

## CHAPTER VIII

**W**E got the ticket just as we were coming into Santa Monica. Two motor-cycle cops pulled up and flagged us down. They rolled to a stop in front of us, stormed back on foot, cursing.

'All right,' one said, pulling out his book. 'Start lying.'

Laughter came up inside of me. If they wait a couple of days they can get me for murder, I thought. 'The lady's going to have some babies,' I said.

The cop leaned over to see me better. 'A coon,' he said. Then he looked at Alice again. 'Both coons.' Then on second thought he asked her, 'Are you white?'

'She's a coon, too,' I answered for her.

'Well, we'll just run you in,' the cop said.

'That's fine,' I taunted. 'You on your puddle jumper and me in my Buick Roadmaster.'

The cop's mouth opened and his face got blood-red. The other cop started back toward me.

'Wait a minute,' Alice said. 'I don't like this, I don't like any of this.' The cold hard authority in her voice stopped the cop. 'I am a supervisor in the Los Angeles Department of Welfare,' she went on, enunciating each syllable with careful deliberation. 'My father's a prominent Los Angeles physician, a personal friