the dining-room open. I have told our niece and nephew it is a room reserved for our wealthiest friends, a profitable enterprise that enables us to pay some of our overhead expenses.

Cathleen and Bruce understand the dining-room is off limits to them. I wouldn't want them to wander in and hear from some drunken diner that this is actually a brothel.

'As for you girls, I think six of you should remain here to play hostesses in the dining-room. No nonsense beyond that. The others can take vacations in the city. You will receive the full amount of your average weekly earnings. You can take up in hotels - although I instruct you to avoid any sexual activity on your own or in any other brothel - and do whatever else you want. You will return here to work in two weeks. Be sure to let Aida and myself know where you will be staying, so if need be we can locate you. Now, any questions?'

A redhead named Cindy held up her hand. 'Who stays on here, and who are the ones to go on vacation?'

'Very well,' said Minna. 'I'll name the six of you who remain to receive guests in the dining-room.

The others will leave as of this evening. Aida and I, with Edmund's help, will find you hotel rooms.

The six who'll stay are - you, Cindy, and Margo, Belle, Phyllis, Dagmar, and the new girl I just hired to replace Fanny - you, Karen. The rest of you, have a good time off, and be back here in two weeks to the day. Good luck.'

The following day, since she had the afternoon off, Karen Grant telephoned Mayor Carter Harrison and asked to meet with him.

An hour later, she was seated across from the mayor in his City Hall office.

'Some good news, I hope,' said Harrison.

'Not yet, but soon. There will be a slight delay before I can come up with any concrete evidence for you.'

'What do you mean?'

Karen went ahead. 'I was told to expect a visitor, a male visitor, when there was an unexpected intrusion. Two young relatives of the Everleigh sisters arrived from Kentucky, one of them a niece who is to marry the son of a prominent businessman.'

'Go on.'

'Well, the niece and nephew were sent to stay with their aunts. They were told the Everleigh sisters

are highly placed socialites. To keep the niece and nephew from knowing what their aunts really do, all sexual services in the Club have been postponed. For two weeks the Club is to be no more than a legitimate home and restaurant.'

'Two weeks! You mean that until then I can have no evidence that the Club is a brothel?'

'None whatsoever, Mayor. Let me explain —'

Carefully, Karen recalled what she had heard from Aida and Minna and tried to repeat what she could remember to the mayor.

'There you have it,' she said, and sat back. 'A hiatus.'

'For the time, a hiatus.'

'Yes, until the day after the wedding. The relatives will leave, and the Everleigh Club will resume as a brothel. So I'll have time on my hands. Do you want me to pick up on some of my secretarial work for you?'

'God, no,' said Harrison quickly. 'I don't want you seen near my office. You are to stay around the Club, work evenings as a restaurant hostess, and keep on the alert. When the time comes, and you get the evidence, inform me at once — I'll shut down the Everleigh Club for ever. Karen, I mean to win this one.'

'You will, I promise you.'

'Don't try to reach me or take any chances. Just wait. Do you mind?'

'Not at all. The Everleigh Club, whatever its shame, is, I have to admit, a fascinating place to be.

The gaudiest place you've ever seen in your life. I don't mind taking it easy there. And Minna Everleigh herself is an interesting person. By the way, her real name is Minna Lester. Her niece and nephew are Cathleen and Bruce Lester.' Karen picked up her purse. 'I'll keep an eye on all of them.

Next time I see you, I hope I'll be the bearer of good tidings.'

Karen left the mayor's office and went downstairs to the lobby. She was heading for the exit doors, when a young man - a tall, handsome young man — intercepted her.

'Pardon me, Ma'am,' he said in a courtly manner. 'By any chance are you Miss Karen Grant?'

Startled, she said, 'Why, yes.'

'I'm Bruce Lester,' he said, introducing himself. 'I'm Minna Lester's nephew.'

For an instant, Karen was shaken. 'Minna Lester? Of course,' she said lamely.

'I saw you briefly yesterday, and again this morning, at my aunts' house.'

'I... I remember seeing you.'

'You're working for my Aunt Minna as a staff member in the restaurant.'

'A hostess,' she corrected him. 'I assist the guests to their seats and help them with their menus. And you — you're in Chicago to chaperon your sister until her wedding?'

'Yes. My father in Kentucky wanted us to stay with his sisters when we came to Chicago, so that's what we're doing. Actually, chaperoning is not the only reason I'm here.'

'Oh, no?'

'I have a very modest stable of three race horses, and I'm here to possibly sell one.'

'I'd like to know more about that some time,' said Karen. 'I'm fascinated by race horses.'

Bruce was entranced. 'That's wonderful,' he said. 'I'd like to tell you more, not some time but now.'

Have you had lunch?'

'Not yet.'

'Neither have I. Do you mind joining me?'

She met Bruce's gaze. 'I'd enjoy that.'

'On my way to the City Hall, I passed a place called Bill Boyle's Chop House. A sign said the lamb chops were thirty-five cents, so it must be a good place. Do you know it?'

'I do.' She had been there several times. It was a favourite lunch place for Mayor Harrison's aldermen. 'Let's go to Boyle's.' As they left the lobby, she half turned to Bruce. 'Incidentally, what were you doing in City Hall?'

'Sightseeing. This is my first visit to Chicago. What were you doing here?'

She thought quickly. 'I don't have to be at the restaurant until dinner time. So I decided to visit a girl friend who just got a job here as a secretary.'

'I'm glad we were here at the same time,' said Bruce, as he touched Karen's elbow, directing her outside.

It was a short walk to Boyle's Chop House, but for Bruce Lester it was mostly a silent one, he was so overwhelmed by his gorgeous companion.

Once inside, and seated opposite Karen, Bruce tried to find his tongue as he gave the waiter their order. He ordered lamb chops for both of them, and when Karen requested a stein of Pilsner beer, he ordered one for himself too.

After the waiter had gone, he addressed himself to Karen. 'I love my aunts' home, what I've seen of it, but I find the restaurant there rather odd. What's a restaurant doing in a home?'

'From what I know,' said Karen, 'your aunts are two single ladies. They'd find it awkward to invite gentlemen over, so the restaurant makes it easier for them to see friends at home. Also, even though Minna and Aida are wealthy, that's a costly mansion they have to keep up day after day, and the restaurant brings in certain useful income.'

Bruce shook his head. 'I still find it odd, mixing business and pleasure. How did you get a job there?'

'I saw an advertisement for a restaurant hostess. I worried that it might be something - well, not decent -'

'You mean like a cover for white slavery?'

'Nothing quite that terrible. But still - anyway, I applied. When Minna Lester interviewed me, I realized that she was a lady and the desire to hire a hostess was genuine. So I started a few days ago.'

'What do you do on the job?'

'As I told you,' said Karen, 'just smile prettily when diners arrive, take them to a parlour for a drink, then show them to their tables, see to their menus, make suggestions, maybe banter a little to make them feel at home.'

'That's all? Do any of the diners ever get fresh?'

'Not really. Minna would never have them back. She's very strict.'

'But you only work evenings,' said Bruce. 'Which gives you your mornings and afternoons free. I hope you'll take some time to show me Chicago. Or are you new here?'

She smiled. 'I'm old here. I'll be glad to show you around.'

They waited in silence until their beers were served.

After each had a sip, Karen resumed. 'First, you'll have to show me something - the horse you brought along.'

'I'd be pleased to do that,' said Bruce. 'Frontier is as sleek as can be, and fast. You'll adore him.'

Only, there's a problem. Before leaving Kentucky I entered him in the American Derby. I guess I was trying to get rich quick. But when I took him to Washington Park yesterday to rent a stable, I found out Frontier is too small to get anywhere in the Derby. So I suppose I'll really have to sell him.'

'Don't do that until I've seen him.'

'I won't, I won't. Actually, I'd invite you to Washington Park tomorrow to see him, but I can't because I have another date, an important one, I suppose.'

Karen frowned briefly. 'A date?'

'Not what you think,' he said hastily. 'I'm not interested in any other woman, not now that I've met you.'

'Aren't you the flatterer, though.'

'I mean it, Karen. I've never met a woman like you.'

'Thank you. Tell me about your date.'

'It's at my sister's future in-laws' for lunch. Aunt Minna and Aunt Aida and I are to chaperon my sister Cathleen, and after lunch we'll discuss the wedding. The Armbrusters want to lay out plans for the ceremony - it's in two weeks.'

'Have you met the Armbrusters before?' Karen wanted to know.

'In Kentucky, when they were thinking of going into horseflesh.'

'How do you feel about them?'

Bruce Lester wrinkled his nose. 'Alan is a nice kid. The rest of them, Harold T., the father, Pearl, the mother, and their daughter Judith are awful.'

'I hope you survive the lunch.'

'I have to,' said Bruce simply. 'Because I want to see you again.'

The lamb chops were served, but they ignored their plates.

'Will I?' Bruce added.

'As much as you want to, Bruce.'

'Then we have a date for the day after tomorrow.'

That evening, Minna brought Dr Herman Holmes into the Blue Room of the Everleigh Club.

Already familiar with the youthful collegiate room, Holmes settled into the pillows of a blue leather sofa as Minna drew up a chair closer to him.

Minna had telephoned the physician earlier, insisting he come to the Club to discuss a personal matter.

'I've never seen the Club so deserted,' said Holmes to Minna, who had settled across from him.

'There's a reason,' said Minna, 'and that's why I summoned you tonight, to tell you all about it. I hired you because I was told you were trustworthy. Now I must trust you to the fullest extent.'

'You advised me this was a personal matter, and personal it shall remain.'

'Very well,' said Minna. 'This is what happened. I have a lovely niece, Cathleen, my brother's daughter in Kentucky. She is a complete innocent. She recently met the son of a prominent Chicago meat-packer in Louisville. The young man's name is Alan Armbruster, the only son of Harold T. Armbruster.'

'You mean the millionaire meat-packer?' asked Holmes.

'The very one. Anyway, Alan fell in love with my niece, they became engaged, and they are to be married in two weeks. I knew about the wedding, but it was not made clear to me that my brother expected Cathleen, as well as his son Bruce, to stay with Aida and myself.'

'They're here?' said Holmes, surprised. 'How can you handle that?'

'I can't, and yet I can,' said Minna. 'My brother Charlie has never been in Chicago. He has no idea what Aida and I really do. He believes, as we led him to believe from the start, that Aida and I made a fortune through investments, bought this mansion, and are part of Chicago's best society. So it seemed reasonable to send his daughter and son to stay with us until the wedding.'

Holmes was truly astonished. 'But they'll find out in a jiffy what goes on here.'

'I don't intend to let them find out,' said Minna. 'I've practically cleared out the Club. Gave most of the girls vacations and kept six here to serve as dining-room hostesses. I advised everyone, the servants included, of my problem. Now I felt it was necessary to tell you also. There must be no loopholes.'

'You can depend on my silence, Minna. You know that.'

'For the next two weeks, I am Minna Lester and my sister is Aida Lester - our maiden names.'

'Of course.' Holmes squirmed on the sofa. 'What am I to do in the meantime?'

'You are not to set foot in the Everleigh Club until you are summoned. You will still earn your fee by attending my girls who have been put on vacation. I'll give you a list of hotels where they are hiding out. You will continue to examine them. I want to be assured they are not working on the side and contaminating themselves.'

Holmes was pleased. 'Certainly fair enough.'

Minna rose. 'Come along. We'll drink to it in my study.'

The next morning at eleven-thirty, the four Lesters, in Minna's new Ford, drove up North Shore Drive along the quiet waters of Lake Michigan, swung on to Lake Park Avenue, and went through open metal gates. The semicircular driveway ahead of them led to the entrance of the brick mansion that was the home of Harold T. Armbruster.

They had all spent the morning dressing for the critical occasion.

As usual, Minna was the most flamboyantly dressed. She was wearing a diamond dog collar, a stomacher studded with emeralds, a long gown of rich blue silk, with four diamond bracelets rattling on one wrist. Aida was similarly attired, but wore only a pearl necklace that had belonged to their mother. Cathleen, as befitted her age and virginal state, was the most simply dressed, in a 70

pleated white linen blouse and brown skirt. Bruce was neatly attired in a straw hat, celluloid collar, new twenty-five-cent black necktie, and expensive seventy-five-cent checked shirt he had purchased at Mandel Brothers.

They had been squeezed together in the car, since room had to be made for Edmund to chauffeur them. Descending from the Ford, Minna led the way up the marble steps.

Admitted by a butler into the foyer, the guests were re-

ceived in the garish living-room by Harold T. Armbruster himself. Armbruster was flanked by his top-heavy, dumpy wife, Pearl, and his two offspring. Judith Armbruster looked somewhat like Abe Lincoln, Minna decided - not bad for Lincoln himself, but not as good for an eligible girl in her twenties. Alan, on the other hand, while above medium height and seemingly strong enough, had a faint, ethereal quality, somewhat like Keats. Minna liked him at once.

Cathleen was greeted with handshakes by Armbruster and his wife. Alan greeted her more warmly with a chaste peck on one cheek. Then Cathleen introduced her aunts, Minna and Aida Lester, with whom she and Bruce were staying while in Chicago.

'Well, well,' boomed Armbruster, 'this is a happy group.' Then addressing himself to Minna, he said, 'Cathleen tells us you and your sister are prominent in social circles here. I can't recall ever having met you.'

'We don't circulate much,' replied Minna. 'We devote ourselves to artistic pursuits and charities. It might be accurate to say we are recluses, two widows alone.'

'A pity,' said Armbruster. 'You're both too attractive to remove yourselves from society. To make you feel more at home, perhaps you'd like to have a look about?'

Armbruster plodded ahead of them as he led his party through the main downstairs rooms. There was a ballroom which could be converted into a theatre. There were several parlours. They visited the

music room, which featured a rosewood piano - quite grand, Minna thought, but nowhere comparable to her own gold piano at the Club. At last they arrived in the large library, done up with imported ebony reading tables inlaid with gold. There were few books in the library. The walls were mostly covered by Gobelin tapestries, and, incongruously, Minna thought, a huge framed painting of a scene from Armbruster's own stockyards.

Insisting that they all relax on the French Empire sofas in the library, Armbruster rang a bell. A maid and butler

appeared immediately, one to serve pate de foie gras, the other to pour Veuve Clicquot.

Sipping his drink, Armbruster said, 'I thought we might have a little get-acquainted talk before we go in to lunch.'

'Where should we begin?' Minna said pertly.

'With your niece's wedding to our son Alan, I should think,' Armbruster answered. 'The ballroom you just saw is where the wedding will take place. I've already secured the services of a Lutheran minister, if that is suitable to Cathleen.'

'I'm a Baptist,' Cathleen said.

'No matter,' said Armbruster decisively. 'We all pray to the same God, don't we?'

'I guess so,' said Cathleen weakly.

'We'll be entertaining 200 guests, the most important people in Chicago. I assume you have your wedding gown, Cathleen?'

Minna took over. 'Cathleen has a lovely white lace and satin gown that Aida and I have picked out for her at Marshall Field's. It needs only to be fitted.'

'Capital!' Armbruster exclaimed. 'The wedding will be formal, of course, because it will be a special occasion beyond the ceremony itself. Prince Henry of Prussia will be in Chicago on that date, and I'm making every effort to have him attend the wedding as an honoured guest.'

'Has he accepted?' Minna wondered.

'I believe Mayor Harrison has just presented the prince's Chicago schedule to his aides in Washington. I should have confirmation before the prince and his party arrive here by train from New York. I have little doubt that the prince will be delighted to be the honoured guest at the banquet in our home.'

'That would be a feather in your cap,' said Aida, speaking up.

'More than that, far more than that,' agreed Armbruster, rubbing his dry hands together. 'I'll tell you something else

that would be a feather in my cap, indeed, in all our caps.' He turned to address Bruce directly.

'Bruce, my daughter Judith has urged me to bring you into my firm once you're part of the family.'

Bruce blinked at him, taken off guard. 'You . . . you're very generous, Mr Armbruster,' he stuttered.

'I . . . I'm not sure what you mean - you mean once my sister marries your son.'

Armbruster laughed. 'More than that, far more,' Armbruster told him. 'I could see, down in Kentucky, that Judith was quite taken by you. Hardly a day has passed since our return to Chicago in which she hasn't mentioned your name.'

Judith blushed, and giggled. 'Oh, Father ...'

Armbruster ignored her, continuing to address Bruce. 'I also had an eye on you, Bruce, when you were with Judith, and I observed you were quite attentive to her.'

'He would be,' Minna hastily intervened. 'He's a Southern gentleman.'

'Well, I'm sure you won't have any difficulty making up your own mind, Bruce. For myself, I'd like Prince Henry to enjoy a rare experience, a beautiful double wedding. That accomplished, I feel

confident I could take you into the firm. I could make you quite a rich person, young man.'

'In your meat-packing company?' Bruce managed to say.

'As my vice-president.'

'You're most generous, sir,' said Bruce. 'I have only one problem with that.'

'What would that be?' Armbruster wanted to know.

'I'm considering becoming a vegetarian.'

Armbruster was puzzled. 'Vegetarian? I'm not sure . . .'

'It means abstaining from all animal food,' Minna interjected.

Bruce pressed forward. 'Last night I found Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in Aunt Minna's library. I read it.' Bruce began to recite from the expose of the meat-packing industry. ' "For once started on that journey, the hog never came back;

at the top of the wheel he was shunted off upon a trolley, and went sailing down the room . . . then dangling by a foot, and kicking in frenzy — and squealing. There were high squeals and low squeals, grunts and wails of agony" as the hog was brutally killed to be converted into pork chops and bacon. That, Mr Armbruster, upset me terribly.'

Armbruster's face had reddened, until he was almost apoplectic. 'Upton Sinclair!' he roared. 'That anarchist trying to destroy the free enterprise system, with his propaganda that some of my workers fell into the sausage machine and came out as sausage links. He's an anarchist, no more.'

Minna tried to soothe him. 'Mr Armbruster, I'd say Upton Sinclair was hardly alone. Vegetarians have ranged from Emanuel Swedenborg to Percy Bysshe Shelley to Count Leo Tolstoi.'

'All anarchists!' Armbruster bellowed. 'I couldn't consider a vegetarian in my company.' He glared at Bruce. 'You can't be serious. Maybe this is an immature eccentricity.'

'Well, maybe,' said Bruce uncertainly.

'I'm sure it is,' insisted Armbruster. 'After dinner, you have a little talk with Judith. She may be able to convince you better than I can. Help you mend the error of your ways. Which reminds me -'

Armbruster staggered to his feet. 'Luncheon is served.' He squinted down at Bruce. 'I know that Pearl has prepared a porterhouse steak and a salad. Do you think you can manage that?'

Bruce rose. 'I can say yes to the salad,' he promised. 'I'll decide on the steak when I'm faced with it.'

Rising, Minna told herself that she must restrain her nephew. A vice-presidency in the Armbruster Company was not to be passed up lightly, especially when her brother in Kentucky was facing bankruptcy. Of course, the price for compliance was not only renouncing vegetarianism, but also marrying Judith. Minna decided that she would have to give all of this more thought.

As Armbruster took her arm to lead her into the dining-

room, Minna guessed that the entire service would be sterling silver.

In the dining-room, she sighed. Every piece was sterling silver.

That evening in the Everleigh Club, Bruce Lester and Karen Grant sat close together on a sofa.

He had dared to take her hand, and she had not resisted. Bruce continued to recount the adventure at

the Arm-brusters'.

'Did you eat the steak?' Karen wanted to know.

'I nibbled at it, so as not to offend him.'

'But bringing up the vegetarianism in the home of a meat-packer,' said Karen. 'Were you serious about that?'

Bruce shrugged. 'I really don't know about becoming a vegetarian, Karen. I do know I wanted to offend Armbruster. He's such a coarse man.'

'How can you resist the offer of a vice-presidency when your father is in such trouble and you need money?'

Bruce scratched his forehead. 'Not easy,' he said. 'On the other hand, I haven't told you the price I was asked to pay to become Armbruster's vice-president.'

'What's that?'

'I'd have to become part of his family. I'd have to marry his daughter Judith.'

Karen studied the man beside her. 'Well, why not do that?'

'For one thing, I don't love her. For another, I care for you. There you have it, Karen. I'm sure of this. I care for you.'

She squeezed his hand tightly. 'And Bruce, I care for you.'

He leaned over and kissed her on the lips. She clung to him, kissing him back.

After they parted briefly, she said, 'That was delicious. But Bruce, you've got to be practical. What are you going to do about money?'

'Tomorrow I'm going to Washington Park to sell Frontier. That should bring enough to keep me afloat.' 'I hope so.' 'Come along with me and we'll see what happens.'

SIX

Arriving at the Washington Street main doorway to City Hall, Harold T. Armbruster checked his watch and noted that he was on time.

Entering the marble lobby, he made for the recently installed elevators, and told the operator inside that he wished to go to Mayor Carter Harrison's office suite on the third floor. After the slow ride up, Armbruster stepped into the corridor and headed for the mayor's office.

In the reception room, he was met by a young man who left him to inform the mayor that Armbruster was present. Moments later, the young man returned to guide him through the empty secretarial office into the mayor's own impressive sanctum.

Mayor Harrison was already on his feet, hand outstretched. Armbruster impatiently shook it.

'You wanted to see me,' Armbruster said.

'Yes, yes, please sit down.'

Armbruster sat on the edge of a chair across from the mayor's desk, as Harrison settled into his own high-backed leather chair. The summons from the mayor had been unexpected, and Armbruster was

restless with curiosity.

The mayor shuffled some papers and raised his head. 'It's about the matter of Prince Henry's visit to Chicago.'

'I hoped you'd have some news,' Armbruster said. 'He hasn't changed his itinerary, has he?'

'No, he will be here exactly as scheduled. A morning, an afternoon, an evening, before returning to New York, and to Germany the following day.'

'Well, did you inform him of the wedding and the banquet at my home?'

The mayor nodded. 'Up to a point.'

'What does that mean, Mayor?'

'It means I had to follow protocol,' said Mayor Harrison. 'I worked out a schedule with my staff to cover every hour of the prince's visit to Chicago. It included your son's wedding and the banquet to follow. Then, still observing protocol, as I'd been advised, I sent the schedule to the German ambassador in Washington, D.C. I want you to see the schedule so that you will know that I have faithfully kept my promise to you.'

Harrison half lifted himself and handed a sheet of paper to Armbruster.

The meat-packer studied the official schedule. It read:

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR PRINCE HENRY

6:30 a.m. Arrival at Union Station. 10:30 a.m. Visit to Lincoln Park. 11 :00 a.m. Choral festival at First Regiment Armoury. 12:30 p.m. Luncheon at Germania Club. 3:00 p.m.

Reception with Mayor Harrison and aldermen

at City Hall. 7:00 p.m. Grand Banquet at the residence of Mr and Mrs Harold T. Armbruster, to celebrate the prince's visit, as well as the wedding of Mr Alan Armbruster to Miss Cathleen Lester.

Satisfied, Armbruster returned the schedule to the mayor's desk. 'You have it there, and you put it well,' Armbruster said. 'You haven't told me the prince's response.'

'The very reason I wanted to see you,' said the mayor. 'I have a response of sorts, but it is from the German ambassador, and not from Prince Henry. I want you to read it.'

He handed another sheet of paper over his desk to the

meat-packer. Armbruster took it. The sheet of heavier paper with a smooth cottony surface was thicker than the sheet that bore the schedule, and the letterhead was embossed with the address of the German Embassy. Armbruster read it carefully:

Dear Honourable Mayor Carter Harrison,

I am most pleased to have received the programme you outlined for the overnight visit of Prince Henry of Prussia to your renowned metropolis.

Of course, Prince Henry will wish to lay a wreath at the foot of the Monument in Lincoln Park. He certainly will be pleased with the luncheon at the Germania Club, aware as he is that the city of Chicago possesses the sixth-largest population of Germans in the entire world.

Regarding the rest of the schedule, including your reception at the City Hall and the banquet to be hosted by the distinguished Mr and Mrs Armbruster, I can only assume that the prince will be

honoured and pleased. However, I do not have his official reaction to the plans as it is too soon to have heard from him.

I have forwarded your programme to Berlin via diplomatic pouch, and I expect to have Prince Henry's response soon, certainly before his arrival in Chicago.

I will keep you further informed.

With best wishes,

Sincerely, Hans Schulter Ambassador

Armbruster reread the letter and then, shaking his head, threw it on the mayor's desk. 'It's an acknowledgement, but it doesn't tell us a damn thing.'

'Not yet, perhaps,' said Harrison, trying to pacify Armbruster, 'but it does indicate that the ambassador expects Prince Henry to approve of everything on our programme, including your festivities.'

'You may be right,' said Armbruster, somewhat mollified. 'Still, the prince himself has not yet approved. You must let me know the moment you hear from him. After all, Mrs Armbruster and I have to make special, more elaborate plans for a royal guest.'

Mayor Harrison threw up his hands. 'What can I say, Mr Armbruster? I know only what you know from the ambassador's letter, that he expects to hear from Prince Henry before the prince's arrival in Chicago.'

'That could be cutting it close.'

'I really don't think you have to worry, Mr Armbruster. The prince can only be pleased with your invitation. I feel that you can go ahead and plan accordingly.'

'Fine,' said Armbruster, standing. 'I'll take your word for it and proceed.'

The mayor also rose. 'Are you still expecting to make your request of the prince?'

'My request? Ah, you mean to tell him of my desire to be the next ambassador to Germany?'

'Precisely.'

'I'll be totally honest with you, as I was when I first brought this matter up,' said Armbruster. 'While it will definitely improve my social standing in Chicago to have the prince in my home, it is equally important that he feel obligated to me, his host, and that he find time to speak to me alone.'

'I understand,' said Harrison amiably.

'I want to get him aside. To impress upon him how qualified I am to be ambassador, and to let him know how eager I am to have the post. Obviously, he can't play any decisive part in this except to influence the kaiser, who may then make it known to the White House that I would be most welcome in Berlin. Am I making a mistake in undertaking this?'

'Not at all, not a bit,' said the mayor, seeing Armbruster to the door. 'You do things for people, and then you expect them to do something in return. It is the way of the world.'

'I'm relieved to hear you say so. Thank you very much, and keep in touch with me.' He paused.

'Meanwhile, I wish you luck in your reform campaign. I agree that it is necessary to have Chicago clean as a whistle on the day Prince Henry arrives.'

They were in the stable area of the old Washington Park race track, some distance behind the wooden two-tier grandstand. Bruce Lester and Karen were escorting a horse owner named Robert Clifford to the farthest stall, where Bruce's colt, Frontier, was feeding.

Clifford was the fifth - and last - potential buyer that Bruce was showing his horse to. Of the first four, three had shown no interest and one had offered a meagre \$300.

'Here he is, Mr Clifford,' said Bruce, leading the man into the stall. 'A beauty, isn't he?'

Clifford stood away, surveying the horse. 'Rather small for a three-year-old. Is he undernourished?'

'He's well-nourished,' Bruce snapped. 'He's strong.'

Clifford walked around the friendly brown colt, patting his body, then stopped to study his legs.

'Small,' Clifford said again. 'Delicate, I suspect.'

'Strong,' Bruce persisted.

Clifford extracted a card from his pocket and studied it. 'The breeding record doesn't promise too much.'

'His dam showed in the Futurity.'

'A poor third,' said Clifford. 'I don't know. I don't think he'd be much of a horse to run. I might be able to use him for stud. I think I can make you an offer of \$500.'

'No more?'

'Not a cent more.'

Karen pulled Bruce aside. 'Don't accept it, Bruce. Someone else will come along.'

Bruce returned to Clifford. 'I don't know. I'd like a little more time to make up my mind.'

'You make up your mind, young man,' Clifford said. 'I'll be leaving Chicago three days after the Derby.'

'I'll give you an answer by then,' Bruce promised.

After Clifford had left, Bruce and Karen remained behind in the stall.

Studying his horse as it munched hay, Bruce said, 'Even if I sold him, the buying price wouldn't go very far. Not enough to restart a stable of my own in Kentucky.'

Karen stared at him. 'Are you saying you'd have to take a job with Armbruster - and what goes with it?'

'I'm not saying anything yet,' Bruce protested. 'I'm only saying I have a father who is an invalid, who is about to lose his home, and I'm the only person who can help him. I'm trying to keep reality in perspective, Karen.'

'What about your sister?' asked Karen. 'She's marrying into the Armbruster family.'

'Impossible,' said Bruce. 'She couldn't ask for money from the Armbrusters. We're supposed to be a well-off Southern family. That's why we're staying with our aunts, so that we'll appear to be more than we are. No, it's all up to me.'

'Well, what are you going to do?' She hesitated. 'Except marry Judith Armbruster.'

Bruce ignored her remark. 'I have two choices for the moment. One is to sell Frontier for what Clifford offered. If I do that I'll have no horse and almost no money. The second is to let Frontier run in the American Derby for the \$25,000 purse. I've already had him entered, but he'll be up against big favourites like The Picket and he doesn't stand much of a chance. He doesn't have stamina. He doesn't even have a jockey.'

'Find a jockey,' Karen persisted. 'I see no other choice.'

Bruce sighed. 'I've already tried. The top jockeys are signed for other entries. The rest of them wouldn't ride a long shot without a guaranteed payment and for only a percentage of his winnings.'

Unhappily, Karen turned away from the stall to leave. 'I guess your best bet is still Judith Armbruster.'

Bruce followed her out into the stable area, about to protest, when he was diverted by a red Ford chugging towards them. Edmund was at the wheel with Minna Everleigh, her face covered with a veil, beside him and Dr Herman Holmes in the rear seat.

Minna was waving to them. As the Ford came up to them and stopped, Minna called down, 'Bruce, what are you doing here? We're just having a look around before the Derby. Bruce Lester, meet our family physician, Dr Holmes.' Turning to Holmes, she added, 'Doctor Holmes, meet Karen Grant.'

Karen flushed, and momentarily stammered her acknowledgement.

Dr Holmes touched his derby, smiling. 'I've met Miss Grant. Pleased to know you, Mr Lester.'

Minna was addressing Bruce. 'You haven't told me what you're doing here.'

'Remember, I mentioned I brought my best horse up from Kentucky, a three-year-old named Frontier? I have him stabled here. I've entered him in the American Derby.'

'Wonderful,' said Minna.

'Less than wonderful,' said Bruce. 'I entered him, but I haven't got a jockey — I mean, one who'll ride for only a percentage of the purse.'

Minna stared at Bruce. 'You're looking for a jockey to ride Frontier?'

'Exactly.'

'Have you ever heard of a Garrison finish?'

'Of course. When a horse comes from behind to win.'

'Do you know how the expression Garrison finish came into being?'

'No.'

'About ten years ago,' said Minna, 'there was a jockey named Ed 'Snapper' Garrison. In the Suburban Handicap at Belmont Park, Garrison was riding dead last rounding into the stretch. Then he started a whiplashing run through the

stretch, coming from last to first to win by a head. That was a typically Garrison finish.' She paused. 'Well, Ed 'Snapper' Garrison is here in Washington Park today. Have you tried him?'

'Tried him?'

'To be your jockey,' said Minna, rising. 'Edmund, will you help me down?'

On the ground alongside her nephew, Minna adjusted her veil and said, 'Let me introduce you.' She grabbed Bruce by the arm. 'Come along. I just saw Snapper playing chess with a stablehand a few stalls back. He's an old friend. I want you to meet him.'

Briskly, Minna led Bruce away, while Karen trailed behind.

As they approached the two men playing chess, Minna called out and Snapper Garrison jumped to his feet, abandoning the chessboard.

'Wait here a moment,' Minna said to Bruce.

She ran ahead to meet Garrison. He peered up at her, puzzled, until she held aside her veil.

'Why, it's you, Minna -'

'Shhh,' whispered Minna, 'listen. I want you to meet my nephew from Kentucky. He doesn't know what the Everleigh Club actually is and I don't want him to know. Don't mention it. And, Snapper, he thinks my name is Minna Lester.'

'Whatever you say, Minna.'

'Let me bring him over.'

Minna went back to Bruce and Karen, and guided them towards the jockey.

Bruce found himself confronting a very abbreviated, middle-aged man, with the wizened face of a small monkey. He greeted Karen with a grin, and was courteous in a brisk way.

'Snapper, do you have a mount for the Derby?' Minna inquired.

'You know I don't,' said Garrison. 'Except for workouts, I don't ride anymore. Over the hill, I'm told. Too old.'

'You look spry enough to me,' Minna said.

'Oh, I am,' Garrison assured her. 'I've never been in better shape. But nobody else here thinks so.'

'How would you like a mount in the Derby?' Minna asked.

'What do you mean?'

'Bruce here brought a three-year-old thoroughbred up from the Bluegrass Region. He has him entered in the American Derby. Unfortunately, he hasn't found a jockey who'll ride for a percentage. Would you?'

Snapper Garrison grinned again. 'That might be better than what I'm earning now. Still, I don't want to make a fool of myself.' He took in Bruce. 'Do you want to show me this colt of yours? What's his name?'

'Frontier,' Bruce said.

'All right, let me have a look at him,' said Garrison.

Leading Garrison, Minna, and Karen, Bruce brought them to Frontier's stall and gestured Garrison inside.

Garrison spent five minutes examining the horse before he emerged.

'A nice horse, a sound one,' Garrison said. 'His only problem is that he's small.' Garrison's grin

reappeared. 'Yet, so am I.'

'You'll ride him?' said Bruce excitedly.

'Oh, sure,' said Snapper Garrison. 'I'll ride him. But I'll tell you one thing. Unless there's hot weather - the hottest May weather - the day of the Derby, he won't have a chance.'

'And if it's a hot day?'

'He'll have a chance,' said Garrison enigmatically. 'I was peeking at my Farmer's Almanac last week. It says the day of the Derby will be a hot day. So let's wait and see.'

Mayor Carter Harrison sat stiffly behind his desk in City Hall, still smarting from the unpleasant meeting he'd had two hours ago.

The pressure for reform had become unbearable.

Awaiting his next visitor, he mentally reviewed the high points of this morning's confrontation.

The confrontation had been with the thin-lipped, dour Reverend John Stonehill, president of the Municipal Voters' League.

'You know why I am here, Mayor,' Stonehill had begun, almost before being seated.

Harrison had suspected the reason behind the reverend's request for a talk, but he had not been ready to admit it. 'To be truthful, I'm not certain why you wished to see me.'

'Reform,' Stonehill had blurted. 'Your key campaign promise was that you would eliminate vice in this city, especially in the Levee, and you promised specifically that you would close down the Everleigh Club, which has come to symbolize the worst of Chicago, throughout the nation and the world. On the basis of your promise to instigate reform, the entire Municipal Voters' League stood behind you and elected you to office. Mr Mayor, we've waited patiently. We see not one single shred of evidence that cleanup has begun.'

Harrison had cleared his throat. 'Reverend Stonehill, I assure you I have been most active in the area of reform, mainly in my effort to close down the Everleigh Club as an example and warning to all the other lesser houses of ill fame.'

'I see no evidence of movement. I have information that the Everleigh Club is as wide open as ever.'

'Not quite,' the mayor had insisted, 'not really. Fewer men are going there, and the Everleighs claim to be operating only a restaurant. Nevertheless, I too suspect a degree of illegal sexual activity still goes on there. To date I've been unable to prove it and I must have proof. However, I will confide in you that right now I have an undercover observer there who will bring me indisputable proof of illegal sexual acts. Once I have this proof my chief of police will be able to close the Club. The rest of the clubs will then see the handwriting on

the wall. They'll also close down and move to other cities. Trust me, Reverend Stonehill.'

'I trust your sincerity,' the Reverend Stonehill had said, 'but I distrust your competence in this matter.'

'I can only say I have been handling this competently.'

Stonehill had come to his feet. 'We shall see. We will wait another few weeks for affirmative results. If you still have not fulfilled your campaign promises, I shall - the entire League shall - petition for your resignation.'

On that threat, the reverend had departed and the mayor had been left to stew over the matter.

Presently, he had acted. Fearing that his own voice might be recognizable, he had ordered a member of his staff to telephone Calumet 412, the well-known Everleigh Club number. It was blatantly listed in the telephone directory under the name of Aida Everleigh. The aide had been told to get hold of Karen Grant personally and tell her to come to the mayor's office as soon as possible.

She had said she would be there in an hour.

That had been an hour ago, and Mayor Harrison was becoming increasingly restless when Karen Grant came into the room.

Harrison wasted no time. 'Sit down, Karen. We've got to have a straight talk.'

She sat down, but Harrison remained standing.

'If you want to talk about the Everleigh Club I have nothing new to report.'

'Indeed that is what I want to talk about. Before lunch I had Reverend Stonehill of the Municipal Voters' League in here. He's demanding I deliver on my campaign promise of reform. If I fail, he's going to have the League pressure me to resign.'

'You can't do that -'

'I won't have to,' Harrison said, 'if I can get faster results from you.'

'I'm doing the best I can, Mayor.'

'It's not enough.' He paced agitatedly. 'Have you seen or do you know of any sexual activity in the Everleigh Club? That's the question.'

'I simply don't have an answer yet,' Karen pleaded. 'The sisters have only their restaurant open. I'm one of six hostesses. The other girls have been put up in neighbourhood hotels. The Club will remain closed this week and next until the Everleighs' niece is safely married and gone off on her honeymoon. When the Club reopens I can get the proof you're waiting for.'

'That's too long to wait. Isn't there a nephew here, also?'

'Yes, there is. Bruce Lester.'

'What about him?' the mayor wanted to know. 'Maybe he'd give you some evidence that his aunts are really madams.'

'Oh, him. God, no. Bruce thinks they're socialites with a big house. Forget about Bruce.'

The mayor eyed Karen keenly. 'He's Bruce to you, I see. I gather you've become acquainted.'

'Naturally. There are only a handful of us in the Club.'

'Don't get too involved with this Bruce,' said the mayor. 'Don't be diverted by anyone. Concentrate on the other girls in the Club. They may be doing a little on the side for the Everleighs.'

'I doubt it,' said Karen. 'I'd know.'

'Just make sure, Karen. You're there to do a job. Your job is to get proof that the Everleighs are still running a house of ill fame. If - temporarily - they're not, then you must keep your word and let me know the first minute they give the go-ahead sign.'

'I promise you I will.'

'The important thing is that I've got to have that brothel closed down before the Municipal Voters'

League tries to force me to resign - and certainly before the prince of Prussia turns up to see our fair city. Indeed, when he sees Chicago, I want to

be sure it is the fairest city in America. It's up to you, Karen.'

The next day, just after finishing their noon dinner, Karen led Cathleen and Bruce out to Minna's red Ford. Climbing up to the driver's seat, settling herself behind the wheel, Karen waited while Bruce helped his sister into the front seat and took the back seat for himself.

While waiting, Karen recalled how this gathering had come about.

Early in the morning, Edmund had come to Karen's bedroom.

'Miss Grant,' he had said, 'if you are free right now, Miss Minna would like to see you in her office.'

Wondering what this was all about, Karen had said, 'I'm perfectly free.'

She had followed Edmund out of her doorway and downstairs, where she headed for Minna's office.

In the office, Karen had found Minna standing beside her desk, staring off.

'There's something I'd like you to do for me, Karen,' Minna had begun without any preliminaries.

'Anything you wish, Minna.'

'It has to do with my niece and nephew,' Minna had said.

Karen had brightened at once. She had enjoyed being with Bruce at the race course yesterday, and she welcomed any opportunity to be with him again.

'I'd be delighted to do whatever you ask,' Karen had said.

'My nephew Bruce has been pressing me to take him and Cathleen on a tour of Chicago. He wants to see something of the city before he goes back to Kentucky. I keep promising to show him the sights, but I'm really afraid to do so. Someone might recognize me and spill the truth about who I really am. I took a chance going to Washington Park yesterday, but I really had to wear a veil to keep from being recognized, and I'll do so again when the Derby is run. I can't take more chances.

Anyway, Bruce told me he'd bumped into you somewhere and you'd offered to take him on a tour.

So I thought of you, even though you're fairly new here. At least your face wouldn't be as familiar as that of one of the other girls. If you would show Bruce and Cathleen the highlights of this city — maybe a few hours - that would get him off my back. Would you consider doing it?'

'Would I?' Karen had said ardently. 'I'd love to do it.'

'Then set it up for this afternoon, and feel free to use my car. I'd appreciate that.'

And so the tour had come to pass, and Bruce and Cathleen were in Minna's Ford with Karen as their guide.

Thinking how to best go about the excursion, Karen decided that she would show Bruce and Cathleen the more expensive residential area first, then the leading major boulevards and parks.

After that they would plunge into the downtown Loop.

Karen drove the Ford from Dearborn to Michigan Avenue, and slowly through the green, quiet neighbourhoods of stone mansions owned by millionaires.

'This is the rich residential area of Chicago,' she explained, recalling what she had seen with the mayor. 'There are plenty of poor in the city. But there are these wealthy people also. That brownstone you see, the one with towers, minarets, balconies, belongs to Potter Palmer, the hotel magnate. The rooms are all done in the French style, with Corots and Monets on the walls. There's a ballroom where he once hired the Russian ballet to perform for a party. Palmer's house has two private elevators, and twenty-seven servants. Look over there. That Gothic on the corner is a \$60,000 house that belongs to Charles T. Yerkes, who owns the El trains — the elevateds - and the electric trolley cars. I'm told he sleeps in a bed that the king of Belgium used to own.'

After pointing out the \$200,000 mansions belonging to Marshall Field, Philip Armour, and George Pullman, Karen tired of all this splendour and turned on to Drexel Boulevard. Again slowing, she showed Cathleen and Bruce the main feature of this drive. It was a magnificent park, 200 feet wide, that paralleled the boulevard, a park thickly ornamented with

walks that wound through trees, shrubbery, plants, and beds of yellow daffodils.

'This leads to Washington Park,' Karen called over her shoulder to Bruce, 'where we went yesterday to see Frontier. I'm glad you're going to run him in the American Derby.'

'Poor man's roulette,' murmured Bruce.

'Maybe,' said Karen. 'Now let me show you some of the bigger buildings your aunts would want you to see, modern landmarks Chicagoans are proud of.'

Twisting through the streets, stopping briefly now and then, Karen showed them the Palmer House Hotel, the sixteen-storey Monadnock Building, which filled an entire block, the Home Insurance Building, the Fine Arts Building in spacious Jackson Park, a park 1,500 acres in size with tennis courts and grazing sheep.

'Now,' said Karen, 'let's see something more interesting — our downtown section known to natives as the Loop. We'll drive there, leave the car, and wander around on foot.'

When they reached the Loop, it proved to be a beehive of humanity and moving vehicles. Above them, like a steel girdle, the tracks of the elevated trains circled the area, pouring almost three-quarters of a million shoppers into the streets daily. The Loop seethed with people dodging automobiles, horse-drawn trucks, buses, and electric streetcars. The din of people talking and walking and of machines whirring and banging was almost deafening.

Karen inched the Ford along, searching and searching for a vacant parking place; at last she found one and eased the auto into it.

Once safely parked, Karen urged Cathleen and Bruce to descend into the bedlam of the street. She told them to follow her. She seemed to have some kind of destination in mind. As they pushed and shoved along, Karen indicated the rumbling elevated that blocked out the sky above them.

'The third elevated line to be installed in the country,' Karen explained. 'New York and Brooklyn had them first.'

We followed in time to create mass transportation for the World's Columbian Exposition. A year before the fair, the elevated consisted of a small steam locomotive hauling four wooden coaches.

Each olive-green coach was forty-six feet long. Eventually, the Els were converted to electrically

powered trains, essentially what you see up there at a second-storey level today.'

Bruce made a mock gesture of covering his ears. 'As a country horseman, I don't know if I could stand all this thunder and confusion on a daily basis.'

'Well, I'm going to show you that we have other diversions,' said Karen. She had come to a halt before a theatre. A sign identified it as the American Music Hall. 'Have either of you ever seen vaudeville?' Karen asked.

'Many times in Louisville,' Cathleen replied.

'Good,' said Karen, 'but today I want you to spend fifteen minutes seeing the best. Have you heard of Joe Cook?'

Neither Cathleen nor Bruce had.

'I've timed our arrival so we can see his performance today.'

'Who is Joe Cook?' Bruce wanted to know.

'A comedian,' said Karen, as she bought three tickets. 'He does what they call a nut act. He satirizes vaudeville. He's marvellous.'

The three of them went into the darkened theatre, which was two-thirds full for the matinee.

As they walked down the aisle and found their seats, a magician on stage was concluding his performance to applause.

Karen whispered to Cathleen and Bruce, 'Now Joe Cook. He's going to do his Four Hawaiians number.'

They watched as Joe Cook, carrying a mandolin, ambled out of the wings. A plain wooden chair had been set in the centre of the stage, and Joe Cook sat down, mandolin in his lap. He squinted out at the audience and began to speak.

'I will give an imitation of four Hawaiians. This is one.'

Cook whistled. 'This is another.' He tinkled the mandolin. 'And this is the third.' He marked time with his foot. Then he resumed speaking. 'I could imitate four Hawaiians just as easily but I will tell you the reason why I don't do it. You see, I bought a horse for fifty dollars and it turned out to be a running horse. I was offered \$15,000 for him and I took it. I built a house with the \$15,000, and when it was finished a neighbour offered me \$100,000 for it. He said my house stood right where he wanted to dig a well. So I took the \$100,000 to accommodate him. I invested the \$100,000 in peanuts, and that year there was a peanut famine, so I sold the peanuts for \$350,000. Now why should a man with \$350,000 bother to imitate four Hawaiians?'

Calmly, Cook picked up his chair and left the stage, while the audience burst into laughter, and Cathleen, Bruce, and Karen held their sides and joined in the merriment.

Presently, after another number, the three of them left the theatre and made their way through the jostling crowds towards the parked car.

Bruce shook his head. 'Joe Cook was wonderful.'

Karen cast him a sidelong glance, pleased. 'I wanted you to know there was a lot of fun in Chicago too.'

'What next?' Bruce wanted to know.

'The afternoon is almost gone,' Karen said. 'I think your aunts will be expecting you.'

They were in the Ford once more and wending their way out of the Loop.

'I guess you've seen just about everything of importance,' said Karen.

'Not quite,' said Bruce.

'What do you mean?' said Karen, with surprise. 'If you mean we missed the Union Stockyards, I skipped that on purpose. I didn't think a potential vegetarian would want to see that.'

'I don't,' said Bruce. 'But there's something else I'd like to see — one more thing.'

'What?' Karen wondered.

'A place called the Levee,' said Bruce. 'I understand it's not far from our aunts' home.'

'The Levee?' said Karen, brow furrowing. 'Are you sure? It's miserable. It's supposed to be the wickedest section of the city.'

'I know,' Bruce agreed. 'I've heard about it. But I hoped to see Chicago completely, for better or for worse.'

'If you insist,' said Karen, still troubled.

Bruce was adamant. 'I insist.'

Karen sighed. 'In that case, we'll return to your aunts' home, leave the car in front, and take a short walk through the Levee.'

After they had returned to the Everleigh Club and parked Minna's car, Karen reluctantly led her charges into the heart of the Levee.

'There's not too much to see,' Karen told Bruce. But then the mayor's reform statistics came to mind. 'The Levee itself is roughly four blocks by four blocks, with over 200 brothels, some of them small as a closet, but of these, thirty-seven are major bordellos. There are about 3,000 persons who inhabit the area. Most of these are hoodlums, drunkards, gamblers, opium dealers, criminals of every stripe. In a single day, usually at night, there's an average of five murders here, seven suicides, ten persons killed by bombings. Raping of women daring to walk through here is routine.

Most of the rapes don't get into the press, but I was told that one time a socialite, Mrs Frank C.

Hollister, was found in a garbage heap. She had been raped, strangled with copper wire, and then beaten to a pulp. That made the papers and provoked some police protection, but only briefly.'

Cathleen shuddered. 'How can our aunts live near such a terrible neighbourhood?'

Karen was uncertain what to say. She said what she could. 'I imagine they were taken by the idea of dwelling in a mansion, but couldn't afford one in a more respectable area.'

Together, the three of them strolled past a brothel where painted young women, semi-clad, stood in the windows and beckoned to Bruce.

Karen pointed to another brothel. 'It's called The California. There are dozens of prostitutes inside, wearing only flimsy chemises and colourful high-heeled shoes. The two men standing in front are cadets trying to lure customers inside.'

'Cadets, you call them,' Bruce laughed. 'You know they're pimps.'

'I try to avoid such language,' Karen retorted.

As they strolled along, Karen waved her hand to take in the entire block. 'All you'll find here are winehouses - some play Scott Joplin ragtime on piano rolls all night long, saloons awash with whisky, pawnshops, gambling joints, and, above all, the mainstay of this district, houses of prostitution. This red-light district is filled with them.'

'Red-light district,' said Cathleen. 'What does that mean?'

'Women for sale,' said Karen. 'Red-light comes from the fact that many of the bordellos have red beacons on the outside.' Again she pointed. 'Over there you see the house owned by Julia and 85

Maurice Van Bever, who were found guilty of practising white slavery, inducing innocent young women to become prostitutes.'

'White slavery?' Cathleen was appalled. 'Isn't that ancient history?'

'It still goes on here and there,' said Karen. 'Off to your left, do you see that hovel with the windows painted over? It's known as a breaking-in house. A handsome man finds a girl who is looking for a good time, a few drinks, some song, and for some love. The man takes the girl to a breaking-in house like that and fills her with liquor. Then he takes her into a back room where a gang of men are waiting. All the men take turns raping the girl, standing in line to do it. Then they give her cocaine or morphine to make her even more passive. After that, she's broken in and ready to become a prostitute.'

'How horrible,' Cathleen gasped.

'It's not the rule,' Karen assured her. 'White slavery is uncommon. Such tactics are unnecessary these days. The madams claim the majority of girls come here to become prostitutes out of choice or out of necessity. Once, the British journalist William T. Stead made a study of the Levee and wrote a book about it called If Christ Came to Chicago. I read it. He wrote the Levee had no civilizing influences. He found no concert hall, no resident clergyman, no educator. He found one German church and wrote, "It is an oasis set in the midst of all the vice and squalor and drunkenness of the district."'

Cathleen looked about her, shocked. 'Those poor girls, how I pity them.'

Bruce squeezed her hand. 'As Karen told you, most of the girls are here by choice. It's the madams of the brothels that trouble me. They're hiring the girls. I wonder what their excuses are?'

'There can't be any excuses,' Cathleen said firmly.

Karen was feeling extremely uncomfortable. As they reached the end of a block, she announced, 'I think we've had enough of this sorrowful place. Let's turn around and get back to your aunts' home before Minna and Aida begin to worry about what I've done with you.'

They retraced their steps to the Everleigh Club. After Cathleen and Bruce had gone upstairs to their bedrooms, Karen turned around to see Minna standing outside her study, beckoning her.

She hastened toward Minna, then followed her inside.

'That was a long tour,' said Minna. 'How did it go?'

Karen recounted where they had been, and what they had seen, omitting the visit to the Levee.

'Bruce and Cathleen enjoyed it all.'

'Then it went perfectly.'

Karen hesitated, then decided to speak out. 'Not quite, Minna. Afterwards, as we were coming here, Bruce wanted to see a place he'd heard about called the Levee.'

'The Levee,' Minna repeated with disbelief. 'He wanted to see that?'

'He saw it.'

'But for heaven's sake, why did you take him there - here - all around here?'

'Because he insisted, Minna. He wanted to visit the worst of Chicago as well as the best.'

'He saw the brothels?'

'They both did,' admitted Karen.

Minna was silent for an interval as she fixed her eyes on Karen. At last Minna spoke. 'What . . . what did they say? You can be honest with me, Karen.'

'They were upset by everything in general,' said Karen. 'They seemed to understand and excuse the girls who work here.' Karen paused. 'They blamed the brothel madams most.'

'Oh, my God!' Minna gasped. 'What if they ever found out what Aida and I are really doing here?'

When Karen did not comment, Minna drew herself up resolutely. 'Well, they won't. They'll never find out. I won't let that happen. From now on, Aida and I will be doubly on our guard. Thank you, Karen, for telling me the truth and putting me on warning. A hundred thanks.'

Many of the Everleigh girls were idling at the Tremont House Hotel during their enforced vacation.

Dr Holmes had agreed to examine each of them once a week, and he had been doing so during the past two hours.

Now, towards the end of his day, there was only one girl waiting to be examined. This was Greta, a Swedish beauty of about twenty, who was the most playful of all the girls and the most receptive to Holmes's advances.

Greta and Holmes were alone in her room on the fourth floor, and Holmes, removing his jacket, watched her provocatively undressing.

It had crossed his mind when he had arrived, and it was still on his mind as he waited for Greta, that he could have her right there in her room. He had never attempted any sexual advances in the Everleigh Club itself, because it was too populated, and there was a chance that Minna or Aida might walk in on one of his examinations.

But here in the Tremont House Hotel, a comfortable distance from the Everleighs, he felt safe to do whatever he wanted to do.

Greta sat down on the bed, and spread her legs. Finding his speculum, Dr Holmes approached her.

He kneeled down, and perfunctorily examined her for any evidence of recent sexual activity.

There was none. She was clean.

Holmes remained on his knees. 'No real problem,' he said.

'I shouldn't think so,' she called down to him. 'I haven't had a man since leaving the Club. I feel like a virgin.'

Gazing at her vagina, Holmes began to feel the stiffening between his legs.

'If there is any problem,' he said, 'it's that you're very tight down here. You need lubricating.'

'How do I do that?' Greta wanted to know.

'By letting your doctor help you.'

'If you think you can, go ahead,' she said lazily.

Holmes put down his speculum, and returned his attention to her vagina. 'Lie back flat,' he called up hoarsely. 'Spread your legs wider. Very good.'

With his head again between her thighs, his tongue circled her vaginal lips. Then he began to kiss her.

Her body started, and she sat up halfway. 'Hey, Doctor, I didn't know you did that.'

'I never do. But you're something special. I can't resist. Do you object?'

'Not especially, except Minna told me not to have anything to do with any man while I'm outside the Club.'

'Didn't she say you could see me?' he asked, looking up at her.

'Yes, of course.'

'Didn't she say I could treat you?'

'Yes, but-'

'I am treating you, Greta. Lie back and cooperate.'

Greta exhaled. She lay back and gave up all resistance. 'Whatever ... whatever you say, Doctor.'

'I say let's enjoy ourselves.'

He bent down once more, easing his head between her thighs, until he could kiss her labia again, and then extended his tongue and inserted it inside her vagina.

She was moist, and her buttocks were rotating.

After a few minutes, he thought she'd had an orgasm, but he wasn't sure and he didn't care.

He pulled back slightly, clambered to his feet, and stood between her legs, unbuttoning his trousers.

'Sit up, Greta,' he commanded. 'Come here.'

He grabbed the back of her neck and pulled her head down to his distended penis. 'It's fellatio time, darling.'

'It's what?'

'Time to do unto others as you would have done to you. It's time to suck, Greta.'

Her mouth closed over him and her tongue and lips slid expertly over his penis. He trembled with frenzy. She was good, very good, very, very good. Staring down at the top of her head, the exposed back of her neck, he realized how many men she must have done this to, and he was excited by one

thing — a desire to sever her head from her body, to dismember her, so that she could do this to no one ever again.

He felt he was coming apart, and then he did, erupting and groaning and groaning.

Later, he patted her cheek. 'You were magnificent, Greta, better than any woman I have ever known.'

'Really? Well, you weren't half bad yourself.'

Holmes dropped the speculum in his bag. 'Then maybe we belong together.'

'What are you saying?'

'I'm saying we seem suited to each other. Why don't you pack your things and move out of here?

Move in with me.'

Greta hesitated. 'I'd love to, but what will Minna and Aida say?'

'They'll never know. Move in with me tomorrow. We can live together, and if it works out as I think it will, we can get married. No more of that Everleigh drudgery for you. Will you?'

'Will I!' Greta exclaimed, falling upon Holmes with a hug, and kissing him again and again. 'I'll be there.'

Holmes was scribbling on a piece of paper. 'Here's my address. Any time from noon on tomorrow.'

'I'll be there. I'm so happy.'

'You won't regret it, darling. I'll have a real treat in store for you. I guarantee you one thing. You'll find peace for the first time in your life.'

It was not until just before noon that Minna Everleigh learned that yet another of her favourite girls had disappeared.

The word of this had come from Edmund, who had routinely checked the scattered whereabouts of the Everleigh girls and reported to Minna on what he could learn of their security and behaviour.

This morning he had reported that Greta was missing from the Tremont House Hotel. Edmund had learned that less than an hour before his phone inquiry, Greta had checked out of her room with her suitcases, leaving no forwarding address.

News of this defection had thoroughly mystified Minna and shaken her.

What disturbed Minna most was the constancy of the disappearances. First Fanny. Then Avis. Now Greta. There were two factors that troubled Minna. The first was the number of disappearances within so short a time. Minna had been accustomed to losing one girl a year, two at the most. But three leaving without a word in two weeks -

it was unheard of. The second factor that concerned Minna was the manner of each disappearance.

Until these, when a girl had wanted to leave the Everleigh Club, she usually had been honest with Minna in giving her reason and her destination. A man had proposed marriage to her and she wanted to settle down. She missed her home and family in Denver and wanted to return. Or, simply, she was bored with being enclosed in the Everleigh Club and devoting her life to lying on her back and pretending to enjoy herself. In the past, the departure of each girl, though few and far between, had always been courteous and forthright.

Now Fanny, Avis, and Greta had vanished into thin air, without any explanation.

Minna brooded over the matter for long minutes, and finally she telephoned the young reporter, Chet Foley, at the Chicago Tribune.

'Chet, this is Minna Everleigh at the Club.'

'I'm glad you called. I was planning to come by one day to have a drink with you.'

Minna put on her most gracious tone. 'You're always welcome, except this week and next. We're renovating the place. I'm really calling to ask you a question. If someone close to you disappeared, and you wanted to find them, what would you do?'

Foley answered immediately. 'I'd hire a private detective agency to trace them.'

'That makes sense,' Minna said. 'A detective agency. Why not? What would you say is the biggest one in Chicago?'

'The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, by far.'

'Do you know anything about them, Chet?'

'Not personally. We must have something on file here at the paper.'

'All right,' Minna said, 'I've just changed my mind about your dropping by. You may drop by if you bring me something on the Pinkerton Agency. Can you?'

'Certainly. Do you want to see me soon?'

'Right away. Soon as you have the information, come right over with it.'

Half an hour later, Foley was seated with Minna in her office.

He handed her a folder. 'All we have on the Pinkertons. Some clippings from the Tribune. One from the Observer. An official brochure from their firm. The clippings are repetitious. The brochure should tell you most of what you want to know.'

Minna sat in silence as she thumbed through the material.

The brochure was indeed impressive. It was headed, PINKERTON'S NATIONAL DETECTIVE AGENCY. It had a staring eye as its trademark, and the motto 'We Never Sleep'. The superintendent of the Chicago office was William A. Pinkerton.

Studying the Observer story, Minna saw that it had only praise for William Pinkerton. 'He is America's leading detective, the man through whose medium you may know the exact wealth of Li Hung Chang, how much your clerk bet on the election, or what African jungle hides the clerk who ruined the Bank of Timbaktu. His methods, though effective, are painfully matter-of-fact.'

Minna looked up from the file. 'Their business seems mostly railroads,' she said.

'Their business is crime,' Foley assured her, 'any kind.'

'I suppose you're right,' said Minna, handing back the file. 'I should retain them to look into several disappearances of my girls. If someone's trying to ruin us, I better find out about it. Look, Chet, just hold on while I phone Pinkerton for an appointment. Then we'll have a glass of champagne together.'

After speaking to William Pinkerton and securing an immediate appointment, Minna had Edmund drive her downtown to Pinkerton's National Agency, at 193 Fifth Avenue in Chicago's downtown.

Once inside the building, she was escorted to William Pinkerton's cluttered office. He was a great

bear of a man, with his hair slicked down flat and a full moustache. He directed Minna to a leather chair beside the desk.

'I'm Minna Everleigh,' she began. 'I don't know if you've heard of me.'

Pinkerton gave a short laugh. 'Who hasn't?' he replied.

'I've run into something that's disturbing me. I think I can use some of your detectives.'

'We don't have detectives,' said Pinkerton. 'We have trained investigators we call operatives.'

'No matter what you call them, they're detectives, aren't they?'

Pinkerton appeared pained. 'All right, if you insist.' He brought what resembled a ledger in front of him, opened it, and dipped his pen in ink. 'Give me the facts first, omitting nothing. On the phone you spoke of a problem concerning the disappearances of some of your employees. Do you want to expand on that?'

'We retain thirty young girls at the Everleigh Club to entertain our guests. In a normal year, I might lose one of them, at the most two, to marriage, homesickness, a desire to change jobs. Just now I have lost three of my best girls in a row, all within a period of two weeks. Each one simply upped and left, vanished into thin air. It gives me the uneasy feeling that someone took Fanny, Avis, and Greta away from me to destroy our Club.'

'Can you give me the girls' full names?'

Minna recited the full names: Fanny Spenser, Avis Kaufman, Greta Ryan. 'All under twenty-two, and pretty.'

'Please describe each one in detail,' Pinkerton said, as he entered the names in his ledger.

Minna described Fanny, Avis, and Greta as best she could.

Pinkerton continued to write. He glanced up. 'Would anyone you know have had contact with these three, someone who might have an idea of their plans or what they had on their minds?'

'The other girls, of course. I have my valet, Edmund, questioning them right now. I'm afraid that won't lead to anything fruitful. The girls are usually close-mouthed about what they know of each other. They'd be especially close-mouthed in a matter like this, about three of them who walked out on us.'

'I see,' said Pinkerton. 'Can you think of anyone else who had contact with these girls who might be more forthcoming?'

'Not really, except - well, there's our physician, who visits all the girls once a week and speaks to them intimately and regularly. He might have some clues.'

'His name?'

'Dr Herman H. Holmes. He knew them all. He could possibly be helpful.'

'How would I locate him?'

Minna gave Holmes's address to Pinkerton. 'Do you want his telephone number?'

'No. I think I'll just look in on him without an appointment. Let's find out if he knows what Fanny, Avis, and Greta had in mind.'

'When are you going to see Dr Holmes?'

'Immediately. Today. I'll do it personally. This is a fascinating mystery. I'll look into it right after you leave, Miss Ever-leigh, and then I'll report to you. Perhaps we'll get to the bottom of this or perhaps we won't. But we'll try.'

Dr Herman Holmes lusted for this girl. No longer sexually, but in anticipation of carving up her ample body.

Greta had moved in a few hours ago. He had taken her on a tour of his three-storey offices and home. She had been dazzled by its comfort and size.

As he left her at her bedroom, she said with awe, 'This is going to be my home too?'

'Yours and mine from this day on,' promised Holmes.

'Did you mean what you said about maybe marrying me?'

Holmes smiled. 'I'm a bachelor. I've studiously avoided marriage until I was sure I'd found the right woman.' He met her eyes. 'I think I've found her at last.'

'I'm so happy!' Greta exclaimed, melting into his arms.

He held her briefly, whispering, 'I'll try to see that you're always happy.' Parting from her, he added,

'I can't wait to make love to you again. You go into your room and undress. Have a leisurely bath.

Then put on the silk robe you'll find inside and join me downstairs. I'll be waiting for you.'

A half-hour later, when he heard her descending the staircase, Holmes left his office to meet her.

She giggled when she saw him in his underwear.

Tightening the belt of her purple silk robe, she said, 'Looks like you have something special in mind, Herman.'

'I do, my pet.'

'Where do we go?'

'To a place where we can have complete privacy.' He took her arm. 'Come along.'

He brought her to the closed entrance to his airtight room. He pressed a button. The door slid open.

'How clever!' she exclaimed. 'I've never seen anything like that.'

He nodded. 'As I told you, I want to ensure our complete privacy. Actually, this is my examination room.'

She was in the room, surveying it. 'Cosy enough, but not a window.'

'Nobody to pry,' said Holmes. 'Take off your robe and hoist yourself on the examination table.'

She did as directed. He watched her, hypnotized by the lushness of her alabaster body.

'What are we going to do?' she asked. 'Are we going to do what we did this morning?'

'If you don't mind.'

'Don't mind? I love it.'

She spread her legs as he knelt on a step. She grasped his head and brought him closer.

She closed her eyes and arched her back as he licked her vulva.

At first, she began to moan. As he continued, she wanted to scream, then repressed the impulse.

'Can . . . can anyone hear me?'

He lifted his head slightly. 'We're alone.'

He ducked down to pleasure her again, and now she screamed lustily.

This excited him. His mouth pressed harder, his tongue probed deeper.

Suddenly, she shook, lifting herself with such force that she almost threw him to the floor. This time he was sure of her orgasm, a noisy and prolonged one.

When it was done, she sank down, breathless, gradually opening her eyes to find him.

'That was something,' she said. 'What about you, Herman?'

'I'm ready when you are,' he said. He stood up over her, stripped off his underwear. His penis was hard as a rod.

She took it expertly in her hands, pulled it to her mouth, and then closed her lips around it.

Blinking down at the nape of her neck, he knew that she was a marvel, but what was most marvellous about her was the back of her neck. He was glad that she could enjoy herself so much before losing her head.

The thoughts of her head, her neck, excited him even more. As she went on, he tried desperately to contain himself. It was impossible. The witch was relentless.

Then he came and came.

When he was limp, she toyed with him, laughing, 'You had a good time, didn't you, Herman?'

'I'll never forget it.'

'Neither will I,' she said.

Holmes pulled free of her, and snatched up his underwear. 'I'll be right back.'

'Where are you going, Herman?'

'Just want to freshen up. I'll be right back. You'll find a towel on the end of the table. You can tidy up too.'

He went off through the open sliding door, and pushed the button to shut it.

Before it closed, he heard Greta's voice calling out, 'Hey, why are you closing the door?'

'Never mind,' he called back. 'I'll be with you shortly.'

The door slid shut.

Pleased, Holmes went to his office, pulled on his union suit, his shirt and trousers, then his stockings and shoes. He knotted his tie. Then he started for the row of levers, prepared to turn on the gas.

He was halfway to the lever when he thought he heard the front doorbell ring. He halted, listened again, and heard the bell ring more distinctly.

Holmes detoured out of his office and headed for the foyer, wondering who the unexpected visitor could be at this hour. He still had much to do after he turned on the gas. There would be great joy in cutting up Greta's plumpish body. Definitely orgasmic.

He put his hand on the knob of the front door and pulled it wide.

The doorway was filled by a huge middle-aged man with plastered hair, a full moustache, an expensive suit, and carrying a cane.

He had a calling-card in his free hand, and he offered it to Holmes. 'I am William A. Pinkerton, supervisor of the Chicago branch of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency,' the man announced.

'I'm here at the instigation of Miss Minna Ever-leigh, your employer, who feels you may give me some help in a matter I'm investigating.'

Glancing at the calling-card, Holmes said graciously, 'To be sure. Please come in.'

Leading Pinkerton to his office, Holmes cast a sidelong look at the sliding door. It was tightly closed, and if Greta was still voicing her confusion, she could not be heard.

After seating Pinkerton in his office, Holmes took his own place behind the desk.

His posture one of hospitality and relaxation, he said, 'What can I do for you, Mr Pinkerton?'

Pinkerton was not one to delay. 'Miss Everleigh is distressed because three of her girls have disappeared in the last two weeks. This is something that has never happened at the Club before.'

'I'm sorry for her. Of what help can I be to you?'

'Miss Everleigh thought it might be useful if I questioned you for some clues to their whereabouts.'

'Who are these girls?'

Pinkerton extracted a pad from his pocket, and flipped the pages. 'Miss Fanny Spenser, Miss Avis Kaufman, Miss Greta Ryan. They are all young prostitutes employed by the Everleigh sisters. Do you recognize their names?'

Holmes bobbed his head. 'I think I do. While I never knew their last names, I do recognize the first names. Fanny, Avis, Greta. Yes, I've medically examined them.' He seemed to recall something.

'As a matter of fact, now I do remember. I missed Fanny and Avis on my last visits to the Club. I meant to ask Minna where they were, but it skipped my mind.'

'Then Greta. She was one of the girls Miss Everleigh housed in the Tremont House Hotel. She checked out late this morning. What is unusual is that neither she nor the other two informed Miss Everleigh that they were leaving. They just left without word as to their destination. They simply vanished into thin air.'

Holmes shook his head sympathetically. 'Too bad. Still, why would Minna have you question me about them?'

'Because you were the one person who saw them regularly and intimately, and Miss Everleigh hoped that you might

have heard from one or all of them — about any plans they might have had.'

'I see, I see,' said Holmes. 'Well, there is some conversation when I'm examining the girls, but rarely anything meaningful. Let me concentrate on the last times I saw these girls. Fanny, you say?'

'Fanny Spenser.'

'The last time I saw her was a few weeks ago. I can't remember anything noteworthy that she had to say. Oh, something about being displeased because her income would be reduced for a while. One might say she was complaining about this, and hinting that she had heard of a few houses in Nashville and San Francisco that paid as well as the Everleigh Club and guaranteed work regularly.'

'Nashville and San Francisco,' repeated Pinkerton, making notes. 'We'll check around.'

'As to Avis,' continued Holmes, 'I do recollect that she mentioned being tired of prostitution, and planned to one day give it up to take on some other line of work.'

'Did she speak of what line of work? Or where such a job might exist?'

'I'm afraid I can't recollect. My memory for names isn't what it used to be.'

Pinkerton looked down at his notes. 'Greta Ryan.'

'You know I examined her early this morning at her hotel,' Holmes said openly.

'I know you did,' said Pinkerton.

Holmes shrugged. 'She seemed quite satisfied with her lot. I had the impression that she was pleased with her vacation. She spoke of catching up on her shopping. I think she mentioned seeing some kind of garment that she wanted to purchase at Carson, Pirie, Scott. That is the most I can remember, I'm afraid.'

'Yet, she did not go shopping today, because she packed her bags and checked out of the hotel.'

'I am truly surprised,' said Holmes.

Pinkerton lifted his big body out of the chair. 'I appreciate your cooperation, Dr Holmes. If you can jog your memory to recollect any more, I wish you'd give me a call with any information, no matter how seemingly insignificant. You have my card with the telephone number. Do phone me if something comes to mind.'

Holmes was on his feet. 'I will, you can be sure. We must help Minna get her girls back.'

He preceded Pinkerton to the front door and showed him out, securing the lock firmly behind his visitor.

Returning to his office, he chuckled. He'd done a smooth job, and that fool of a detective had swallowed it whole. No one, anywhere, was smarter than Herman Holmes, and no one more clever and deceptive.

Still chuckling, he crossed his office to the levers and brought up the top lever, turning on the gas.

Goodbye, dear Greta. When he had his scalpel in hand, he would have another orgasm with her — the most exciting one of all. He could almost hear the gas hissing into the airtight room. It was a wonderful day, wonderful.

Once back in his own cluttered office, safe behind his own cluttered desk, William Pinkerton fished about in his jacket for a notebook, found it, and turned to the pages on which he had scrawled during the Dr Holmes interview.

On his way to the office, he had intended to phone Minna Everleigh and inform her that nothing had come of the meeting with Dr Holmes. But now, finishing with the notebook, he had second thoughts.

Pinkerton telephoned the Everleigh Club, and waited patiently until Minna Everleigh came on.

'Miss Everleigh. This is William Pinkerton again.'

'Yes?' Her voice was eager.

'I've just come from a meeting with Dr Herman Holmes. While he was cooperative, I'm not certain the meeting was

productive. I have a few leads on your missing girls, but they are vague. I will pursue them, but if nothing comes of them, I would like to pursue another course.'

'What course?'

'It involves Dr Holmes's veracity.'

'You think he was misleading you about Fanny, Avis, and Greta?'

'Possibly. At any rate, do you mind if I pursue this investigation a step further?'

'Will that be expensive?'

'It won't cost you a penny, unless I get results. Is that agreeable?'

'I couldn't ask for anything better.'

'I'll go on then,' said Pinkerton. 'Let's see what happens.'

SEVEN

Minna Everleigh summoned Karen Grant to her office. Minna, remaining seated, pointed Karen to a chair.

'There's something I'd like you to do for me,' Minna began.

'If it's something I can do, I'll be glad to.'

Minna shifted in her chair. 'Have you ever been to Marshall Field's department store downtown?'

Karen smiled. 'He advertises it as "Everybody's Store", so I'm sure everybody has been there. Yes, it was one of the first places I visited when I came to Chicago.'

'Very well, then, I want you to do me a favour. I had intended to escort my niece, Cathleen, to Marshall Field's to select her wedding gown. I myself spend a fair amount of time and money there.

The clerks and managers know me well, and so does Mr Marshall Field himself. Did you see him standing near the door?'

'No, I didn't.'

'Well, he may approach and question you as a new customer. If you want to avoid this, you'd better know what he looks like. He's a grey-haired man in his late sixties, pink cheeks, about six feet tall.

He's a bit hunched and somewhat bow-legged. He usually keeps the forefinger of his right hand in his vest pocket because it's slightly malformed. Anyway, he always teases me about running a big business too with our Everleigh Club. Well, I realized if I took Cathleen in for her wedding gown, Marshall Field might see me and come over and make some joke about the Club. I could not let that happen in front of Cathleen. You do understand?'

'I do.'

'I'm asking you to escort Cathleen to Marshall Field's in my place and help her select her wedding gown. I told Harold

T. Armbruster when we all lunched with him that I wanted a white satin gown with lace for Cathleen. I'd like you to help her select something along that line. Price is no object. Will you do that this afternoon?'

'I'd be delighted,' Karen said with enthusiasm.

Karen had welcomed the opportunity to get away from the Club, where she had begun to feel guilty performing as a spy for Mayor Harrison. It had been all right in the beginning, when there had been only the mayor to satisfy, but now there was someone more important to satisfy - Minna's nephew, Bruce. Karen felt less and less pleased about being responsible for exposing Minna and Aida to their relatives.

Further, there was another reason that Karen welcomed the opportunity to go shopping with Cathleen. It would be an opportunity to discuss Bruce Lester with his sister. Karen wanted to know everything possible about him.

Because she was in love with him.

Because she wanted to find out from Cathleen if he was really in love with her.

With an effervescent, talkative Cathleen in tow, Karen descended from the electric streetcar at the corner of State and Washington streets.

Alongside her on the cobblestone street, Karen could hear Cathleen's excitement as they approached the mammoth department store. Marshall Field's was twelve storeys high and it occupied the entire city block between State Street and Wabash Avenue, and between Washington and Randolph.

They walked to the Washington Street entrance and were greeted royally by the liveried doorman.

Inside, they crossed the highly polished black marble floor. House detectives, well-dressed clerks, and floorwalkers with carnations in their lapels blended in with crowds of shoppers.

Briefly, Karen led Cathleen on a tour of the showcases, pressing forward to see the array of gloves, powder boxes,

and jewellery illuminated by the pink overhead globes with their new electric bulbs. Karen pointed out the store's library, furnished with green leather chairs and Oriental rugs. They paused to visit the elegant powder room, a spacious expanse of pale-green travertine walls, silver mirrors, and green willow rockers.

They took an elevator to the top floor, where a salesman proudly informed them there was a cold storage vault that held 25,000 fur coats. Then they went down to the floor that sold muffs and hats, and after that to the lace counter, where they saw ruffled parasols in white, black, and ecru. Finally, they toured the yard goods section, wandering through endless aisles of silk, cotton, woollens, and chiffon with hand-sewn beading.

When they reached the display of lavish wedding gowns, a tall, regal saleswoman with bunned, grey hair piled atop her head, introduced herself.

'I am Mme Judith. May I help you?'

Karen nodded. 'My name is Karen Grant, and this is Cath-leen Lester. Cathleen's the bride-to-be.'

'Congratulations, Miss Lester,' said Mme Judith. 'May I bring you our newest styles?'

'Oh, that won't be necessary,' Cathleen exclaimed. 'I see the gown I want.'

She reached out her hand and touched the gown draped on a waxen store mannequin. The gown was made of heavy white satin and trimmed with rose point lace. A train of satin and lace flowed from a crown of orange blossoms set upon the mannequin's head.

'You have the best taste,' Mme Judith stated. 'This is our finest import from Paris.'

'I only hope Alan likes it,' said Cathleen.

'He'll adore it,' Karen assured her.

Mme Judith was removing the wedding gown from the form. 'I think this is your size, young lady,' she said. 'Why don't you try it on?'

The saleswoman carried the gown into the fitting room, and Cathleen and Karen followed. As Cathleen removed her outer garments her eyes remained fastened on the gown. 'It's beautiful. I was just thinking how lovely it would look on you.'

'On me?' said Karen. 'I haven't got anyone to marry.'

As Karen assisted her in getting into the gown, Cathleen said, 'I know someone who would like to marry you.'

'Who?'

'My brother Bruce.'

'He hasn't shown the slightest interest in me.'

'Oh, he cares for you,' said Cathleen. 'He's always speaking of you when we're together.'

'Why doesn't he speak to me?' said Karen.

Cathleen was adjusting the gown. 'Maybe because he feels he can't. Maybe because he realizes he's in big financial trouble.'

'You mean trying to raise money for your father?'

'Yes, that first. And then he must figure out how he can provide for a wife and himself.'

'You're trying to tell me he may consider marrying Judith Armbruster to - to take care of everything.'

'Well, unless something else works out.'

'What else can work out?'

'His long shot hope is the race,' said Cathleen.

'The what?'

'The American Derby day after tomorrow.'

Karen shook her head. 'Everyone thinks his horse can't win.'

'Bruce hopes he will, but I too believe it's a long shot.'

'I'd bet the winner is the odds-on favourite, Judith Armbruster.'

'We'll see,' said Cathleen.

She primped in front of a mirror. 'What do you think?'

'Gorgeous,' said Karen. 'It makes me happy for you.'

But it made her more miserable than ever for herself.

The morning of the American Derby was warm, but the

sun stood high and clear and the temperature rose steadily. By afternoon it was hot. Just what Snapper Garrison had earlier hoped for and even predicted, Bruce Lester reminded himself as he walked into the stable area, accompanied by Karen and his veiled Aunt Minna.

Frontier was in front of his stall, placidly chewing some lumps of sugar as Snapper Garrison kept circling him, carefully supervising the trainer saddling the colt. Garrison watched while the saddle 98

was placed on a cloth over the withers, then secured with a leather cinch belt. As the belt was threaded and tightened through the buckle, he turned to greet Bruce, Karen, and Minna.

'Welcome,' Garrison said. He mopped his brow. 'Perfect day. Couldn't ask for a better one.'

'You wanted it hot,' said Bruce. 'Why?'

Garrison's smile was enigmatic. 'You'll see, boss.'

'How does he ride?' asked Bruce. 'You've been working with him.'

Garrison patted the horse's flank. 'He's fast - too fast at the break,' said Garrison. 'By the time he reaches the mile he begins to wear down.' He grinned. 'I hope to change all that in the Derby.'

Bruce was not optimistic. 'Apparently no one else thinks he has any chance. The odds on Frontier are fifteen to one. The odds on The Picket are three to five. The Picket's an overwhelming favourite.'

'As he should be,' Garrison agreed. 'He's a big, powerful horse.'

A bugle sounded from the dirt track inside the wooden stands of Washington Park.

Snapper Garrison listened, and then put his foot in the stirrup.

'You still think we have a chance?' Bruce grumbled. 'Even though we're fifteen to one?'

Garrison swung his small frame on to the saddle. 'I never heard of an oddsmaker winning a silver cup.'

Minna stepped forward, closer to her nephew. Digging into her purse, she pulled out a wad of tickets.

'I think Frontier is worth a bet. Aida and I took \$1,000 out of the bank. I've bet it all on Frontier to win. Here, take these tickets, Bruce. A present from your aunts.'

Reluctantly, Bruce accepted the tickets. 'I wish you hadn't, Aunt Minna. But I certainly appreciate your confidence.'

'I'm betting against Judith Armbruster,' Minna said tartly. Shading her veiled eyes from the sun, she squinted up at Garrison. 'Did I do something foolish, Snapper?'

The jockey grinned down at her. 'Maybe we both did,' he called down. 'I didn't have \$1,000, but I did have five hundred. I laid it all on Frontier to win. If I lose, I won't have a roof over my head.'

You'll have to put me up, Minna.'

As Garrison urged Frontier forward for the parade to the post, Bruce called out, 'Good luck!'

'You three find yourself a place near the finish line,' Garrison called back. 'Just watch for the green and white colours.'

An enormous crowd, 49,500 persons, had jammed into the grandstand of Washington Park and crowded into the infield. The more affluent had come in tallyhos, carriages, buggies, and in their new-fangled automobiles. The less affluent had come too, by foot and by streetcar, and all waited expectantly in the heat for the start of the \$25,000 American Derby.

Bruce, at the forefront, had pushed his way through the sea of humanity, closely followed by Karen and Minna.

At last, they'd eased their way to the finish line, pressed against the railing, and turned their gazes a quarter of a mile down to the starting line.

Bruce produced two pairs of cheap binoculars, one pair for Karen and the other for himself. Minna polished the lenses of her opera glasses.

The dozen horses in the race had paraded past the start, turned to trot towards the webbing to be lined up by the official starter.

Bruce trained his binoculars on the starting line. As usual, the thoroughbreds were all milling about, bumping each other relentlessly, bursting in and out of the webbing as they were patiently brought back to their places. Bruce focused on Frontier, who was standing calmly at the pole position, alongside the inner rail. The competing horses, colts and fillies, continued to mill about in the blazing sun.

Gradually, the horses were lined up perfectly, and the starter could be seen about to spring the webbing, when Bruce saw that Snapper Garrison was raising both hands in protest. Bruce could see him pointing down to one of his boots. Apparently the laces of one of his boots had broken. New laces must be sent for. The assistant starter ran off.

Bruce watched a distressed - or seemingly distressed - Snapper Garrison dismount and casually walk behind the restless horses as the jockeys tried to quiet their nervous mounts. Five minutes passed, then ten, then fifteen minutes, when at last the assistant starter returned with fresh laces for Garrison. Accepting the laces, Garrison took his time threading the new laces into his left boot.

At last Garrison was set. He put a foot on Frontier's stirrup and swung himself into the saddle. Now the other thoroughbreds were out of line again, twisting, turning, bumping into one another under the relentless mid-afternoon sun.

Through his binoculars, Bruce was able to make out a movement on Snapper Garrison's part. In his Number One post position, Garrison had slipped his left foot out of the stirrup, and was resting it on the rail of the infield fence keeping nearly his entire weight off Frontier, while the fractious other mounts perspired under the weight of their riders.

As thousands of spectators strained with expectation, awaiting the send-off of the American Derby, the starter still could not get the field off. Bruce glanced down at his watch. Over an hour and a half had elapsed since the horses had been led to the webbing. Standing there, watching, Bruce realized that his own legs felt leaden, and he tried to imagine how the legs of the horses must feel by now.

Once more, the starter managed to bring the thoroughbreds into line, when Bruce saw Garrison rise on Frontier and desperately wave to the starter, screaming at him.

Garrison dismounted again, and by his gesture Bruce could see that he was pointing to his saddle girth. His saddle girth had broken and he was obviously demanding a new one. Again, he was off his

horse's back, on the ground, while the other jockeys remained on their exhausted horses.

Through his glasses Bruce saw the starter heading for Garrison, confronting him, angrily waving his fist at him. Bruce brought down his binoculars and observed that Minna had lowered her glasses and was smiling broadly.

'Aunt Minna, you seem to know something I don't know,' said Bruce. 'What's going on? I've never known a race to take so long to get going.'

Minna was still smiling broadly. 'Let me explain. When Aida and I bet on Frontier, we didn't really bet on your horse - we don't really know him. We bet on Snapper Garrison. Because we do know him. Do you remember when you took him on, he wished for a hot day? You didn't know why. But I did. Snapper's problem was to overcome the strength of the rival horses, to weaken them, which would make Frontier their equal or better. And this he has been doing. First his boot lace. Then resting on the rail. Now his broken saddle girth. All of that arranged in advance, I'm sure. Snapper has contrived to keep those other horses and their riders at the post for just about two hours. Yes, it's two hours and all the horses are still at the post. I'm certain that by now Snapper is ready to go.

Let's see.'

Minna had brought the opera glasses to her eyes, and now Bruce lifted his binoculars once more, focusing on the starting post.

A new saddle girth had been brought for Garrison and had been speedily exchanged for the broken one.

Satisfied at last, Snapper Garrison sprung up, mounted Frontier, and was firmly astride. Bruce followed Garrison's gaze as the jockey studied his rivals. The other horses appeared wilted, even tired. Bruce focused on his own colt. He could see that Frontier remained cool, quiet, rested - and yes, ready.

Bruce's binoculars arced towards the starter, who had the field lined up in place.

And then the webbing flashed upwards - and they were off.

Bruce leaned over the rail trying to make out how they'd started. Some unknown had gone to the front. The favourite, The Picket, was second by a half-length. Bruce scanned the rushing field driving for the first turn, but he couldn't find the green and white colours. Then he did — Frontier was in twelfth place, dead last and galloping lazily. Garrison's whip was still in his boot as they drove around towards the halfway mark.

The horses were pounding into the backstretch. The unknown leader had fallen back into the pack.

Two hours at the post with a jockey on his back had begun to take their toll. The Picket had gone to the front by a length, then two lengths. Frontier was no longer in last place. The green and white colours were moving up. Bruce counted. Frontier must be eighth, no, seventh, no - sixth.

The horses galloped through the backstretch, rounding into the homestretch.

Bruce groaned. The Picket was opening up a three-length lead. Frontier moved into fourth place, but time was running out. Bruce shut his eyes. His baby would never make it.

When Bruce opened his eyes, the horses were pounding into the homestretch. At first, Bruce was unable to find Frontier because he wasn't in fourth place, nor was he in third place. He was in second, and Garrison had his whip out at last and was steadily fanning Frontier with his crop.

Heading towards the wire, Frontier was full of heart, full of compact, conserved strength, hardly working up a froth. He was making his bid. Moving like a whirlwind, Frontier was fast closing the gap between The Picket and himself. Snapper Garrison, riding low and hard, was driving for one more Garrison finish.

The crowd noises were thunder behind Bruce. The approaching horses were clouds of swirling dust and beating hoofs as the field approached.

Bruce did not need his glasses now.

What was happening was clear to the naked eye. Frontier had closed the distance between himself and the leader. It was neck and neck, stride for stride with The Picket as they streaked for the wire.

Suddenly, other spectators jammed in front of Bruce, pushing him backwards.

Momentarily, he lost sight of the finish.

Jumping on a free chair, Bruce had a glimpse of one horse flashing across the finish line, leading by a length. The dust blurred his vision, and for an instant he couldn't tell the colours of the winner.

Then he could make out the winning colours.

Green and white!

Frontier, Snapper Garrison up, had won the American Derby of 1903. It was Frontier at fifteen to one. It was the \$25,000 first-place purse.

Bruce found a breathless Karen Grant coming towards him, hugging him, kissing him.

Then she stared up at him. Bruce was unable to read her mind, but Bruce guessed what was on it.

Karen was telling herself that maybe she had not actually won - but she was damned certain that Judith Armbruster had lost.

The telephone on Minna Everleigh's desk was ringing. She hurried across the room to answer it.

'Hello.'

She recognized the man's voice immediately. 'This is Harold T. Armbruster,' he said. 'Is this Miss Minna Lester?'

Minna, from long habit, almost corrected him by saying she was Minna Everleigh. She caught herself in time. 'Yes, this is Minna Lester.'

'How are you? Actually, I'm calling to speak to your nephew. Is Bruce around? I want to congratulate him on his horse's magnificent winning of the American Derby.'

Minna was enjoying this. 'He's out at Washington Park, turning away all the bidders for Frontier.'

'I can understand that,' said Armbruster. 'I was hoping he'd treat me as a special bidder. I'd certainly like to buy that horse, run him a little longer, put him to stud. Will you tell Bruce I'm interested?'

'Gladly,' said Minna. 'But I'm afraid it won't make any difference to Bruce, Mr Armbruster.'

'You're sure of that?'

'I'm positive,' asserted Minna.

'A \$25,000 purse may seem a fortune to him now as a young man, but later he'll need all the money he can get.'

'He made \$15,000 on his win tickets.'

'Even that can run out,' continued Armbruster. 'I want to tell him that for his future he will still require a steady, well-paying executive job. The offer I made him is still open.'

'You mean provided he marries your daughter Judith.'

'Why, yes, of course. He'd be in the family then, he'd be one of us. Then I'd know I could trust him wholly even in the most sensitive financial matters.'

'I think I can answer for Bruce,' said Minna. 'Nice lady that your daughter is, I don't think Bruce has his mind on marriage today. Or, in fact, on any pursuit other than breeding horses in Kentucky.'

'Too bad. Becoming vice-president of one of the country's largest meat-packing firms is nothing to sneeze at.'

'Mr Armbruster, in that regard, I remind you that Bruce is still a vegetarian. You can speak to him yourself at the

wedding next week. But I must tell you it will be one wedding - not two.'

With that call out of the way for Armbruster, and having concentrated at the work in his plant in the afternoon, his mind returned to a more immediate concern that evening after dinner.

The memory of his own marriage in Milwaukee was still vivid. Or rather, more exactly, the event that preceded his marriage so many years ago. Armbruster's father had taken him aside and told him that any young man unschooled in sex should gain some experience before his wedding night.

One sexual encounter with a professional would relieve his tension about what was ahead with Pearl. Therefore, as a pre-wedding gift, his father had taken him to a well-known Milwaukee brothel for his first knowledge of sex with a woman.

Armbruster recalled that he had been terrified, yet he could not deny his father, and besides, he wanted to satisfy his curiosity and get it over with.

At the brothel, the young woman had been advised in advance that her customer was a virgin, and she had been instructed to treat him with consideration.

It had worked out well, better than he had hoped, and when he and Pearl had undressed for their wedding night, he had been ready. He had felt experienced, unafraid of sex with his bride.

Now, with Alan about to be married, Armbruster felt that his own son should enjoy the advantage of the same initiation into the mysteries of sex that he himself had undergone as a youth.

His mind made up to provide Alan with a sexual encounter the following evening, he had gone to the plant to make inquiries about the best brothel to which he might treat his son. For himself, Armbruster knew very little about brothels, except what he had overheard from his friends'

bantering gossip. He had never been to one himself in his life with Pearl; in fact, had never been unfaithful to her even once.

Sometimes he saw stories in the press about the city's notorious brothels, but he had always ignored them as wasteful pornographic trash. In truth, he did not know the name of a single brothel in Chicago,

but he was not above making inquiries to find out which was the best.

During the following day he met separately with two of his plant directors and his senior foreman.

He frankly told each of them the plan he had in mind for Alan. After doing this, he asked each one to give him advice on which brothel in Chicago they would recommend for the bridegroom's first serious experience.

To a man, each of his advisers had suggested the same brothel. To a man, each had told him, 'Take your boy to the Everleigh Club on Dearborn.'

Armbruster thought that the Everleigh Club rang a bell. It sounded familiar. Yet, he did not know about it. He assumed that this oversight was due to the fact that, like an ostrich that buried its head
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in the sand, he had always buried his eyes and his ears in his business. He'd paid no attention to anything on the outside.

He remembered having been told how to go about this initiation in the Everleigh Club. He must reserve a table for Alan and himself in the Club's expensive restaurant. He and Alan must spend lavishly on a good meal with fine champagne. After that, he must request entertainment upstairs for his son.

After supper at home, Armbruster told his son that he would like to speak privately with him in the library.

Once settled and at ease behind closed doors, Armbruster made his proposal to Alan. It was not really a proposal, but rather an order.

'Alan,' he began, 'in a few days you are going to be wedded to a lovely virgin from the South. That part is fine. But what is awkward, Alan, is that you too are a virgin. It is not becoming for you to be so totally inexperienced on your wedding night.'

'Why not?' Alan answered. 'After our wedding night I'll be experienced, and Cathleen will be too.'

'My son, listen to me, as I listened to my father before I was married. The wedding night can be a horrendous encounter, unless you know what you are doing. You can fumble about, do things wrong. A bad start can give you a bad marriage.'

'What are you trying to tell me?'

'That you need one sexual experience before you have the more meaningful one with Cathleen. You need another woman - a professional woman - beforehand.'

Alan protested. 'I don't need anyone and I don't want anyone before my wife. Dad, I'll have no

problems with her, I promise you. I know about the female anatomy from my college courses in biology. I know something more important. Every time I set eyes on Cathleen, my penis grows stiff. I think that's all I need to know.'

'You need another woman first,' Armbruster persisted. 'We'll do it my way. I've learned the most luxurious brothel in Chicago is the Everleigh Club on Dearborn Street. Industrialists and celebrities go there regularly to enjoy its amenities. I've already made a reservation for supper there tomorrow evening. That's how it is done. We will have supper in the Everleigh Club, and a few drinks to loosen you up, and then I'll arrange for you to go upstairs and have your experience with one of their pretty young girls. I'll wait for you downstairs. By the time you come down, you'll be a man, my boy, a real man and grateful to me for your knowledge. Expect to accompany me to the Everleigh Club at eight o'clock tomorrow evening.'

At the Everleigh Club that night there was consternation.

Edmund had caught up with Minna and Aida and reported to them that Harold T. Armbruster had made a reservation for supper for the very next evening for his son and himself.

'I took the reservation,' said Edmund, 'but I know that Mr Armbruster is the last person you want to see here.'

Aida immediately fell into a panic. 'You've got to cancel

him. Make up any reason you can. If he should see us here, and realize what we do, he'd call off the wedding. You've got to see that he's not admitted, because . . .'

'No,' Minna interrupted. 'That would be too suspicious.' She addressed Edmund. 'Are they coming here simply to dine?'

Edmund cleared his throat. 'Not exactly, Miss Minna. To dine, of course, but after that he said he would like some entertainment for his son upstairs. He explained that his son was getting married in a few days, and that the boy was a virgin, and he wanted him' to have at least one experience.'

'We can't allow that,' Aida said fearfully to Minna. 'The truth might get out.'

'It won't get out,' said Minna forcefully. 'It will remain between father and son, I assure you. I have no objection to letting Alan go upstairs and get some pleasure with one of the girls. If that's what his father wants, he should be allowed to do it. Cathleen and Bruce will never find out. Be sensible, Aida, several of the girls here have been taking trustworthy regulars upstairs to entertain them.

There's no reason one of them can't have a roll with Alan Armbruster too.'

She weighed what was next on her mind.

'The important thing is to let this take place in the Ever-leigh Club, yet not let them know the so-called socialite aunts are running the house. Aida, you and I will just have to slip into the office and remain out of sight when the Armbrusters arrive, and stay hidden until they leave. We can do that with no trouble.'

'You mean stay locked up all tomorrow evening?'

'Not quite,' said Minna. 'We can go about our normal activity. But the minute that Edmund welcomes the Armbrusters in the entry hall, he can leave them a moment and rush in to Professor Vanderpool at the piano. You know all those music cues, those codes, we gave him to play when he wants to warn us of danger? Well, when the Armbrusters arrive, let him play "More Work for the Undertaker." That

will be the song that tells us the Armbrusters are here. Wherever you and I are, we'll hear it played and hurry into the study. When the coast is clear, Professor Vanderpool is to play it again. How does that sound?'

Aida was mollified. 'It sounds foolproof.'

'It is,' said Minna, 'so don't worry. Let the Armbrusters come and go. The reputation of Cathleen and Bruce Lester won't be damaged. I give you my word.'

At noon the following day, Bruce Lester had gone in search of Karen. He found her setting tables in the restaurant.

He went to her. 'Karen, have you got a moment?'

'Time on my hands,' she said. 'I have no real work until supper this evening.'

'Good. Can we have a word outside?'

Puzzled, Karen accompanied Bruce out of the restaurant. In the hallway she said, 'We can talk here.'

'It's nothing earth-shaking, just something to feed my curiosity.'

'About what?'

'My aunts' home here,' said Bruce. 'I've never had a real look at it. Whenever I ask Aunt Minna to show me around, she always says she's too busy, and so is Aida. Maybe a coincidence, maybe not.'

Anyway, I'd like to see the place. Since Minna and Aida are still asleep, I thought you could guide me through the mansion.'

Karen was immediately reluctant. 'It's not my house. I'm not certain I can do that.'

Bruce persisted. 'I'm sure there is nothing to hide. Unless you know of something.'

Torn between loyalty to Minna and Aida and the desire to please Bruce, Karen said hesitantly, 'Of course, I don't know their home as well as they do. But I've been all through it a number of times, and I could show you whatever I know.'

'That's all I want,' said Bruce. 'It's such a tremendous

place for two small ladies, I'd like to see what they did with it. You don't mind?'

'Well, I suppose it's all right,' said Karen, taking Bruce by the hand. 'We can start with the library Minna is so proud of.'

She directed Bruce past the restaurant and into the library.

Bruce surveyed the library. 'All this intellect intimidates me,' he admitted.

'It is intimidating,' agreed Karen. 'Minna has over 3,000 books here. Look at that complete collection of Shelley. Over there, nineteen volumes of Chinese poems. Next to them, Guy de Maupassant. A complete collection of Edgar Allen Poe. Minna told me that Poe was a relative of hers on her mother's side.'

'I never knew that.'

'Did you know your Aunt Minna is writing a book of her own?' said Karen. 'She even discussed it with me. It's to be called Poets, Prophets and Gods.'

Bruce shook his head in wonder. 'Minna's brother, my father ... I always thought he was the big brain in the family. I think I can say now that Aunt Minna is at least equal to him.'

As they left the library, Karen suggested that they skip the Art Gallery. 'Not my strong area,' she said. 'I only know the reproduction of Bernini's Apollo and Daphne. I don't know the paintings at all. Want to go to Minna's favourite retreat -the Gold Room?'

'You mean the one with the small pure gold piano and the gold cuspidors?' said Bruce. 'I've already seen it. I can't imagine anything gaudier.'

Karen laughed. 'Well, start imagining,' she said, leading him past the Gold Room. 'Have you seen the

Copper Room?'

'No, but I'd like to.'

Karen led him into the Copper Room. The walls were panelled in copper and hammered brass. The furniture was made of Arabian brass. In the centre was a mahogany table with a table top made of Italian marble. All around the chamber were cages of yellow canaries singing in full voice.

They went on to the Rose Room, with its rococo pink wall hangings and its scattering of rounded easy chairs and divans upholstered in pale-pink silk damask.

Next, they came to the Grand Ballroom, dominated by a massive chandelier of cut-glass drops, shedding light on a hardwood floor made of rare woods in mosaic patterns.

'There's more?' asked Bruce with amazement, as they resumed walking.

'Here's the Chinese Room,' said Karen.

Bruce studied the Oriental hangings and draperies. In the middle of the chamber he saw a teak table holding an oversized brass beaker filled with packages wrapped in red tissue. 'What's this?' he inquired.

Karen started to explain that it was used by the girls, then caught herself. 'Those packages are Chinese firecrackers. When diners come in here for champagne, your Aunt Minna sets a few of them off. If they make more noise than the pulling of a champagne cork, Minna gives the diner a - a playful kiss on the cheek.'

'That's an unusual game,' said Bruce.

They went on to the Moorish Room. It was furnished with deep African couches and the fountain sprayed a musky, intoxicating perfume. 'Your Aunt Minna likes to open boxes of live butterflies.'

Involuntarily, Bruce was shaking his head. He pointed to folding doors leading to another chamber.

'What's that?' he asked.

'To be perfectly frank, I don't know,' said Karen. 'I've never been inside it. Shall we have a look?'

'Why not?'

Karen opened the doors and showed Bruce inside. 'Heavens,' she gasped. 'The entire floor is mirrored.'

'Astonishing.'

'I've heard of a Mirror Room,' said Karen. 'This must be it.'

She walked past Bruce inside the chamber, going gingerly

over the mirrored floor, and stopped, fascinated by the mirrors beneath her feet.

Bruce was looking at Karen. His eyes went downwards to the hem of her skirt and the tops of her shoes.

'Karen,' he called out. 'I can see what you're wearing underneath your skirt.'

'What do you mean?'

'You're . . . you're wearing a lace-trimmed chemise beneath your corset.' He gulped. 'It separates but covers you between your legs.'

'My God!' Karen exclaimed. She came off the mirrored floor as fast as if she'd been walking barefooted on burning coals. At the door, she brought her hand to her mouth. 'What can a floor like that be doing in your aunts' home?'

'Or for that matter, what's a restaurant doing here?'

Bruce took Karen by the arm as they walked away. He was lost in thought.

'You know, Karen, I'm not sure this is Aunt Minna's and Aunt Aida's home,' Bruce finally said. 'It's more like a house.'

'A house?' Karen repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean,' said Bruce, 'once in Louisville I was taken to a house. It was not as classy or large as this one, but almost as luxurious. It was a house of ill fame, Karen. This resembles it. You know, a house is not always a home.'

'Bruce! Do you know what you're saying?'

'I'm not really sure,' Bruce said.

'Well, don't say it, please don't say it!'

At nine o'clock that evening in the Everleigh Club, the Armbrusters, father and son, the latter uneasy in his woollen brown suit and bow tie, had finished their supper.

Harold Armbruster felt relaxed, expansive, as he continued to ply Alan with champagne.

Armbruster had advised his son to eat lightly and drink heavily to overcome his nervousness.

They'd both dined on

roast chicken, and now Armbruster sat back to enjoy a cigar and watch Alan steadily sipping the champagne.

'Quite a place, this Everleigh Club,' Armbruster admitted.

'Yes.'

'No one ever told me a whorehouse could look anything like this. I bet the girls are just as beautiful.'

Alan made one last effort at resistance. 'Father, I don't have to do this. I'll know what to do with Cathleen. Let's just go home now.'

Armbruster shook his head vigorously. 'It's now or never. If I let it be never, you'll be in real trouble next week when it matters. I'm going to see you through this, Alan. You won't be able to count the times you'll thank me later.'

'If you insist,' Alan mumbled.

'I've never insisted on anything more.' Armbruster waved his hand at Edmund, who was immediately attentive. Armbruster said to him, 'We're through eating. I'll wait down here and have another few drinks until my son is ready to leave. Will you see that he's taken upstairs for some entertainment?'

'Certainly, sir.' Edmund beckoned the nearest hostess - it was Karen. 'I'll have our hostess escort him upstairs.' When Karen reached his side, Edmund leaned over and whispered to her, 'Take the boy up

to Margo's room. You know which one. Margo will be expecting him.'

Karen extended her hand to Alan, who rose reluctantly. He cast one wretched glance at his father, and then he trailed Karen out of the restaurant.

As they walked slowly to the staircase, Karen said, 'You look like you're going to the guillotine. Is it your first time?'

'First,' Alan answered in a quavering voice.

'It may be an ordeal,' said Karen, 'but it can be fun once you're relaxed. I don't think you'll be sorry.

Margo is very nice.'

'I... I hope you're right.'

They reached the top of the staircase, and Karen guided him past the numerous doors.

'Margo, Margo,' murmured Karen to herself, 'she's in eight or nine. I'm sure it's nine.'

She opened the door partially and peeked in. 'She must be in the bathroom. In fact, I can hear the water running. All right, Alan, you just go in alone. Take off all your clothes and sit on the bed.

Soon as she comes out, she'll tell you what to do.'

'Okay,' Alan swallowed.

Karen shut the door tightly, and left for the downstairs, praying it went well for the poor kid.

And that Bruce would never find out about this.

In the boudoir, Alan stood helplessly, surveying the room and seeing nothing but the brass bed, with its thick mattress covered by a white cashmere blanket.

As the sounds from the bathroom ceased, he realized that he could not just stand there fully clothed.

With numbed fingers he began to shed his clothes and drop them in a heap, first his jacket, then his bow tie, then his shirt, next the shoes and socks, and finally his trousers. He was left standing in his sleeveless, one-piece union suit with its button fly partly fastened.

Embarrassed to wait naked, he moved towards the bed, and was about to slip under the blanket, when he heard the knob of the bathroom door turn.

Heart going like a triphammer, he turned towards the bathroom as its door opened and a small, attractive girl, lost in the dim light, appeared. She was loosely clad in a pure white peignoir and he could make out her legs, and then her lovely figure, even the dark patch between her legs.

Momentarily breathless, his gaze went up to her breasts, fully evident beneath the thin garment, and then his gaze went up to her face.

When he saw her face, he gasped audibly.

This was no whore named Margo.

This was Cathleen, his Cathleen Lester, the virgin he was engaged to marry in a matter of days.

He jumped to his feet just as she realized that a young man was present in the room, almost undressed, and then she gasped too. 'Alan!' she exclaimed in a strangled voice.

Momentarily stunned, he found his voice. 'Cathleen! What are you doing here?'

'What do you mean what am I doing here? I'm living here with my aunts in their home until our marriage.' She stared at him. 'The question is what are you doing here - and in my room?'

'Cathleen, this isn't your aunts' home. This is a famous house of prostitution. It's the Everleigh Club.'

'You must be crazy. It isn't. It can't be. Where did you get the idea that this is a ... ?'

Alan broke in on her. 'It is. It's a brothel, a house of prostitution. It's known everywhere. Whatever your aunts told you, they are running this place. They are madams.'

'Don't you dare say that -'

'I'm saying it because it's true. Listen to me, Cathleen. For heaven's sake, listen to me. My father decided I must have some experience in sex before our wedding night. It's an old-fashioned idea.

Take your son to a sporting house and make him learn what women are all about. The biggest 109

brothel in Chicago is a house called the Everleigh Club, run by two sisters named Minna and Aida Everleigh - not Lester, but Everleigh. He brought me here against my will. I don't want to be with any woman but you. But my father insisted. He dragged me here for dinner and drinks tonight - I mean, what would a restaurant be doing in a private home? - and then he sent me upstairs to consort with a prostitute named Margo. The person who escorted me sent me into the wrong room. Now do you understand?'

Cathleen was pale, shaking her head. 'I can't believe it, I just can't believe it. You mean my Aunt Minna and Aunt Aida are actually madams, and they've been lying all these years? My father sent us here in good faith, to stay with our aunts before the wedding. He doesn't know ...'

'Nor does my father know about Minna and Aida. He must never find out that his future daughter-in-law has been living in a house of prostitution.'

On her bare feet, Cathleen had moved closer to Alan. She said in a low voice, 'Alan, it's not important what your father thinks. To me, it's only important what you think.' She hesitated.

'Because I'm here, surely you don't think I'm a prostitute?'

'Of course not!' He shook his head vigorously. 'I know who you are. I know you're not working here.'

'But maybe you're not sure.' She reached out and touched Alan's chest. 'Darling, you've got to be sure before we go ahead. You've got to know I'm not one of those girls. Everything that I've told you is true. I'm a virgin, Alan, and I can prove it.'

With that, she unfastened her peignoir and let it fall to her feet. She faced him, utterly nude.

'Let me prove it, Alan,' she said, and then turned, walked to the bed, threw back the cover, and lay down.

Dazzled by the sight of her, Alan swayed on his feet, choking. His eyes feasted on her body as she lay on the bed. He felt the swelling hardness in his crotch. Suddenly his thick penis came straight up and burst out of his underwear.

He could see Cathleen's eyes widen.

For Alan, there was nothing more to hide or hold back, no longer a need for modesty.

He ripped off his union suit and tossed it aside.

Trembling with excitement, he tried to contain himself as he approached her.

He settled on the bed and dropped down beside Cathleen, so close that their bare hips and thighs touched.

Rising, his lips went to her firm nipples, kissing and licking them, then he was kissing her mouth.

Their tongues met, and gradually her breathing heightened.

He was lifting himself, coming down between her legs, as her own legs came up to encircle him.

He was entering her, gradually entering her, slowly, with difficulty, as she moaned. 'Oh, Alan, I love you.'

'And I love you,' he whispered.

And through the joyful minutes that followed, their marriage was consummated without a wedding.

Downstairs, in a corner of the restaurant, Edmund came upon Karen Grant.

'Well,' he inquired, 'did you take care of young Arm-bruster?'

'You mean did I take him up to Margo's boudoir? I did. I put him into bedroom nine, and left him on his own with Margo. By now he knows the facts of life.'

Edmund was blinking at Karen. 'What did you say? You put him in room nine?'

'That's right. You told me to put him in room nine.'

Edmund was shaken. 'No, I didn't. I told you to put him in room six. Margo's in room six.'

'Oh, no ...'

'Never mind,' said Edmund harshly. 'Do you know who's in room nine? Stay here. I've got to get to Miss Minna at once!'

Edmund whirled about, hastened through the restaurant, and raced for the Everleigh office.

He flung open the door without knocking.

Minna and Aida were on a sofa, chatting. Minna raised her head. 'What is it? Did old Armbruster leave yet? I didn't hear the Professor's song.'

Ignoring the question, Edmund entered the office, and propelled himself across the room to face the Everleigh sisters.

'Miss Minna,' he panted, 'I have some terrible news. There's been a terrible mistake. I just heard about it.'

'What is it?' Minna asked worriedly, rising.

'Someone escorted Alan Armbruster upstairs to - to be entertained by Margo in bedroom six. There was a mistake. Alan was led into bedroom nine, instead.'

'Nine!' Minna exclaimed, aghast. 'That's Cathleen's private room. I don't believe it! Are you sure?'

'I'm positive, Miss Minna.'

Minna's hands went to her head. 'Oh, my God, what a disaster. By now he knows Cathleen's Aunt Minna and Aunt Aida own a whorehouse, and by now he must believe Cathleen is a prostitute in this house. It's the worst thing that could have happened. I must put a stop to it -I must explain —'

Aida was on her feet. 'Minna, don't go out there — Arm-bruster's there -'

But Aida's warning came too late. Minna had already dashed out of the office.

To get to the entry hall quickly and up the staircase, Minna cut through the restaurant. She ran up an aisle, oblivious to several guests who tried to greet her as she raced past.

She was approaching the far end of the restaurant when she came on a lone diner, a hefty man puffing on a cigar as he watched her. He narrowed his eyes, then stared at her.

He threw down the cigar and leaped to his feet, stepping into the aisle to block her.

'Miss Lester!' he exclaimed. 'Can this be Minna Lester? What in the devil are you doing in this house of assignation? What are you doing here?'

She stopped in her tracks, confronted by his bulk. For seconds she was speechless. At last she spoke. 'I own it,' she said. There was simply not another thing to say.

'You own it?' Armbruster bellowed. 'You own this whorehouse?'

'I own it, my sister and I own it,' she repeated. She tried for an explanation. 'My brother in Kentucky doesn't know a thing about it. That's why he felt he could safely send Cathleen and Bruce to stay here before the wedding. I could never tell him. And Cathleen doesn't know. We changed everything, almost everything, so she wouldn't know. So, please ...'

'This is unthinkable!' roared Armbruster, grabbing Minna by the arm. 'Come on, I want to get my son out of this

infamous Gomorrah!'

He dragged Minna out of the restaurant, through the entry hall, towards the staircase landing.

They both halted as they looked up in time to see Alan, fully clothed, a benign smile on his face as he descended.

As he reached the foot of the stairs, Alan grinned at his father. 'Thanks, Dad. You were right. I had a girl, and now I have enough experience for the wedding.'

Armbruster let go of Minna and snatched his son by the arm. 'Wedding, you say? What wedding?

I'm not letting my son marry the niece of two whorehouse madams. It would destroy me in Chicago for ever, ruin everything I ever tried to build. Come on home!' Armbruster wheeled to confront Minna. 'As for you, don't you dare to come near me or any of us. You're not setting foot in my home again. There'll be no wedding! The wedding is off!'

With that, he pulled Alan away. Minna watched them go and then burst into tears.

EIGHT

Mayor Carter Harrison always came to his City Hall office at promptly nine o'clock in the morning.

He was surprised, upon his arrival this morning, to see that there was already a visitor in his office.

The visitor was Harold T. Armbruster, admitted half an hour earlier by the mayor's administrative aide.

'I hadn't expected you,' said Harrison, removing his hat, shaking hands, and sitting down across from the meat-packer. 'What brings you here?'

'Something that may be of use to you,' said Armbruster.

'Please go on.'

'This morning my mind was on your campaign for mayor. That was the first time we met.'

'I remember very well.'

'What I remember is something else. My interest in you was based on your desire to expand our railroad system. But I recall you didn't speak of that much when I heard you. You spoke of reform, of getting rid of the whorehouses in this city.'

'Correct,' said the mayor. 'I am dedicated to fulfilling that pledge.'

Armbruster nodded. 'Until two days ago I knew only vaguely about the Everleigh Club. Now I know a good deal more. Mayor, why haven't you closed the Everleigh Club?'

The Mayor sighed. 'Mr Armbruster, the legal fact is that I can't move against it until I have evidence first-hand that it is operating as a whorehouse. The sisters have become more cautious about their activities. Thus far, it's been impossible for me to prove the Club is presendy anything more than a restaurant.'

Armbruster stood up. 'Mr Mayor, I assure you, the Ever-leighs are still in the business of prostitution.'

'You know for certain?'

'For certain,' said Armbruster. 'They are in business and I can prove it. As you know, my son is getting married this week. I thought - repugnant as it was to me - it would be valuable to him to gain some experience with a woman before his marriage. Everyone I asked told me to take him to the Everleigh Club. So last night I did.'

The mayor was fascinated. 'You took your boy to the Everleigh Club?'

'To let him have a woman.'

'Did he have a woman there? Did you pay for it?'

'He had a girl, by his own admission. He won't give me any details, except to say he did have sexual intercourse. And yes, I paid for it. It was added to my dining bill, which is in my pocket.'

The mayor was on his feet. Coming around his desk, he took Armbruster by the shoulders. 'Am I hearing you right, Mr Armbruster? Are you telling me you have first-hand evidence that the Everleigh Club is — right now — operating as a house of prostitution?'

'As a whorehouse, a real, working whorehouse.'

The mayor's excitement was growing. 'You can prove it, testify to this?'

'Definitely. That's why I'm here. To side with you in your reform movement. Last night, after my son was sent upstairs to cohabit with one of those professional chippies, I learned by accident that the house is owned by Minna and Aida Everleigh, who have misrepresented themselves to me as socialites. They were to give the bride — their niece — away. I was shocked. I instantly called off the wedding. No son of mine is marrying into the family of whorehouse madams. The wedding is cancelled.'

'I'm saddened to hear that, but the banquet . . . Will you still have the banquet for the prince of Prussia?'

'The banquet is on. The wedding is off. And I'll not be satisfied until the Everleighs are in jail and their establishment shut down for ever.'

The mayor was beaming. 'I need only your sworn testimony before my chief of police, Francis O'Neill, to accomplish that end.'

Armbruster raised his right hand. 'You have my promise that I'll testify against the Everleighs and their Club immediately.'

The mayor linked his arm inside Armbruster's. 'Let's get you downstairs to the chief of police, swear you in, and take your deposition. Then I'll be free to accomplish what I've been trying to accomplish all these weeks - bring an end to the careers of Minna and Aida Everleigh.'

Minna had been sitting in the Gold Room in the early evening trying to distract herself from thoughts of the run-in with Harold T. Armbruster. She was reading the collected poems of Shelley when Edmund appeared in the doorway.

'There you are, Miss Minna,' Edmund said. 'I've been looking everywhere for you. There's someone here to see you.'

'Without an appointment?' Minna said, surprised. 'Who is it?'

'Chief of Police Francis O'Neill.'

Minna put aside her book of poetry. 'That doesn't sound promising. All right, show him in.'

Edmund disappeared, and a minute later reappeared to usher the corpulent chief of police into the Gold Room.

Minna offered her hand as O'Neill waddled over to her.

'It's been a long time, Chief,' she said, shaking his hand. She patted the sofa cushion beside her.

'Please sit down.'

With a wheeze, the chief of police took a seat next to her. 'I'm sorry to come by so abruptly, Minna,' he apologized. 'But I had to.'

'Why?' asked Minna calmly.

'I'm not here of my own free will, I assure you. I guess you know who sent me.'

'Mr Armbruster, I presume.'

O'Neill nodded. 'And the mayor. Technically, Mayor Carter Harrison sent me at the instigation of Armbruster.' The chief fiddled with the buttons of his uniform. 'Minna, I heard about your niece's wedding - that it's off. I'm sorry.'

'No loss,' said Minna, 'although we'll miss Alan, who's the best one in that family. Cathleen will manage without the Armbrusters. She'll go back to Kentucky and find plenty of eligible men there.'

'I'm sure she will, Minna.'

'But you're not here to discuss my niece,' said Minna. 'You have something else on your mind.'

'That's right, Minna.'

'And it's bad news.'

Clearly unhappy, the chief of police jerked his head up and down. 'That's right.'

Minna had known this chief, and others before him, for a long time. Usually, when they came by with bad news, that bad news was simple to define. It meant additional pay-offs, or higher pay-offs, to keep the Everleigh Club open. This visit, Minna knew, was more serious.

'Go ahead,' Minna prompted him. 'Let me have the bad news. Has it got to do with the mayor's reform campaign?'

Chief of Police O'Neill gave a weary sigh. 'Mayor Harrison has ordered me to shut down the Everleigh Club.'

'That's no surprise.'

'For good, Minna.'

Minna's expression remained impassive. It was not unexpected news, but still, the finality of it was unexpected. She'd gotten out of scrapes like this constantly. She sensed that she would not be able to elude this one.

'Based on Armbruster's evidence?'

'Yes.'

Minna started shaking her head. She kept shaking it. Not indignantly, but as a comment on the injustice of this turn of events. 'It's not fair, you know. Armbruster himself brought his son over here. We recognized him from the newspapers, and we did him a favour. So that's not what he has against me. What he has against me is that he was misled into thinking I was a society lady. When he found out I wasn't, he couldn't stand by and let his son's marriage bring me into his family. Not in his position. It's really not fair. I'm cleaner in my business than he is in his.'

Chief of Police O'Neill nodded sadly. 'I couldn't agree with you more, Minna. Yet, there it is. I have to follow orders.'

'I'm not faulting you, Chief.'

'Worse than that, Minna, I'll have to arrest you and Aida.'

This time Minna was genuinely surprised. 'I didn't know you could do that.'

'It's a law in the books,' said O'Neill. 'It's always been there, gathering dust, but Harrison has dusted it off. You and Minna are to become object lessons to the Levee.'

'What happens after we're arrested?'

'We take you down to the jail and book you. We'll put you in a cell until your lawyer meets the bail that's set, which may be considerable. After that, you're free until the trial date.'

Minna sighed. 'What a mess.'

'There you are, Minna. It's out of my hands.'

'What is in your hands? Shutting me down?'

'First shutting you down. Then ordering your arrest. The mayor insists that you be out of business when the prince of Prussia arrives.'

'When is that?'

'Not tomorrow morning, but the morning after. That gives you tonight and most of tomorrow to make arrangements to get your people on the road. When that's done, we'll post the notice outside and two of my men will escort you and Aida to the local prison.'

'Not much time to act,' said Minna.

'The best I can offer,' said the chief, rising. 'My job is to see that there is no Everleigh Club and no Everleigh sisters visible when the prince of Prussia sets foot in this city of purity. Again, I'm sorry, Minna. Forgive me. But orders are orders. Now you better get ready to leave.'

Minna did not inform her sister of their bleak future until early the next afternoon. She wanted Aida to have a restful night before they tackled what lay ahead.

In the morning, while cleaning out her desk, she tried to think through all that had to be done.

First, she must notify Edmund to assemble all the girls living on the outside for a three o'clock meeting that afternoon in the Moorish Room.

Second, she must find a decent hotel where Cathleen and Bruce could stay before returning to Kentucky.

Third, she must summon Dr Holmes and let him know of her fate, the fate of the Club, and the end of his job.

Then she would have to find a hotel suite for Aida and herself until they could make more permanent plans.

Also, she must hire a storage company to hold all the Club's furniture and precious objects. That could be done last, while she and Aida were incarcerated and waiting for bail.

In organizing her moves, Minna realized that she had omitted planning for one meeting that was really necessary before any of the others.

She must have an intimate session with her niece and nephew, whom she had not seen since yesterday. She must find out what happened to Cathleen after Alan appeared in her room. She must learn if Cathleen and Bruce knew the truth about their aunts, and - if by some wild chance they didn't know — she must tell them the truth once and for all.

Leaving her study, Minna went out to find Edmund, who was not far away.

'We're being padlocked, aren't we?' Edmund asked.

'You're right, Edmund. Don't worry about your own future. We'll take care of that. Right now, we have a lot to do. I want you to go out and summon all the girls, wherever they are, to a meeting with Aida and myself by mid-afternoon in the Moorish Room. Before that, I want to talk with Cathleen and Bruce. I couldn't find them when I looked.'

'They were out late last night,' Edmund said. 'They went out again early this morning. They seemed to have a lot on their minds. They're back now.'

'Send them to the Gold Room,' said Minna. 'They've talked enough to each other. Now it is my turn to talk to them.'

Minna waited in the Gold Room until Cathleen and Bruce were ushered in by Edmund.

'There are some important matters I want to discuss with you,' Minna said after they were seated.

'Where have you been?'

'Walking, talking, seeing more sights of Chicago,' said Bruce. 'Mostly, talking about our futures.'

'Then you know the wedding is off,' said Minna.

Cathleen nodded miserably. 'Karen told Bruce, and he told me. Armbruster called it off once he heard about you and Aunt Aida.'

'Then you know everything,' said Minna.

'Only that this is not merely your home,' replied Bruce. 'It's a house of prostitution. We know that you and Aida are not socialites but brothel madams. I've never had much regard for madams. But knowing you, I've changed my mind.'

Minna shook her head. 'Too bad that you had to learn the way you did, or at all. I never meant for you to know. I'm afraid I gave it away when I realized that Alan had mistakenly been sent to your bedroom, Cathleen. I'm afraid I lost my head. Armbruster recognized me and went crazy. In his position, he couldn't allow his son to marry the niece of two madams. It was a foolish accident and I regret it.'

Cathleen forced a wan smile. 'I, for one, don't regret it. Karen tried to apologize to Bruce and then to me. There was nothing to be apologetic about. I simply had my wedding night without the wedding. It was wonderful.'

'Have you spoken to Alan since?' Minna wanted to know.

'Not in person, of course,' said Cathleen. 'He's practically a prisoner in his own home. But he telephoned me twice. He tried to get his father to change his mind. No luck. Now Alan wants to elope. I know that's impossible. It would ruin Alan's future.'

Minna stood up and paced restlessly about the chamber. 'Everything became unstrung because I lied to your father from the start. Still, I had to. I couldn't tell my brother that his sisters had opened a house of prostitution. Not in his condition. He'd have had another stroke, especially since he always felt responsible for us. So I invented the socialite fiction when we moved to Chicago. Your father believed me. When his daughter was to marry someone in Chicago, it was only natural that he would send both of you to me and to my care. I always tried to disguise the true nature of what was going on here. I almost succeeded.' She opened her hands as if to implore their forgiveness. 'In the end I failed.'

'I'm not blaming you for anything, Aunt Minna,' Cathleen insisted.

'Thank you, Cathleen. Just don't blame Aida and me for one thing - our profession. It is an old one, and as honourable as Armbruster's. We've run a respectable establishment here. We've given fairly for everything we've received.' Minna shrugged. 'But now it's over.'

Bruce came to his feet, puzzled. 'It's over? What's over?'

'The Everleigh Club is being shut down tonight. Aida and I are going to jail, at least temporarily.'

Armbruster went to the mayor, who went to the chief of police. The chief came over with the closing order last night.'

'They can't do that to you!' Bruce exclaimed.

'They're doing it, Bruce. Legally, there is no way I can prevent it. We'll be out of business. But both of you never mind about Aida and me. We'll manage. We've made enough to get along on. We'll either retire and travel, or go somewhere else and open up again. More important, what's going to happen to the two of you?' She looked at Cathleen and added, 'What about you, Cathleen?'

'Bruce and I will be going back to Kentucky. I'll make up some story for Dad about the wedding being cancelled. He'll believe me.'

'You'll find someone else,' Minna assured her. 'There are plenty of men in Kentucky -'

'There's no one I want except Alan,' Cathleen said. 'If I can't have Alan, I'd rather be a spinster.'

Minna made no further effort to placate her niece. She turned to her nephew. 'What about you, Bruce?'

'I'm a little luckier than Cathleen,' he said. 'From what I won at the Derby, I can go back to Kentucky and set up a breeding farm.'

'No marital prospects?' asked Minna.

'No. I -'

'That's not true,' Cathleen broke in. She fixed her gaze on her brother. 'Why don't you tell Aunt Minna that you're in love with Karen Grant -'

'With a prostitute?' said Minna with a frown.

'She's not a prostitute,' Bruce objected. 'Karen Grant is Mayor Harrison's secretary. She was sent to the Everleigh Club to get evidence of illegal activities. After she met me, she changed her mind about being a spy for the mayor.'

'I see,' said Minna slowly. 'Are you considering marrying Karen?'

Bruce thought about it. 'I'd like to. Yes, very much. Still, I won't be that rich. And I don't know how Karen would take to life on a Kentucky farm.'

'Find out,' said Minna. 'Ask her.'

'Maybe I will.'

Minna considered her niece and nephew. 'When will you leave for Louisville?'

'In a few days,' said Bruce. 'I have to arrange to ship Frontier out of Washington Park to Kentucky.'

'Then you'll need somewhere to stay after we're closed down,' said Minna. 'Let me put my mind to it. I have a few matters to settle first. We'll talk again late this afternoon. Meanwhile, better pack up.'

By three-fifteen that afternoon, all the Everleigh girls had assembled in the Moorish chamber and gathered about Minna and Aida.

Minna counted the twenty-seven of her girls.

When her eyes fixed on Karen Grant, Minna dismissed her. 'You don't belong here,' Minna told Karen. 'I know the truth. I can only say that I appreciate that you held back and are not responsible for what I'm about to announce. Go upstairs and keep Cathleen and Bruce company. I'll get to you later.'

After Karen had exited, Minna directed her attention to the rest of the assembly.

'I'll make this short and bittersweet,' Minna began. 'Speaking on behalf of Aida and myself I must

inform you that the Everleigh Club is no more. It is being shut down this evening - permanently, I gather - on the order of Mayor Harrison and Chief of Police O'Neill. This lovely place is being shuttered, and we're all out of work.'

There were outcries of anguish from most of the girls, and several broke into tears.

'I know, I know,' Minna continued. 'It's terrible news. We've had good times, haven't we? You've all been darlings.'

Feeling miserable as her girls, Minna found a gold-tipped, perfumed cigarette, lit it and began to puff nervously.

'If the mayor says we must close, that settles it,' she resumed. 'He sent the chief of police last night to inform me. The closing order will be posted at six. Then Aida and I must go to jail, I hope only briefly. What the mayor and the chief say goes, as far as I am concerned. I'm not going to be angry about it either. I never was a complainer and nothing that the politicians and police of this town can do to me will change my disposition. I'll close up shop and walk out of the place with a smile on my face.'

One girl called out, 'What about us, Minna?'

'There are plenty of other houses.'

'Not like this one,' the girl called back.

'No, not like this one,' Minna agreed. 'I'm afraid there never will be one like the Everleigh Club.'

You all have a little money due you, enough to last a month or two. After you get it, I suggest that you clear out of the Levee entirely. It has nothing substantial to offer. The reformers have shut us down and within a few months they'll get to the other houses. You're young. Find a job, a husband, anything, but don't depend on this life for a career. It's washed up, as we used to say in the theatre.

It's done for, good and done for. We must all find different ways to live.'

Minna surveyed the room one last time.

'Go back to your hotels or wherever you're staying. Since you're all paid up for the week, remain where you are until Edmund can come by and settle accounts with you on our behalf.' She choked.

'I'm going to miss you, every one of you, and I'm going to miss this comfortable place. I love you one and all. Good luck and goodbye from Minna and Aida Everleigh.'

Late in the afternoon, Minna sat alone in her study behind her empty desk and began to make phone calls to hotels in the area, trying to find two rooms, one for Bruce and one for Cathleen and Karen Grant, whose own boarding house apartment was still sublet.

During this process, her office door opened and Dr Herman Holmes entered looking bewildered.

He took up a chair and drew it closer to Minna.

After Minna hung up the telephone receiver, Holmes said, 'You wanted to see me. What's going on here? All I see in the Club are piles of furniture and crates being filled. Are you moving?'

'We're moving somewhere, I don't know where yet,' Minna said. 'Dr Holmes, we're being shut down in less than an hour by the chief of police.'

He was plainly astonished. 'You're what?'

'Being shut down,' Minna repeated. 'Aida and I are out of work. The girls are out of work. And you, Dr Holmes, are also out of work - at least for the Everleigh Club.'

Holmes was shocked. 'What happened?'

Minna told him the details of her meeting with Chief of Police O'Neill last night.

'So that's it, I'm afraid,' she concluded. 'You've done well for us, and I'm sorry to lose you. I wanted to tell you so in person.'

'Thanks, Minna.'

She picked up the telephone. 'Now I'd better get back to calling hotels. They're all completely full.

I've found a small single room for my nephew Bruce. But I can't find a double room for my niece Cathleen and her friend Karen. I'll just keep—'

Dr Holmes was on his feet, about to leave, when he halted and turned around.

'Minna, if you need a place for Cathleen, I'd be glad to provide one in my house. I have several spare bedrooms. Cathleen can come with me for as long as she needs a place to lay her head, and Karen Grant can come with her as her chaperon. How's that?'

Minna jumped up, delighted. 'That's wonderful, Dr Holmes, and I'm grateful for your offer. You need only have them there a few days, until Cathleen goes back to Kentucky. I don't know how to thank you enough.'

'I'm happy to have them,' said Dr Holmes with a smile. 'If they're here, I'll collect them right now and take them to dinner. Then I can move them in with me tonight.'

By six-fifteen the following morning, the official reception committee appointed by Mayor Carter Harrison had crowded on to the platform at Union Station to greet the arrival of Prince Henry of Prussia from New York.

At the forefront of the twelve distinguished citizens gathered to receive the prince was Mayor Carter Harrison, flanked on either side by Ex-Mayor C. P. Walbridge, President of the Business Men's League, and Potter Palmer, head of The Palmer House, Chicago's leading hotel. Immediately behind the mayor and waiting nervously stood Harold T. Arm-bruster. Off to one side were a dozen newspapermen and photographers, the most eager among them young Chet Foley of the Chicago Tribune. This was his biggest assignment yet.

It was fifteen minutes before the prince's arrival, and Foley decided to take advantage of the time by getting the best story of the day. Breaking the confines of the press section, Foley stepped brashly out of line and approached Mayor Harrison.

'Your Honour,' Foley said, 'I'm Chet Foley of the Tribune, assigned to cover the arrival of Prince Henry. I want to do a full-length feature story, and I was hoping you could spare a few minutes to fill me in on some details.'

Mayor Harrison made it a point never to be too obvious about seeking publicity, but he did relish having it, especially on such a momentous occasion as this. In an agreeable mood, the mayor said,

'I don't know if I can be of much help, Mr Foley, but I'll be glad to cooperate.'

'I've been able to learn very little about Prince Henry,' said Foley, 'except that he is the only brother

of Kaiser Wilhelm, and that he is the nominal head of Germany's powerful navy.'

'Quite true,' said the mayor. 'In fact, I'm told Prince Henry was trained to sail from his earliest youth. His father built him a nautical gymnasium in the Potsdam Palace garden. Masts were planted in sand and rigged with all the ropes of a real ship. As a boy he could go aloft every day, and he learned the feel of being on a ship.'

'Fascinating,' said Foley. 'I understand that Prince Henry sailed the Kronprinz Wilhelm to New York on a naval matter.'

'In a manner of speaking, yes. He came to New York to supervise the dedication of a yacht, the Meteor HI, which his brother the kaiser had ordered built.'

'Was Prince Henry at the dedication?'

'Certainly. After a brief stay in New York, where he attended the Metropolitan Opera House, he went to Washington, D.C., to pay his respects to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House and assured the President that Germany had no designs on South America. He and the President attended the launching, and the President's daughter Alice officially dedicated the ship.'

'And momentarily he will be in Chicago.'

'We're very honoured to have him here,' said the mayor. 'Of his twelve-day visit to the United States, he is spending only a few of those days outside New York. He is giving us one full day in Chicago, staying overnight, and then returning east to board the Deutschland for his homeland.' The mayor paused, and cocked his head. 'I hear the train coming in now. I'd better get to my place.'

'Thank you, Mayor,' said Foley, retreating into the press circle.

Gradually the train from New York became visible, billowing steam as it loomed towards the platform and slowly grinding to a halt beside it.

Quickly two porters unrolled a red carpet, running it up to the exit of the private Pullman behind the engine. Mayor Harrison stepped on the far end of the carpet and waited.

A conductor unlatched the Pullman door from the inside, and stepped down to a stool in front of it.

A half-dozen of the prince's entourage began to emerge, one by one, all in uniform and braids.

The last figure to emerge was the tallest and most imposing, with flat hair parted in the middle, a full moustache, a thick but somewhat pointed beard, bedecked in a cape over a bemedalled and beribboned uniform. This was clearly Prince Henry of Prussia.

Mayor Harrison strode forward to welcome him warmly. After shaking hands, they walked along the red carpet and came to a halt before the members of the press.

Digging into a pocket for his brief speech, Mayor Harrison stated in a loud voice:

'We are proud to welcome His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Prussia to Chicago as our city's esteemed guest. His appearance plainly dissipates all the foolish and malicious assertions of political antagonism between Germany and the United States and of German plans to make inroads in the American sphere of influence, and instead thereof, strengthens and establishes feelings of mutual recognition and equality. We welcome Prince Henry as a prince of peace.'

The prince stated his appreciation and thanks. That done, the mayor drew Prince Henry aside to introduce him to the official reception committee.

Graciously, the prince shook hands with everyone. At the conclusion of the ceremony, before the mayor could introduce the prince to the eager Harold T. Armbruster, the prince fumbled inside his uniform for a sheet of paper.

Unfolding it, Prince Henry said, 'About this schedule you prepared for me, for my stay in Chicago.'

The mayor nodded. 'Yes, I have been awaiting your approval of it.'

The prince cleared his throat. 'If I may suggest a few changes -'

'Of course, of course, Sir,' the mayor said hastily, moving

the prince out of earshot of the press. 'Anything can be rearranged to suit your wishes.'

'For one thing, I would like to cancel all the daytime activities. I am exhausted, and I would like to rest for the banquet tonight.'

'Splendid!' exclaimed the mayor. 'I will make excuses to your other hosts. Now, if I may, I'd like to introduce the gentleman who will host the banquet. Your Highness, let me introduce Mr Harold T.

Armbruster.'

Shaking the meat-packer's hand, the prince said, 'How kind of you to invite me to your home. Much as I appreciate it, I have another entertainment in mind, and another place I'd like to have the banquet held.'

Armbruster was crestfallen, and the mayor surprised.

'What do you have in mind, Your Highness?' the mayor asked.

'There is only one place I want to see in Chicago,' Prince Henry stated. 'I've heard throughout Europe, throughout the world, about this sight.'

'What is it?' the mayor wanted to know.

'It's the Everleigh Club,' announced Prince Henry. 'That is the one place I must see and enjoy tonight!'

NINE

Since the moment of Prince Henry's stunning announcement on the Union Station platform, Mayor Harrison and Harold Armbruster had not had a chance to discuss the matter.

After escorting the prince to his suite at The Palmer House, the pair had gone on to City Hall, accompanied by several other members of the reception committee. Even in the elevator they had not had privacy.

Now, inside the mayor's office, Harrison and Armbruster were alone at last.

The mayor had instructed his receptionist that he did not wish to be disturbed while he was meeting with Armbruster. He had promptly flopped into an easy chair as Armbruster settled on the sofa.

The two men stared at each other silently.

Armbruster broke the silence. 'What do we do, Mayor?'

'I don't know.'

'The only place he wants to spend the evening is in the Everleigh Club. How can we fete him there

when there is no Everleigh Club to take him to?'

The mayor was silent again.

'Maybe we could persuade him to have the banquet at my home after all,' said Armbruster.

'No, that won't work,' said the Mayor. 'You heard how emphatic he was about the Everleigh Club.

How can I tell him I closed it down in a hurry because of him?'

Armbruster sighed. 'I don't mind cancelling the banquet at my home. I'd even host it in the Everleigh Club, if that'll keep the prince in a good mood.'

'I wouldn't mind that either,' said Mayor Harrison. 'But how?'

'Well, the Everleigh Club is still there.'

'Sure it is, with a big sign posted saying that it's been closed down by order of the mayor. All the furnishings are probably packed for storage, and let me remind you that the Everleighs themselves are locked up in jail.'

'What do you intend to do, Mayor?'

With deliberation, Mayor Harrison prepared a cigar and lighted it. 'There is only one thing we can do,' the mayor said. He took a few puffs on the cigar, contemplated it, and looked at Armbruster.

'Open it before this evening.'

'The two of us can't do that.'

Mayor Harrison sat up. 'But the two of them can do exactly that.'

'You mean Minna and Aida?'

'Yes, they can do it with the help of their servants. They can return the furnishings to their proper place, bring back the girls and music. And present the banquet in their restaurant.'

Armbruster frowned. 'What if they won't do it? What if they refuse to out of spite?'

'Then it's our job to convince them to open up the Everleigh Club. The first thing we have to do ...'

He jumped up, went to his desk, and reached for the telephone. '... is get them out of jail.'

'Then what?'

The mayor did not reply. He was giving an operator the number for the main police station. In a few seconds, he had Chief of Police Francis O'Neill on the phone.

'Chief, this is the mayor,' Harrison said. 'There's something urgent I want you to do at once.'

'Whatever you say,' replied O'Neill.

'I want Minna and Aida Everleigh out of their cell. Take them to your office and wait for me. I'll be coming down to talk to them. Harold Armbruster will be with me.'

'We just locked them up! Now you want them free?'

'Instantly,' said the mayor. 'The entire operation was a

mistake. I want to rectify it this minute. I'll explain to you later.' He paused. 'By the way, what kind of mood are they in after a night in jail?'

'Not too happy,' said the chief. 'Uh, to put it mildly.'

'I thought not,' said the mayor. 'Armbruster and I will be right over.'

Hanging up, the mayor went to retrieve his hat.

'What are we going to say to them?' Armbruster wanted to know.

'We're going to say we're sorry,' said the mayor. 'We're going to apologize abjectly. Then we're going to bargain with them.'

Armbruster joined the mayor. 'I don't think we'll have to bargain much. After all, they'll have their Club open again. That should please them.'

The mayor led Armbruster to the door. Opening the door, he stared at the meat-packer. 'I think it'll take more than that to please them. Much more. You'll see.'

When Mayor Harrison and Armbruster were received by Chief O'Neill as they entered his office, they could see Minna and Aida Everleigh seated stiffly on a couch, somewhat rumpled from their night in jail, and glaring at them.

Losing no time, Mayor Harrison stepped forward and stood before Minna.

'Miss Everleigh,' said Mayor Harrison, 'first I want to apologize from the bottom of my heart for the inconvenience I've caused you and your sister. I made a mistake, and I'm here to say I'm sorry.'

Minna's countenance was not forgiving. It was defiant. 'You harassed us a long time, Mayor. You finally shut us down and landed us in jail. Now you want to be forgiven. It's not easy.'

'I know it isn't.'

'Now you're saying we're free ...'

'Personally,' said the mayor, 'and free to open your Club once again.'

Minna did not soften. 'I don't get it. What's behind this?'

Mayor Harrison tried to collect himself. At last, before speaking, he cleared his throat. 'I am going to level with you, Miss Everleigh. No evasions. No subterfuge. Only the truth, whatever it avails me.' He cleared his throat again. 'This concerns Prince Henry of Prussia - you've heard of him, haven't you?'

'I'm no dummy,' Minna snapped. 'I read the newspapers. Of course, I've heard of him. He's coming to Chicago.'

'He's already here,' the mayor corrected her. 'He arrived this morning. Mr Armbruster and I were among those who officially greeted him. We reviewed the programme of events we'd planned for him. He flatly declined everything for the afternoon. As for the evening banquet, well, I'm embarrassed to tell you. He wants it to be held in the Everleigh Club.'

'He what?' said Minna and Aida in one voice.

'The only site he agrees to visit in Chicago is your Everleigh Club.'

'My God!' Minna exclaimed, slapping her forehead. 'I don't believe it -' She broke into laughter, poking at Aida, who also began to laugh.

Mayor Harrison gulped. 'I know it is funny. I worked relentlessly to shut down your Club. I was so afraid that the prince would hear of it and be repelled. Now he is here and it's all he wants to see. It gave me a whole new perspective on what you have done for our city. Miss Everleigh, will you find

enough kindness in your heart to forgive me and open the Club tonight? Isn't that enough to persuade you to resume business?'

Minna stared at him. 'Not quite,' she said slowly, 'not quite. It's a good beginning, but not enough.

To open the Club, you have to offer me more.'

'What?' said Mayor Harrison hastily. 'Anything you wish. Name it.'

Minna turned her gaze from the mayor to Armbruster. 'It is something Mr Armbruster must do for me. Otherwise, the Club remains closed.'

'I have much at stake in seeing you open for Prince Henry,' said Armbruster. 'What can I do for you?'

Minna's gaze remained fixed on him. 'You can take back what you said the last time we met. You cancelled the wedding of your son and my niece. You announced the wedding was off. Aida and I want the wedding on. We want it on and we want it to take place in the Everleigh Club. That's our condition. What do you say to that?'

Armbruster flushed but seemed relieved. 'That's your condition for opening the Club?'

'Yes, the wedding.'

'Then you can open the Club. The wedding will take place in your house this evening.' He hesitated. 'In return for that, I have a request. My most heartfelt ambition is to become ambassador to Germany. I was hoping to get a word in to Prince Henry to that effect. Now I can see that a word from you, Miss Everleigh, would carry considerably more weight with the prince. Would you consider doing it?'

Minna laughed good-naturedly. She stood up, crossed the chiefs office, and planted herself in front of Armbruster. 'Why not?' she said, suddenly bending and planting a kiss on the startled Armbruster's cheek. 'I've always wanted my niece to be married to the son of an ambassador!'

Returning to the Everleigh Club, Minna observed that -except for the brightness of the walls and the fountains still bubbling — it resembled a warehouse.

Now there was a single morning and afternoon in which to return the Club to normal.

Her first act was to send Aida scurrying out to contact the servants. They would be needed to unpack the furniture, hang tapestries and artwork, and shelve the books in her library.

Once the servants were found and set to work, Aida's next assignment was to locate the musicians and have them ready to play that night.

Next, Minna ordered Edmund to go from hotel to hotel to meet with the girls and tell them that the Everleigh Club would be open that evening for business after all.

Minna then telephoned Bruce, caught him just awakening, and roused him completely with the word that the Everleigh Club would be open tonight staging a banquet to honour Prince Henry of Prussia, and that a clergyman would be on hand to marry Cathleen to Alan Armbruster.

'Telephone Alan Armbruster and tell him the wedding will take place tonight,' Minna said. 'Tell him his father relented and will be on hand for the festivities. My God, Cathleen doesn't know yet she's going to be a bride. I sent her out with Karen Grant to spend the night with Dr Holmes. He was gracious enough to take them in until I could find them hotel accommodation. Why don't you surprise them by going over to Dr Holmes to give them the good news? When you collect them, return them here. Have Alan accompany you. I'll tell you what, you both come here and take my car to Dr Holmes's. I'll give you his address.'

While waiting for the restoration to begin, Minna hastily pulled her study into shape.

As the dozen servants gradually began to trickle in, the furniture was uncrated under Minna's direction, and gradually began to fill the gaudy chambers once more. In the restaurant, the tables were lined up to form one long banquet table.

Then the musicians brought in their instruments and set them in their familiar positions. After that, the beautiful Everleigh girls, herded by Edmund, jubilantly returned to the Club and began to move their belongings upstairs.

Observing all this activity, Minna felt buoyed with confidence that the Everleigh Club would be its old self in a few hours and that by nightfall it would be fit for a prince and for a wedding.

While supervising the resurrection, Minna realized that she was being interrupted by Edmund.

'What is it, Edmund?'

'Gentleman to see you, Miss Everleigh. Insisted it's a matter of urgency. Wouldn't give me his name, but gave me this calling card.'

Puzzled, Minna took the card. It read:

PINKERTON'S NATIONAL DETECTIVE AGENCY

Beneath the trademark eye, it read:

We Never Sleep

William A. Pinkerton Superintendent Chicago Branch

Minna blinked at the card. William Pinkerton. She had almost forgotten that she had retained him to locate her three missing girls. He had learned nothing in the beginning, and she recalled vaguely that he had told her he would continue working on the case at no extra charge — except if he uncovered some new information.

Now Pinkerton was here to see her - apparently he had uncovered something. She was terribly busy at the moment, yet Pinkerton himself wanted to see her on a matter of 'urgency'.

Minna knew that she could not resist. She must spare the time.

She said to Edmund, 'Tell the gentleman I'll be glad to see him in the privacy of my study. You escort him, Edmund. I'll be there waiting.'

A few minutes later, Minna was settled behind her desk, satisfied that the room was once more in order, when Edmund rapped, announced William Pinkerton, and showed him in.

She had half forgotten his appearance, but when he lumbered in, she recognized him at once. He was this bulky man, with neat, flat hair and an overflowing moustache. He was carrying a thick folder. Without wasting time, he took a chair and drew it up across from Minna.

Opening the folder in his lap, he raised his head.

'You may recall, Miss Everleigh, I advised you after our last conversation on the telephone that I

would continue working for you at no cost, unless I found something.'

'Yes.'

'I found something, Miss Everleigh.'

'On the three missing girls?'

'No. On Dr Herman Holmes, your house physician. Remember, I advised you I'd be investigating Dr Holmes himself.'

'I do remember your saying that. But why him?'

'His veracity, or the lack of it,' said Pinkerton. 'I am very experienced in judging when people are or are not speaking the truth. I was immediately suspicious of Dr Holmes. I questioned his veracity.'

'About what?'

'About insisting he did not know what had happened to your three missing girls. I began to check into the background of Dr Herman Holmes. It wasn't easy, but with the help of our branch offices I managed it.'

'Managed what, Mr Pinkerton?'

'I'm afraid what I learned will appal you.'

Minna's heart tripped. 'Tell me ... tell me what you found out.'

Shuffling through his notes, Pinkerton did not look up. 'To begin with, his name is not Herman H.

Holmes. His real name is Herman Webster Mudgett. He has one of the most unsavoury backgrounds I have ever come across. There exists evidence that Dr Holmes has been a forger, bigamist, horse-thief, mad scientist, swindler - and possibly, quite possibly, most likely although not yet proved, a Bluebeard of sorts, a compulsive murderer.'

Minna trembled. 'I can't believe it. He's gentle, mild, and as a physician most professional. Are you sure of your data, Mr Pinkerton?'

'Judge for yourself.' He began to read from his notes, actually skimming the notes and giving Minna his findings in abbreviated form. 'At eighteen, Holmes eloped with the daughter of a well-off New Hampshire farmer. His new wife paid his tuition to study medicine at a small college.

Then he transferred to the medical school at the University of Michigan. A student friend who carried life insurance worth \$12,500, and who worked with Holmes and named him the beneficiary, soon disappeared. Holmes then abandoned his wife and moved to the state of New York. He boarded with a farmer, seduced the farmer's wife, left her pregnant and dropped from sight. He next turned up in Chicago, where he bigamously married one Myrtle Belknap, twice tried to poison her father, then fled to St Louis. He became friends with Benjamin Pietzel, a swindler. He came back to Chicago, changed his name to Holmes, and posed as an inventor. He escaped from his work leaving \$9,000 in debts. He bought the building he now lives in on Wallace and Sixty-third streets and remodelled it as a hotel for the World's Fair. Many of his guests were never seen again. One was Julia Connor, along with her eight-year-old daughter. Mrs Connor had left her husband to become Holmes's mistress — before she vanished. Travelling to Texas, Holmes met Minnie Williams, who, with her sister Nannie, owned property worth \$75,000. Holmes disposed of it and ran off with the cash. There followed other women in his life, including Emily Van Tassel and Emeline Cigrand.

All eventually disappeared. Holmes brought his friend Pietzel from St Louis to take care of the house. Eventually Pietzel was found dead. Perhaps Pietzel had made the mistake of taking out life insurance,

with Holmes as the beneficiary. Visiting Denver, Holmes married Georgianne Yoke, even though he already had two wives. Then came others -'

Agitated, Minna held up her hand. 'Don't tell me any

more. Do you think he murdered all those people who disappeared?'

'What do you think, Miss Everleigh?'

Minna was more agitated than ever. Her voice quavered. 'I ... I think I've made a horrible mistake. I allowed my niece Cathleen and her friend Karen Grant to move in with Dr Holmes yesterday, until I could find them adequate hotel lodgings.'

Pinkerton's frown deepened. 'Your niece and Miss Grant are staying with Dr Holmes?'

'Yes, I'm afraid so. The Everleigh Club was temporarily closed down, and I was having trouble finding accommodation for Cathleen and Karen. Dr Holmes volunteered to take them in. How could I know that he might be a monster, a - ?'

'You didn't know,' said Pinkerton. 'Now we must try to get them back, if it's not too late.'

'I've already sent Cathleen's fiance and my nephew to Dr Holmes's residence to bring them back here.'

Pinkerton shook his head. 'I'm sure he'll turn them away. He'll say the women left and he doesn't know where they went. The young men won't get anywhere. Miss Everleigh, this is a matter for the police. Let me use your telephone immediately.'

Minna nodded dumbly, and Pinkerton reached for the phone and told the operator to connect him with the main police station.

Once connected, Pinkerton told Captain Zubukovic, who answered, that he had to speak to Chief of Police Francis O'Neill at once.

'I'm sorry, sir. The chief is out for the next few hours. Can I help?'

'This is an emergency,' said Pinkerton. 'I'm sure you can help.'

'What's on your mind?'

Quickly, after introducing himself, Pinkerton told Captain Zubukovic what he had learned about Dr Herman Holmes,

and about the two women whose lives might be endangered. 'I think you should rush a squad of police to the Holmes residence - Holmes might do something homicidal.'

'Do you have evidence that Dr Holmes is a murderer?'

'Circumstantial evidence, but extremely convincing.'

'Not enough for me to act on just on the basis of a telephone call,' said the captain. 'I suggest you come right over and show me your evidence. I'd have to see for myself before I could order a raid.'

'The delay might make it too late.'

'Mr Pinkerton, I can't do any more without a go-ahead from the chief. I suggest you come right over here with your file.'

'I'm on my way,' said Pinkerton, hanging up. He came to his feet with surprising agility. 'Miss

Everleigh, there's not a minute to lose. I can only pray your Alan and Bruce have some luck with Dr Holmes. Otherwise, I can't vouch for the lives of Cathleen and Karen.'

With that, Pinkerton rushed out of the room.

Minna remained immobilized in her chair, paralysed with fear.

In his bedroom in the Castle, Dr Holmes awakened late in the morning.

His bedside clock told him it was just before eleven o'clock. Lying in bed, he wondered if his guests were awake yet.

Yesterday evening, after taking them from the Everleigh Club, Holmes had driven Cathleen and Karen in his Packard to the Saratoga Restaurant and Oyster House for a lavish dinner.

A lavish dinner because he wanted to soften them, fatten them up, for the following day.

Now it was that day, and Holmes felt euphoric, relishing the possibilities the day offered.

Leaving his bed, he contemplated the joys immediately

ahead. He would make love to each of them separately, two virgins he was sure. That would be memorable. If rejected by them, he would gas and kill them, and dismember each, which was a sexual thrill in itself.

Having finished his dressing, and touching up his attire, he reached into a drawer of the bedside table, where his Colt .45 lay always loaded. He did not think he would need it, but just in case one of the women panicked or resisted, the gun would be useful to have on hand.

Shoving the Colt into a pocket of his jacket, he left his room and headed for Cathleen's bedroom on the second floor. He had decided that Cathleen would be the first. He guessed that she was more pliant and would give in more quickly.

The night before, he had locked her door from the outside — just to be sure she would not go wandering about, getting into trouble.

Now he unlocked her door and went inside.

Cathleen was buttoning the waist of her skirt.

'Oh,' she gasped. 'I didn't expect you to walk in like this.'

'I was sure you'd be up and about,' he said, taking a chair. He observed her. She was small, dainty, genteel. He was positive that she would be a delightful bed companion. 'Cathleen,' he said. 'You needn't bother to finish dressing.'

She seemed startled, and paused in her buttoning. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean that I know your wedding is off. You don't have a man. You should have one to pleasure you. You're a free woman now, and you can do whatever you want. I thought you might want me.'

Her hands dropped limply to her sides as she stared at him. 'What are you talking about?'

'I'm talking about having you undress and get back into bed. I'll join you. A man of my experience can make you very happy.'

'How dare you!' she burst out.

'You were going to give yourself to that young Armbruster boy-'

'He was going to marry me.'

'I'm ready to marry you too,' said Holmes.

'Are you insane? I don't want to marry you. I don't even know you. I only know what my Aunt Minna told me, that you were a gentleman. I see she was wrong.'

'Well, you don't have to marry me. Just go to bed with me.'

'No, never! Not in a million years! Wait till Aunt Minna hears this.'

Calmly, Dr Holmes came to his feet. 'Your Aunt Minna is never going to hear this. If you reject me, you're going to be dead.'

'Dead?' Cathleen whispered hollowly. 'Surely you're teasing me, joking.'

'Dead,' Holmes repeated, 'unless you comply. I'll give you a few minutes to think about it. I'm going to see Karen next. I'm sure she's more sensible.'

Turning his back on Cathleen, he left the bedroom, shut the door, and carefully locked it.

He walked down the hall to the other bedroom. He unlocked it and stepped inside.

Karen was seated in an easy chair, fully dressed, legs crossed, tapping one foot angrily. 'So here you are,' she said. 'What in the devil do you mean locking me into this bedroom? I wanted to get out for a breath of fresh air. I thought you were our host, not our warden.'

Holmes smiled. 'I'm not your host, whatever Minna Ever-leigh may think.'

'Just tell me what you want and let me out of here.'

'You, I want you,' said Dr Holmes. 'That's what I want. You've been a virgin too long. I want to make you a woman.'

Karen came to her feet. 'You'd have to rape me to accomplish that.'

Dr Holmes rose slowly, clearly offended. 'I've never contemplated rape, never. I can't imagine forcing myself on a female. I've never done that in my life.'

'Then let me out of here immediately!'

'I couldn't do that either,' said Holmes softly. 'I want you. If I can't have you, no one else shall.'

What I'm offering you, Karen, is an affirmation of life. Otherwise I can offer you only death.'

She met his burning eyes. 'I think you actually mean that.'

'I've meant it before.'

'You're an absolute madman! I'm getting out of here!'

As she tried to pass him, Dr Holmes roughly grabbed her and spun her around in a violent lurch.

She looked at him, frightened.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the Colt .45. 'You're going nowhere except where I tell you to go. Right now we're going to Cathleen's room to join her. She's expecting me. Get out into the hall and turn left.'

Waving his gun at Karen, he forced her out of the room. Then, prodding her with the metal gun, he marched her up the hall to Cathleen's bedroom. There, gun trained on Karen, he unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Cathleen was seated on the foot of the bed, very still, stricken. The sight of the gun at Karen's back made her recoil.

Holmes gestured Karen into the bedroom, and commanded her to sit beside Cathleen.

'All right, the two of you,' Dr Holmes said in a low voice, 'last chance.'

'Why are you doing this?' Karen asked weakly.

'Because I made a proposal to the two of you,' he answered, 'and if I freed you - well, you could be witnesses against me and ruin me.'

'What if we gave in to you?' Karen asked. 'How would that protect us?'

'I'd find a way,' said Holmes mysteriously. 'I could make you happy - one at a time - after I tied the other up. What do you say?'

Cathleen glanced at Karen. 'I couldn't,' she said.

Karen gazed at Holmes directly. 'Neither could I,' she said emphatically.

Dr Holmes snorted. 'Stupid,' he said, 'but your choice.' He aimed the gun first at one, then the other.

'Both of you, on your feet.'

He backed out of the bedroom, signalling them to walk through the doorway, past him.

'Where are we going?' Karen wanted to know.

'Down the hall, that way. Then down the staircase. I'll be right behind you. Try to get away and you're dead. At the bottom, turn to the right and go to the blank wall.'

In a single file they crossed the hallway and descended the stairs, with Holmes pointing his gun at their heads.

They turned right and continued to the blank wall. They stopped and waited for his next command.

Holmes, still holding the gun on them, went to the far side of the wall and pressed a button.

A portion of wall slid open. The women stared into the eerie, partially illuminated room, barren except for the examination table.

'Go inside,' Holmes commanded. 'Step up to the table and wait. Don't try to escape. There is no escape.'

'What — what's going to happen?' Karen wanted to know.

'You'll see,' said Holmes.

He pressed the button and the wall slid closed on the airtight room.

Satisfied, chuckling, Dr Holmes pocketed the Colt, pivoted, and started for his office. As he entered the room and strode over to the gas lever panel, there was the sound of the front doorbell.

This was unexpected, and Holmes halted in his tracks. He peered over his shoulder at the entry as the doorbell rang again and again, more persistently.

Should he answer the doorbell?

Or should he continue to the lever and turn on the gas?

He remained where he was standing, unable to make up his mind.

TEN

Still hesitating, Dr Holmes tried to make up his mind if he should continue to the lever or turn around and find out who was so insistently ringing the doorbell. Holmes told himself it could be no one important. He expected no one. At most, this could be a patient without an appointment, or possibly someone with a minor complaint.

If the visitor was indeed someone with a minor complaint, Holmes felt that he could dispose of the patient quickly. On the other hand, if it was a true emergency, the bell ringer might not cease in the effort to gain admittance.

Wanting to be alone and unhurried to savour the elimination of Cathleen and Karen, Holmes decided to answer the doorbell. Better to get his caller out of the way before indulging himself in the pleasures ahead.

Dr Holmes turned away from his office, went back into the entry hall, crossed to his front door, took the knob firmly and pulled the door open.

He was surprised to find himself facing two young men, both well-dressed and seemingly in the best of health. One was tall, husky, while the other was slightly smaller, but wiry.

The husky young man spoke first. 'Dr Herman Holmes?'

'Yes, I'm Dr Holmes,' the physician said, wondering who they were.

'I'm Bruce Lester,' he said with a tinge of Southern accent. 'This is Alan Armbruster.'

Holmes recognized neither one, and because of his tense state, their names were only dimly familiar.

'What can I do for you?' asked Holmes impatiently.

'We've been sent here by Minna Everleigh —'

'By Minna Everleigh?'

'Yes. The mayor has lifted his ban on the Everleigh Club. The Club is to be reopened today. Minna

- my Aunt Minna

- is frantically trying to get her place in shape. She's giving a banquet for the prince of Prussia tonight. All her servants, musicians, and girls are back. I am very grateful to you for taking care of Cathleen and Karen. My Aunt Minna told us to borrow her car to bring them back to the Club as soon as possible - especially since my friend Alan is going to marry Cathleen this evening. Sorry to disturb you, but here we are to take your guests off your hands.'

Dr Holmes was momentarily confused. 'Well, I don't know

- I mean, I'm afraid you're too late,' he said finally. 'Cathleen and Karen did spend the night in my house, but they're no longer here.' Holmes gestured behind him. 'You can see, I'm quite alone now.'

Suddenly suspicious of the doctor's manner, Bruce went through the doorway past Holmes to see for himself. He was immediately followed by Alan.

As Bruce and Alan turned towards the doctor's open office door, Holmes caught up with them.

His hand swept the office. 'You can see it's empty. They left an hour ago. It's strange they didn't let Minna know they were leaving.'

Alan shook his head. 'They left just like that? It makes no sense.' His eyes continued to rove about the office.

Holmes, having recovered his poise, feeling easier about the intrusion, took Alan by the arm and led him to the desk. 'Sit down for a moment, both of you, and let me explain.'

Alan sat down alongside the desk, and Bruce reluctantly seated himself across from the doctor, who had taken his swivel chair.

Briefly, Bruce considered the doctor's office. On the surface, it appeared average enough - the flat oak desk, the examination table, the fireplace, the square table that was heaped with medical journals. Yet, Bruce's intuition told him,

it did not have the feel of a real doctor's office. It seemed somehow staged. There was something indefinably creepy about it, as there was about Dr Holmes himself.

Bruce's eyes met Alan's, and he sensed that Alan was having the same reaction.

Nevertheless, here was Dr Holmes and here was his office, and there was actually nothing wrong with either.

Bruce concentrated his attention on Dr Holmes once more.

'You say they left an hour ago?' repeated Bruce.

'Give or take a few minutes,' said Holmes.

'They were supposed to stay here,' Bruce persisted. 'They were to wait for Minna to contact them.

Why did they leave?'

'I suppose it was uncomfortable for them,' said Holmes, fully composed. 'Perhaps they wanted privacy. They simply said they were leaving. I urged them to remain until they heard from Miss Everleigh. But no, they refused. Uh, maybe you will find them back at the Everleigh Club. Perhaps they wished to help your aunts with the packing.'

Alan shook his head again, more vigorously. 'That's quite impossible, Dr Holmes. You were acting as their host because the Everleigh Club had been shut down. They'd have had no way to know that it was ordered reopened this morning.'

Dr Holmes shrugged helplessly. 'Then I have no idea -not the faintest idea - where they went.

Unless they were seeking you out, Mr Armbruster, because of the wedding.'

'Not in a hundred years,' said Alan. 'For all they knew, the wedding was cancelled.'

'Well, then it's all beyond me,' said Holmes.

'And beyond me too,' agreed Bruce, rising. Alan came to his feet, and together they went into the

hallway, still casting about, mystified, eyes on the blank wall.

Holmes was hurriedly beside them. 'You can see - and hear - that I am quite alone. I have no idea where Miss Lester and Miss Grant went. I'm sorry you were put to all this trouble. You'll just have to look for the young ladies some place else.'

'We're certainly going to,' said Bruce with determination. 'I don't know where we'll begin, but we are going to find them.'

Holmes started walking the two young men to the door. 'Maybe Miss Everleigh gave the young ladies a means of contacting her, before she sent them off with me. At least I hope so. Anyway, neither of them told me where they were heading.' He opened the massive door. 'If I should hear of their whereabouts, I'll telephone Miss Everleigh instantly.'

Bruce nodded. 'Sorry to have bothered you this long, Dr Holmes.' 'Good day and good luck,' murmured Holmes.

Once they were gone, he shut the door.

Outside the Castle, Bruce and Alan stood on the sidewalk before Minna's car.

'What now?' Bruce said. 'Where do we go from here?'

'Nowhere else,' said Alan enigmatically.

Beckoning Bruce closer, Alan held a clenched fist in front of him. Slowly unclenching his fingers, he revealed a ring of keys in the palm of his hand.

Puzzled, Bruce asked, 'What's that?'

'Dr Holmes's keys, I hope. They were dangling from a hook under the edge of his desk. While we were talking, my knee bumped against them. When he turned his head, I slipped my hand under his desk and pocketed them. My guess is that his front door key is among them.'

'Front door key?' said Bruce, bewildered.

'To get us back in the house for a thorough look around.'

'But what for?'

Alan lowered his voice. 'Bruce, I don't like it. I don't believe that Cathleen and Karen left to go somewhere else. It makes no sense. They had no place to go, neither of them. They didn't know the Everleigh Club was open again. Karen had rented out her rooms. No hotel rooms were available last night. They had no idea where Minna and Aida might be staying. Why would they leave with no destination?'

'What are you trying to say?'

Alan came even closer to Bruce. 'I think they're still here.'

'Why wouldn't the doctor tell us so?'

'Maybe he wants to keep them here against their will for some reason like —'

'Like what?'

'Sex, white slavery, I don't know what. I only know I don't like him and I don't trust him. I say we go back into his house for another look.'

'What if he catches us?'

Alan jiggled the keys in his palm. 'I could say the ring got caught in my pocket and I just found it and wanted to return it.'

'He'll never accept that.'

'Then he can accuse us of trespassing and call the police.'

'I doubt he'd do that,' said Bruce.

Alan gazed at Bruce. 'Want to come along with me?'

Bruce smiled, took the keys out of Alan's hand, and started for Holmes's front door. Alan fell in beside him.

'This will have to be a very quiet operation,' whispered Bruce.

He began sorting the keys and pushed the first one into the front door keyhole. It didn't turn. He tried the second key. Same result.

The third key worked.

Gently, Bruce eased the front door open, praying it wouldn't make a noise. Well oiled, the massive door yielded without a sound.

As they squeezed inside, Alan's head tilted forward, indicating something ahead.

Dr Herman Holmes was visible in the hall, his back to them, as if meditating.

Silently, Bruce and Alan entered the shadowy foyer and closed the door. Bruce signalled Alan to duck behind the dark corner of a pillar with him and hide there.

After a brief interval, although desperate to keep out of sight, Bruce risked peeking out from behind the pillar.

He saw Dr Holmes still standing in contemplation where he had been when they re-entered. But now, Holmes was no longer looking towards his office. Instead, he was staring at the blank wall.

Now that he had rid himself of the intruders, and was in complete control once more, Dr Holmes had come to a different decision about what he would do next.

He had been about to lift the gas lever that would exterminate the two imprisoned women.

However, with the visit of those two meddling young men, a delay had occurred. Dr Holmes could imagine how that passage of time had affected Cathleen and Karen. They had expected to die at once. Certainly, this waiting, trapped, had tortured them, weakened their resolve to resist him.

Perhaps they were less ready to die. Likely, they'd had time to reconsider Holmes's demand, and probably now saw it as the lesser of two evils.

Fantasizing what it was like to have Karen naked beneath him, that soft, fresh body, to be followed by Cathleen's body, Holmes changed the direction of his next step.

He would give them another chance.

Slowly, Holmes walked to the blank wall, reached behind the broad-leafed rubber plant to the button opening the sliding door. As the wall began to slide open, Holmes reached into his pocket for the Colt .45. He pointed it into the room.

He observed Karen off to his left, on her hands and knees exploring the floor of the room, as if

seeking a means of escape. He saw Cathleen seated on the examination table, crying quietly.

Both women sprang upright at the sound of the opening door and, as they realized that Holmes had returned, looked at him with dread and disgust.

'Karen!' Holmes shouted. 'Get over to the examination table where you belong, next to Cathleen!'

Obediently, Karen straightened and marched back to the table and stood beside Cathleen.

'All right, listen to me,' announced Holmes. 'I'm giving both of you a second chance. It's your last chance, and you'd be wise to take it. You, Cathleen, I want you to come up to my bedroom with me.'

There was a long interval of silence before Cathleen began sobbing loudly. 'No - no, I can't -I can't do that.'

Holmes spoke again. 'All right, that was Cathleen's death sentence. What about you, Karen? Do you want a reprieve?'

'Get out of my sight, you lousy scum, and let me die in peace!' Karen shouted.

Holmes grunted. 'You will now have your wish, each of you. I'm locking you in. I'm going to turn on the poison gas and leave it on until you choke to death. Goodbye, you fools!'

With that, Holmes stepped outside the room and pressed the button, waiting while the wall slid shut on his victims.

Pleased, he pocketed the gun, and in measured strides made for his office.

Bruce pulled back into the shadows behind the pillar.

'You heard that,' he whispered. 'We've got to act fast, right now.'

'He's got a gun,' Alan whispered back. 'If he hears us, he'll shoot us dead and kill the girls too.'

Bruce was already removing his boots. 'Take off your shoes, Alan. He's not going to hear us.'

In seconds they were both in their stocking feet.

'Let's go,' Bruce whispered urgently.

They stepped out into the foyer and crept quietly down the central hallway.

They paused.

In the dim light off to their left, they could see that Dr Holmes had entered his office. He was rubbing his hands together as he headed towards what Bruce guessed was a control panel.

Without another word, Bruce signalled Alan to follow him as he hurried on padded feet across the hall into Holmes's office.

Dr Holmes was reaching up for a lever.

Abruptly, Bruce gestured for Alan to circle around to Holmes's other side. Alan did so as Bruce closed in on Holmes directly from behind.

Holmes's finger was already on the lever.

Bruce cocked his head towards Alan.

With a shriek, Alan leaped at Holmes, hammering one fist against the doctor's arm, knocking his hand away from the lever.

Startled, wild-eyed, Holmes lunged at Alan with a fist as his free hand snaked into his jacket for the Colt .45.

Behind him, Bruce saw the gun in Holmes's hand. Instantly, Bruce grabbed for Holmes's wrist, wrenching hard. The Colt .45 wobbled in Holmes's grip, then flew to the floor.

Holmes whirled about to confront Bruce, slipped beneath a blow, and hooked out with a right and left to Bruce's jaw. The power of the punches rocked Bruce, momentarily paralysing him as he went down heavily on his back.

In a flash, Holmes kneeled, swept up the Colt .45 once more, gripped it, and spun around to fire at Alan, who was coming at him.

Bruce staggered to his feet, in a frenzy scanned the room for any heavy object - he saw the solid-looking Venus de Milo vase with its dried flowers on the mantelpiece. With both hands Bruce reached up for it and turned in time to see Holmes taking aim at the retreating Alan.

Bruce lifted the vase high above him, and with all his strength brought it down with a loud thud on the top of the doctor's skull.

The blow shattered the vase.

Clearly, it also shattered part of Dr Holmes's head.

Dr Holmes crumpled, and then pitched unconscious to the office floor. He lay spreadeagled between Bruce and Alan.

Losing no time, Bruce dropped to his knees, released the Colt .45 from the doctor's slack fingers, and shoved it into his own pocket. Turning the doctor over, he could see that Holmes was totally unconscious and fresh bright blood was matting his hair.

'He's out,' Bruce gasped.

'Thank God,' said Alan breathlessly.

With difficulty, Bruce came to his feet. 'The girls . . .' he croaked. 'Let's get them out of there before something goes wrong - before they die of fright.'

Alan was already on the run, out of the office and heading for the blank wall. Alan searched desperately for the button to the sliding door. At last he found it, and pressed hard.

The portion of the wall slid wide open.

Alan peered inside the room.

Cathleen and Karen were standing in front of the examination table, clinging to each other as they waited for death. At the sound of the sliding door, they both gazed with disbelief at the opening, as if they were seeing an apparition.

'Oh, Alan . . . Alan . . . it's you,' Cathleen moaned. She pulled free of Karen and stumbled towards Alan as he entered the death chamber. She threw her arms around him and he hugged and kissed her.

Bruce was in the room now, advancing on the shaken Karen. His arms went around her tightly and his mouth found her lips. He kissed her over and over again until she could scarcely breathe.

'How ... how did you get here?' Karen wanted to know.

'Aunt Minna sent us to bring you back,' replied Bruce. 'Dr Holmes tried to bluff us into believing you weren't here, that you'd left, but we were suspicious of him. We managed to hide out and discover that he was trying to kill you. Then we overcame him.'

Cathleen tore away from Alan. 'Where is Dr Holmes?' she asked, still fearful. 'Where is that maniac?'

'Come along,' said Bruce.

The four of them emerged from the death chamber.

They crossed the central hall to the doctor's office. Stretched out on the floor, still unconscious, was Dr Holmes.

Bruce looked at Alan. 'We've got to lock him up,' said Bruce. 'Help me, Alan. We'll carry him into the gas chamber. After we close the sliding door, we'll call the police.'

They both bent down, Bruce taking Dr Holmes by the armpits and Alan taking his legs, and they carried him away, as the two women, with hatred in their eyes, watched his body go.

Minutes later, the four of them were gathered in the doctor's office.

Bruce's gaze met Alan's. 'You know what I'd like to do,' said Bruce. 'Give the bastard a taste of his own medicine. But we can't do that.'

'Why not?' said Alan furiously.

'We just can't. We can't do what Holmes planned to do — commit murder. We've got enough evidence to see that justice is done under the law. I'm calling the police right now.'

Rapidly, Bruce made his call to the police station, explained what had taken place, and when the police captain promised to send someone over, he hung up and turned to the two women. 'Are you feeling any better?'

Karen and Cathleen nodded uncertainly.

'You'd better sit down, both of you,' Bruce ordered. 'Since you left the Club, a great many things have happened. Alan, you start it off.'

Alan feasted his eyes on Cathleen. 'Darling, we're getting married this very evening. My father gave us his blessing.'

'What?' exclaimed Cathleen, half out of her chair.

Alan went to her and kissed her, and settled her down. 'It was the price your Aunt Minna demanded to open the Everleigh Club again.'

Karen was in mild shock. 'Minna bargained to open the

Everleigh Club again? After all the work the mayor went to -to shut it down? How can that be?'

Alan gestured to Bruce. 'You take over from here, Bruce.'

Grinning, Bruce recounted the astonishing events of the past hours.

'The prince of Prussia arrived in Chicago this morning. The mayor, Mr Armbruster, and an entire reception committee were there to greet him. What the prince did was to throw the mayor's complete

agenda out the window. He would have none of it. He was very forthright. He told everyone what he did want. The only place he wanted to see in Chicago was the Everleigh Club.'

It dawned on Karen first. 'Oh, no!' she blurted, and began to laugh. 'And the Everleigh Club was out of business, shut down, closed.'

'Exactly,' said Bruce. 'Well, the mayor was on the spot. So was Alan's father, who wants to be our ambassador to Germany. They both knew that they couldn't disappoint him. They simply couldn't deny his one request. So the mayor and Mr Armbruster agreed, as one, that the Everleigh Club must be opened. But there were only two persons who could do that.'

'Aunt Minna and Aunt Aida,' said Cathleen.

'Yes - and both were in jail,' said Bruce. 'You can bet they were freed at once. Then Minna drove her hard bargain. She and Aida would get the Club in shape and throw it open for the prince (/ "they 138 could host the prince's welcoming banquet in the Club, and if Cathleen and Alan were allowed to be married there before the festivities.' Bruce grinned at his sister. 'Mayor Harrison and Mr Armbruster offered no opposition. The Everleigh Club is being readied right now and you, Cathleen and Alan, are going to tie the knot there this evening.'

That moment the front doorbell rang and continued to ring, and there was a hammering at the door.

'It can't be the police so fast,' Bruce said. 'Who the devil can that be?'

Cautiously opening the front door a ,crack and then flinging it wide, Bruce found himself confronting a man in a braid-trimmed police uniform, another burly man in a business suit, and five policemen in plain blue.

'Who are you?' the man in the street clothes wanted to know.

Taken aback, Bruce announced, 'I'm Bruce Lester. What are you doing here?'

'I'm William Pinkerton, a private investigator working for Miss Minna Everleigh. You must be the nephew. This is Chief of Police Francis O'Neill. The other men are his officers.' Pinkerton swallowed. 'We've come about the ladies -Cathleen Lester and Karen Grant - are they all right?'

'They're safe now,' said Bruce. 'Come in and see for yourselves.'

Bruce led the seven men into the office. With the chief's help, he introduced everyone.

The chief of police looked around, as if missing someone. 'Where's Dr Herman Holmes?' he wanted to know.

'He's unconscious in the next room,' Bruce said. 'Alan and I jumped him just as he was about to kill the women with gas. Holmes had a gun. He shot at Alan and missed, and was about to shoot again,

when I smashed him on the head with a heavy vase and knocked him out. We locked him in the next room.'

'Wait a minute,' said the chief. 'Are you sure he's not dead?'

'For all I know, he might be. You want to find out?'"

'Immediately,' said the chief.

'Let's go,' said Bruce. 'I'll open up the next room.' While Alan, the chief, and Pinkerton followed him out of the office, Bruce went straight to the rubber tree at the far end of the blank wall. 'Holmes has a button concealed back here. You push it and it automatically opens up a portion of the wall that leads you into an airtight room - where Holmes intended to gas Karen and Cathleen to death.

Look.'

Bruce worked his arm behind the branches of deep-green foliage, found the button, and pressed it.

With only the slightest rumble, a portion of the wall slid smoothly to one side.

Bruce pointed into the room. 'There's Dr Holmes on the table the way we left him. I think he's still unconscious.'

The chief grunted. 'Let's hope he's not dead. Let me have a look.'

Bruce and the others stood aside as Chief of Police O'Neill entered the room by himself. He walked straight to Dr Holmes's inert body, peered down at it, saw the eyes closed, the face almost bloodless. Then he lifted a wrist and felt for a pulse.

After a while, he lowered Holmes's arm, turned away and left the room to rejoin Bruce, Alan, and Pinkerton. 'He's alive, but barely,' the chief said. 'His pulse is very feeble. I don't know if he'll make it. We'd better get him to the County Hospital at once.'

That moment the doorbell rang, and Alan answered it. The policemen summoned by Bruce rushed into the room.

The chief, hastening back to the office, called out, 'Soren-son. Prescott. Nadler. What are you doing here?'

'A Mr Lester telephoned us about a Dr Holmes. He -'

'We already know,' said the chief. 'Glad you're here. The three of you carry Dr Holmes out to your car. Take him to the County Hospital. He's in poor shape. We don't want to lose him, so take it easy, but don't waste a minute. Stay there for word of his condition. The minute you know if he'll live or die, telephone and let me know. Take down this number.'

One of the men copied the number, then hurried to help his partners remove Holmes's body from the chamber.

The chief of police confronted Bruce. 'Now tell me again what happened. Why did you hit the doctor on the skull like that?'

'I had to get Holmes before he got Alan.'

The chief frowned. 'Better back up a step and tell me how you got mixed up with Dr Holmes in the first place.'

Bruce tried to restrain his impatience. 'My aunt Minna Everleigh was looking for a place for Karen and Cathleen to stay, and Dr Holmes volunteered his house. When the Club was reopened, Alan and I were sent to pick up the ladies. Dr Holmes was here, but he told us Karen and Cathleen had left already. His answers were so evasive that Alan became suspicious. Alan managed to get his hands on a set of the doctor's keys. After we'd left here, we let ourselves in for another look. We hid in the entry and saw Holmes tell Karen and Cathleen they had to sleep with him or he'd kill them.

They both refused. Holmes locked them up in that crazy room, and he was just about to turn on the gas. Then Alan and I came out of hiding and we overpowered him. That's when I smashed Holmes on the head.'

'You shouldn't have done that,' said the chief of police sternly. 'You might have killed him.'

'He was trying to kill them,' Bruce protested.

'You can't be sure of that,' said the chief. 'He may have said he was going to do so, but he may not have meant it.'

'What do you mean?' Bruce exploded. 'I saw him going for the gas lever -'

'He may never have used it.'

'I can't believe what I'm hearing,' Bruce said.

'Wait a minute,' Pinkerton interrupted. He faced the chief of police. 'When I went to the police station and showed you all the evidence I'd gathered against Holmes, you agreed to come here with me to see if the ladies were safe.'

The chief of police bobbed his head. 'I agreed to this because you had some suspicion that Dr Holmes might be up to no good. However, you had no solid proof, Mr Pinkerton, that Holmes was a murderer. A scoundrel, yes, but no absolute evidence that he was a killer.'

'You heard Bruce tell you what he was witness to,' Pinkerton argued. 'I say that's more than enough evidence that he's a murderer.'

Bruce broke in. 'If Holmes lives, I'll swear in court that he

planned to kill Karen and Cathleen. Until then, Chief, the rest of us would like to get right back to the Everleigh Club.'

The chief of police shook his head. 'I'm afraid you can't do that, Mr Lester,' he said. 'You took the law in your own hands when you attacked Dr Holmes. There is still not a shred of concrete evidence that Dr Holmes ever committed murder or ever intended to. Unless we can find such proof, you may be involved in a crime, young man. Your partner as well. That is, if Dr Holmes dies.'

'The whole thing is absurd,' said Bruce.

'It's anything but absurd,' the chief countered. 'If we can prove that Dr Holmes is indeed a murderer, you'll have no problem.' He surveyed the room. 'But I don't see any corpses around.'

Karen pushed forward. 'When Cathleen and I were locked in here, I searched for some way to escape. There was none. But over there in the floor I did find what may be two trap doors. You'd better see where they lead.'

Chief of Police O'Neill beckoned to his three officers. 'Captain Zubukovic, let the lady show you where she thinks she saw some trap doors. If they exist, remove them and find out where they take you.'

As Karen walked towards the chamber with the policemen, the chief turned to Bruce.

'Unless they lead to real evidence that Dr Holmes is a murderer, you're in trouble.'

While waiting for the outcome of the search down the trap doors, they all sat in the doctor's office.

Pinkerton sat with Chief O'Neill, going through a file of notes on his investigation of Dr Holmes.

Bruce and Alan sat huddled with Karen and Cathleen, struggling to make conversation about the

wedding, and about Minna and Aida and the restored Everleigh Club. The talk was mostly intermittent. Bruce and Alan were plainly worried

by the turn of events, and the unfairness of the chief's interpretation of the law.

At one point Bruce addressed himself to the chief of police and to Pinkerton. 'I wonder what's happening?' he asked.

'Maybe nothing,' said the chief. 'Or maybe something. We should know any minute.'

The chief went back to Pinkerton. Bruce and Alan continued their conversation with Karen and Cathleen, trying as best they could to reassure the shaken women that they were really safe and could relax at last.

It was more than an hour before the three policemen, somewhat dusty and dirtied, finally reappeared. All three came out of the airtight room, crossed the central hall, and came into the office.

Everyone instantly fell silent. All eyes were on the police.

Chief O'Neill spoke first. 'What did you find, Captain Zubukovic?'

'Miss Grant was right,' said Zubukovic. 'There were two trap doors in the floor. One led to a narrow staircase that Dr Holmes obviously used to descend into a basement-level room. The other trap door opened on to a chute, a kind of slippery slide by which human bodies were dropped into that basement.'

'Human bodies?' repeated Chief O'Neill. 'What gives you that idea?' He added with emphasis, 'I want facts, not fantasies.'

'I have facts, Chief,' said Zubukovic. 'You want to hear what we found in the basement?'

'Tell me,' said the chief.

'We found an operating table - blood has been washed off but some still exists in patches - upon which Dr Holmes apparently dismembered the bodies of his gassed victims. There is a vat with traces of quicklime. It looks as though Dr Holmes dipped his dismembered victims into it.'

Chief of Police O'Neill interrupted with annoyance. 'All speculation, Captain. I told you I wanted facts.'

'Then,' Zubukovic resumed doggedly, 'we found a huge furnace. A huge one. Big enough so I could step inside. I counted twenty-seven skulls, and the worst tangle of charred ribs, pelvic bones, thigh bones, shin bones and other human remains - it's too gruesome to go any further.'

Chief of Police O'Neill was standing. 'Twenty-seven human skulls,' he echoed with disbelief.

'Twenty-seven?'

'Precisely,' said Zubukovic. 'That's how many we sorted and counted. Most of them women, I'd guess. That doctor probably tricked them into coming here, then tried to take advantage of them. I imagine he gassed them whether he had his way or not, then dissolved the bodies, cut them up, and cremated the pieces. That's the truth, Chief. You should see for yourself. Miss Lester and Miss Grant are lucky to be alive.'

Chief of Police O'Neill stood silently, contemplating what he had heard.

Suddenly the telephone on the desk rang. The chief seemed to rouse himself out of a state of shock.

He stepped towards the desk to take up the telephone.

'Officer Sorenson at the County Hospital,' a voice announced.

The chief said, 'This is O'Neill. What about Dr Holmes? Is he still alive or did he die?'

'He's alive, sir. A skull fracture. They can fix him up.'

'They'd better,' said the chief of police. 'I want him in good shape when he's tried and sentenced to the gallows.'

His narrowed eyes lingered on Cathleen and Karen. Then they shifted to Bruce and Alan.

His gaze holding on the two young men, the chief said loudly and distinctly, 'We'll put Holmes on trial as soon as he's well enough. I'll send in our forensic experts to identify the remains.' He paused, and grinned. 'You're free, Bruce, to go to the Everleigh Club - in fact all of you are free.

Minna and Aida will be relieved to see you. And, adding my thanks, so am I.'

Bruce drove Minna's Ford to 2131 South Dearborn Street and parked it in the reserved place in front of the Everleigh Club.

While Alan helped Cathleen out of the car, Bruce assisted Karen to the sidewalk. Together they hurried up the steps leading into the Everleigh Club.

As they hastened through the Club's entrance, they saw rainbows of flowers reflected in gleaming mirrors. Cathleen, Karen, Alan, and Bruce were met by Minna and Aida, who had stationed themselves in the foyer to await their return.

The moment that Minna set eyes upon the new arrivals, her face lit up with relief and joy.

She rushed forward to fling her arms around Cathleen, and then around Karen.

'You're alive, you're safe!' Minna exclaimed. 'Aida and I were desperate when Mr Pinkerton told us about Dr Holmes's background. We'd been waiting on pins and needles for some word that you were alive. Thank heavens Bruce telephoned.'

'They're alive,' Bruce said, 'but it was close, very close, I can tell you that.'

'What happened?' Aida wanted to know. 'Did Dr Holmes make advances to you?'

'Yes, he made advances to Karen and me,' answered Cathleen, 'and when we rejected him, he was ready to kill us. We were rescued at the last minute by Alan and Bruce. Tell my aunts about it, Alan.'

Alan gestured to Bruce. 'I'm still too shaky to be very articulate. I think Bruce can do a better job of it.'

'It was pretty awful, and it was nip and tuck with the girls' lives. I'll make it brief. Here is what happened.'

Quickly, Bruce recounted what had taken place at Holmes's Castle, from the time he and Alan had come calling to the terrible moments when they had prevented Holmes from gassing Cathleen and Karen.

'We knocked him unconscious,' concluded Bruce, 'and after we pulled the girls out of that death chamber of his, we

carried him into it, sealed it, and held him there until Chief of Police O'Neill and Pinkerton arrived.

The chief was concerned that Alan and I had taken the law into our own hands without proof - actual proof - that Dr Holmes had ever done harm to anyone.'

'But then the police found proof, in the basement, that Dr Holmes was a lunatic killer,' added Alan.

Bruce was nodding his head. 'Aunt Minna, Aunt Aida, the police found the remains of twenty-seven bodies in his basement.'

Aida covered her face. 'Twenty-seven bodies,' she said, shuddering.

Minna was horrified and saddened. 'And our three missing girls — our Everleigh Club girls — Fanny, Avis, Greta — they must have been among his victims.'

Bruce sighed. 'I'm afraid so, Aunt Minna.'

'How gruesome,' said Minna. 'Wait here.' She disappeared into the hallway briefly and returned with her head servant. 'Edmund, would you find Chet Foley in there, the reporter from the Chicago Tribune. Then go out to my car and carry in the ladies' luggage, and unpack it in their rooms upstairs. And see that Cathleen's wedding dress is prepared. But get Mr Foley first.'

When Edmund was gone, Minna turned to Bruce.

'I owe this young man a story. I wouldn't permit him to write about the Everleigh Club when he first came here. We were in trouble then. Now I should make it up to him. Bruce, I want you to repeat to him everything you told us about Dr Holmes. What you saw and what you learned from Mr Pinkerton.'

When Edmund reappeared with a puzzled Foley, Minna introduced him around and then directed him to Bruce. 'My nephew has a story for you, Chet, a genuine scoop. He'll tell you the whole thing.'

Enthusiastically, Foley located the ever-present notebook in his pocket, took out a pencil, and waited.

Concisely, but without loss of detail, Bruce recounted their adventure with Dr Herman Holmes and what Pinkerton and the police had learned about him.

'Twenty-seven bodies,' Foley noted on paper, wagging his head. 'It's the most awful thing I've ever heard. But what a great story. Thank you, Bruce. I'd better call it in for the next edition. Minna, may I use your telephone?'

'Make yourself at home,' said Minna, waving the others to follow Aida into the Club.

Leaving last, Minna could overhear Foley dictating his story on the telephone. She halted momentarily, listening to Foley trying to explain Dr Holmes's psyche. 'The nerve, the calculation and the audacity of the man were unparalleled,' she heard Foley dictate. 'Murder was his natural bent. Sometimes he killed from sheer greed of gain; more often to gratify an inhuman thirst for blood. Not one of his crimes, as far as we know, was the outcome of a sudden burst of fury — "hot blood" - as the codes say. All were deliberate, planned, and concluded with consummate skill. To Dr Holmes murder was indeed a fine art, and he revelled in the lurid glamour cast upon him by his abnormal genius. The field of victims was open to him, since he served as the physician of the Everleigh Club and its thirty beautiful girls. Captured, he will be tried and-'

Minna listened no longer.

Hastening ahead, Minna caught up with Aida and the others as they entered her beloved Gold Room.

Once inside, Minna took command, as was her habit.

The room was crowded. Surrounding the prince of Prussia, who had arrived an hour earlier, were members of his entourage - braid and medals everywhere — and at least a dozen of the Everleigh Club's most attractive girls. The majority of them surrounded Prince Henry, resplendent in his uniform with its elegant high-collared jacket, relaxing on a gold sofa with women on either side of him and at his feet. The sighing, teasing, and flattery of the girls was mixed with the sounds of toasts and music from the five-piece orchestra playing in a distant corner.

Defly, Minna guided her party around the room, introducing Cathleen, Karen, Alan, and Bruce to members of the German entourage.

When she reached Prince Henry, Minna waited for his attention and then drew Cathleen forward.

'Your Royal Highness . . .' Minna began.

Prince Henry rose to his feet at once.

'. . . I want you to meet another guest who is being honoured here tonight,' Minna continued. 'This is Miss Cathleen Lester, whose marriage ceremony to Alan Armbruster will be performed here in your presence shortly.'

'I am honoured, most honoured,' said Prince Henry, bending slightly to kiss the top of Cathleen's outstretched hand.

'Your Highness,' Minna went on briskly, 'my niece will be feted before you are. Ladies first, you know. After that we'll proceed with the banquet in your honour.'

'I am absolutely delighted,' said Prince Henry. 'This long-desired visit to the Everleigh Club - how exquisite it is, how magnificent its occupants — is the climax of my tour of your country.'

Minna introduced the others to the prince, then ushered him back to his place of comfort on the sofa.

Turning away, Minna caught Cathleen by the arm and led her aside. 'Time to put on your wedding gown,' she whispered, 'as quickly as possible.'

Cathleen hugged and kissed her and ran off.

Now, after the close call at Holmes's Castle, Bruce Lester wanted - more than ever before - an interval of privacy with Karen Grant.

Taking her by the hand, he led her first into the Japanese Room and then the Blue Room, but both were filled with chattering male guests and Everleigh girls.

At last, arriving at the Moorish Room, Bruce saw that it was unoccupied and he drew Karen inside.

'I want to talk to you,' he told her.

He led her across the brilliant Oriental carpet and between smoking incense burners to a small sofa.

He sat her down, and then seated himself close to her.

'Karen,' he said, 'you've known ever since we met — I made it no secret - that I'm in love with you.'

'Oh, Bruce,' she said, her voice catching, putting her arms around him and kissing him. 'And you know I'm in love with you.'

Separating himself from her, Bruce said, 'I've been in love with you from the start, but I didn't realize how much until I almost lost you at Holmes's place. Now I want to - I want to discuss us.'

'I'm ready,' said Karen.

'I've wanted to ask you to marry me. I want to marry you more than anything —'

'Bruce, dear -'

'No, hear me out, Karen. There are problems. You're a big-city girl. I'm a country boy. You're a working woman, living fairly well on your own, I gather. I'm a fellow who runs a small Kentucky 145 farm - and a home for my half-paralysed father. All I have to my name is a small stud farm and my winnings from the Derby. Eventually, I want to plough that money back into stallions and mares.

I'll hope to breed more Derby winners, always a long shot. If you married me, I'd be taking you back to an old house in Kentucky. We'd live with my father, a dear man, but he does need some attention. You'd be isolated from city life down there. I don't know if that's the kind of life I can ask you to share with me.'

Karen emitted a sigh. 'Bruce, how can you be so smart in so many ways, and be so dumb about this? I love you. How many times do I have to tell you? I want to live with you wherever you live, however you live, because I want to be with you now and for ever. Bruce, stop being a donkey and tell me you will marry me, the sooner the better, right now, here and now.'

In those seconds all of Bruce's reservations had fled. 'You mean that?'

'I'll prove it. Let's get married tonight. The minute that minister has finished marrying your sister and Alan, let's grab him and make him marry us too.' 'Karen, that's perfect!'

He rose to his feet, pulling her up with him, and embraced her, smothering her with kisses. 'Come on,' he said, 'let's find the minister.'

He tried to take her hand to leave the Moorish Room, but she remained firmly planted, refusing to go.

'Not so fast,' she said, 'not yet.'

He stood before Karen. 'Why not? What's wrong?'

Karen smiled sweetly. 'I don't think you should marry a virgin. I think on your wedding night you should enjoy an experienced woman. Don't you?'

Confused, Bruce hesitated. 'Well, really, I don't know.'

'I know,' said Karen. 'Believe me, Bruce, it would be better. No fumbling, no tension, if we're both experienced. After that, from our wedding night on, it will get better and better.'

'You mean that, don't you?'

'I mean it. I'm ready. I still have my bedroom. Don't you want to make a virgin happy?'

He kissed her. 'You bet I do.' He took her hand. 'Right now.'

Slipping away from the banquet guests slowly filling the Everleigh Club, Karen and Bruce made their way to her room.

Once inside, Karen locked the door. There was only one lamp shining dimly. The rest of the room was dark.

Without a word they began to undress.

He was the first to strip and to stand nude. Standing apart from him, she dropped the last of her clothes.

His eyes widened as he took her in. 'My God, I've never seen anyone so beautiful.'

She stared at him. 'I've never seen a man undressed before.. '

He went to her and pressing his body against hers, he could feel her heart thumping.

Taking her hand, he led her to the bed.

'You know what to do?' he asked softly.

'I think so.'

She lifted herself on to the bed, and settled on her back, frightened and thrilled.

Lying close, Bruce kissed her on the mouth, ran kisses down her cheek and neck, until his lips found her nipples.

Her nipples hardened and his tongue on them began to arouse her. As he moved above her body, her hand went to the back of his head. 'Please - please — oh, please, don't wait,' she gasped. 'I can't stand this. Please do it. Do it now.'

He guided his hardened penis downward, and slowly, slowly he entered her.

'Ahhh,' she said. 'Ahhh - deeper, deeper.'

He went in all the way, going slowly.

Once he stopped, drew himself back, and glanced down at the bed sheet.

'Darling, you're not a virgin anymore,' he said, and added, 'You're an experienced woman.'

'Make me more experienced,' she breathed. And they went on.

Half an hour later, composed and fully dressed, they held hands, in love, and walked away from the bedroom.

The downstairs hallway was empty and quiet. From the muted sounds of conversation and laughter somewhere in the Club, they realized that almost everyone had gathered in the Gold Room.

Karen and Bruce made their way to the entrance, and they saw Cathleen in her white satin and lace wedding gown and Alan standing before a tall Lutheran minister, while the guests - including Prince Henry of Prussia - watched the conclusion of the wedding. Minna and Aida were beaming at the bride, and Armbruster and his wife stood behind the groom.

'Alan Armbruster,' the minister intoned, 'wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?'

'I will,' said Alan.

'Cathleen Lester, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honour and keep him in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?'

'I will,' Cathleen replied in a firm serious voice.

The minister bent towards them and whispered something.

Alan took Cathleen's right hand and spoke. 'I, Alan Armbruster, take thee, Cathleen Lester, to be my wedded wife, and plight thee my troth, till death us do part.'

Then Cathleen raised her voice to speak. 'I, Cathleen Lester, take thee, Alan Armbruster, to be my wedded husband, and plight thee my troth, till death us do part.'

The minister said, 'The ring, please.'

Harold Armbruster took the blue velvet box out of his pocket, snapped it open, removed the wedding band, and handed it to his son.

Alan placed the ring on the fourth finger of Cathleen's left hand, and he stated, 'Receive this ring as a token of wedded love and troth.'

The minister directed, 'Join your right hands.'

Cathleen and Alan took each other's right hand as the minister covered them with his own, and announced, 'Forasmuch as Alan Armbruster and Cathleen Lester have consented together in holy wedlock, and have declared the same before God and in the presence of this company, I pronounce them man and wife. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

Cathleen lifted her veil, and went into Alan's arms as he gave her a prolonged kiss.

Music struck up from somewhere in the Gold Room, and the guests gathered in small groups joined in with applause and cheers.

Watching, Karen tugged at Bruce's sleeve. 'Our turn next.'

'Right now,' said Bruce.

'In the Moorish Room where we can be alone with the minister - and Minna and Aida as our witnesses - if the minister will do it.'

'He will,' promised Bruce. He strode into the centre of the Gold Room, got the attention of the minister, and whispered to him.

The minister listened, looked up at Bruce, then at Karen, and vigorously nodded his assent.

It was half-past eleven in the evening by the time everyone had taken a place at the long table of the Everleigh Club.

At the very centre of the banquet table, erect and beaming with pleasure, sat Prince Henry himself.

On the right side of him sat Minna in her freshly done Gibson hairdo, Arm-bruster, Cathleen, and Alan. At the left side sat Aida, Mayor Harrison, Karen, and Bruce.

From the far end of the restaurant, the musicians had begun to play the day's favourites - 'On the Banks of the Wabash', 'A Bicycle Built for Two', and 'I'm Afraid To Go Home in the Dark'.

Waiters were filing in, carrying the first dish, a garnished Bodense felchen trout.

Mayor Harrison pushed back his chair and stood up to

unfurl a sheet of paper. He read a brief address welcoming Prince Henry of Prussia to Chicago, the gem city of the Midwest prairie.

No one listened. The babble of voices continued gaily and loudly, as the Everleigh girls clinked their goblets of champagne and became better acquainted with the male guests beside them.

'Wonderful, wonderful,' said Prince Henry to Minna. 'A most remarkable and memorable evening. I am happy that you could do this for me.'

'Your Highness, I'd do anything for you,' Minna said. 'You're a true gentleman, and I will always be delighted to do anything you ask.'

'You are a most gracious lady,' said the prince.

Aware of Armbruster beside her, Minna turned fully towards Prince Henry. 'Your Highness,' she began, 'you told me you were pleased I could do this for you.'

'Of course,' said Prince Henry. 'Indeed, I meant it.'

'Then I would like to request a favour of you,' said Minna.

'Anything,' said Prince Henry. 'Whatever you wish.'

'All right, I'll come out with it,' said Minna. 'We have an American ambassador in Germany. What is his situation today?'

Prince Henry appeared bewildered. 'I'm not sure I understand your question,' he said. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean, how long will he be ambassador?'

'Sadly, for a short time only. Normally, the ambassador would remain head of the diplomatic mission to the royal court for as long as your government wishes. But your ambassador is unwell. I know he plans to send a letter of resignation to your president in a very short time — perhaps a few months.'

'Then you will need a new American ambassador in Germany?' said Minna.

'Of course. I am sure that President Roosevelt will appoint

someone from the diplomatic corps as soon as he receives the resignation.'

'Could the kaiser recommend to President Roosevelt an American he would like to see represent us?'

Prince Henry gave it some thought. 'Normally, Miss Ever-leigh, it is not done that way. Your President will select someone he feels deserves the post and is qualified. Then his choice must be approved not only here but also in Germany. When the kaiser has given his approval, the new ambassador is on his way to Berlin.'

'I understand,' said Minna. 'But what if it went the other way around? Suppose the kaiser knew of

somebody in the United States whom he would like to have as the American ambassador? Could the kaiser make such a recommendation - informally - to President Roosevelt?

Prince Henry furrowed his brow, considering such procedure. 'Umm. It would be unusual. I can see no rule against it. But then, my brother, the kaiser, would know of no such American to suggest.'

Minna edged provocatively closer to Prince Henry. She said flirtatiously, 'I may, Sir. I may know somebody to suggest.'

'You?'

'Why not? Who on earth knows men and their character better than Minna Everleigh? Yes, me. I have someone to suggest.'

Prince Henry chuckled. 'Why not you? Of course you would be highly qualified to suggest someone to represent the United States.'

'The idea is that I would suggest a name to you. And you could convey it to the kaiser. He in turn could make the suggestion to President Roosevelt. Of course, this would make a deep impression on the president. He would want to please the kaiser and would certainly consider selecting such a man for the post.'

'Yes, that is possible,' said Prince Henry. 'Obviously, you do have a man in mind.'

'I do.'

'Very well, tell me.'

Minna reached to the side, took Armbruster by his hand, and drew him into the conversation. 'Your Highness, this is Harold T. Armbruster, the renowned Chicago meat-packer, who would very likely be pleased to become the next ambassador to Germany. He is of German origin, of Lutheran faith, and he knows very well what the post would entail. Isn't that so, Mr Armbruster?'

Armbruster gulped. 'It is, it is.'

'More importantly, Mr Armbruster is my niece's father-in-law. So I'd be involved in a relative way.'

Prince Henry grinned at Minna, and then at Armbruster. 'A capital idea,' Prince Henry said. He was briefly silent, as if turning the idea over in his mind, and then he said gravely, 'I would be happy to make such a recommendation to the kaiser — on one condition.'

Minna frowned. 'What is that condition, Sir?'

'That the Everleigh Club remain open for my next visit to the United States. If I knew it would be here, I'd be certain to make my next visit very soon. I heard that it had been shut down, and only opened tonight for my presence. I would like to be reassured that it will continue to flourish for years to come. May I have your word on that, Miss Everleigh?'

'You can have my word,' said Minna, 'but my word is not enough. It's really up to the mayor.' She leaned across Prince Henry. 'Aida, would you get Mayor Harrison's attention?'

Aida gently prodded at the mayor, who immediately turned, glanced at Aida, and then noticed that Minna had something to say to him.

'What is it, Miss Everleigh?' Mayor Harrison asked.

'It's about Harold Armbruster becoming the next ambassador to Germany,' said Minna. 'I just

broached the subject to Prince Henry. He agrees to help under one condition -that you allow the Everleigh Club to remain in business not just for tonight but in the months and years to follow.'

'Is that all?' said Mayor Harrison, all affability. His eyes met Prince Henry's. He cleared his throat and said with sincerity, 'Your Highness, you have my solemn pledge that the Everleigh Club will remain open and flourish as long as I am in office. I'll manage my reformers.'

Prince Henry smiled broadly at Minna. 'Miss Everleigh, as you Americans put it, you have a deal.'

At just past two o'clock in the morning the banquet was finally coming to an end. Someone jumped to his feet, held up a hand, gave a signal to the orchestra, and began to sing.

The singer was Alderman John Coughlin.

Minna leaned towards Prince Henry, made a face, and explained, 'The alderman is singing a song he wrote, and he sings it at every public occasion. It's something called 'Dear Midnight of Love'. I want to apologize for this, Sir . . .'

Prince Henry, listening, hushed Minna and said, 'Let's give the man a chance.'

They all paid heed to Coughlin as he sang on:

Dear Midnight of Love, why did we meet? Dear Midnight of Love, your face is so sweet. Pure as the angels above, surely again we will speak; Loving only as doves, Dear Midnight of Love.

When love hearts are serene, can waking be their knell? Were midnight but between, sleep, night, but not farewell. Stars! Oh, what do they mean? For you to wake 'tis well — Look, mother, on the scene, for you my love will tell.

Your promise, love, redeem; your gentle words do thrill; Live as the rippling stream, always your friend I will. Now I must bid adieu so cruel, why did we meet? List! What shall we do? Pray, when do we eat?

Prince Henry broke into laughter. 'You are right, Miss Everleigh. I accept your apology.'

With the song ended, Prince Henry reached down along Minna's leg, and asked for her shoe.

'My shoe?'

'Yes, kindly take it off and hand it to me,' said Prince Henry.

With Minna's shoe in hand, the prince came to his feet and poured the champagne into the slipper.

'A toast!' announced Prince Henry. 'To the health and longevity of the Everleigh Club, and to the enrichment of its proprietors! To Aida and Minna Everleigh, who have given me my finest evening in America!'

Everyone at the table rose, lifting their goblets of champagne.

The guests remained standing, getting ready to depart after the prince left the table.

But Prince Henry of Prussia sat down beside Minna once more. He bent close to her. 'Only one thing is missing from this evening,' he said.

'What's that?' Minna wanted to know.

'Most of the men here have sampled the joys of the Everleigh Club. I too should like to sample its

pleasures.'

Minna waved her hand at the girls around the table. 'Take your pick, Your Highness. You may choose any girl you wish.'

'There could be only one I want,' said Prince Henry, staring at Minna. 'I want you.'

Minna returned his gaze. 'You really want me?'

'Only you, Miss Everleigh,' Prince Henry said.

Minna stood up. 'In that case, you'd better call me Minna, and I'll call you Hank.'

Minna put her arm inside Prince Henry's. She was pleased to see that Mayor Harrison had offered his arm to Aida.

The four of them walked out of the restaurant and across the hallway to the staircase.

Then they all went upstairs.

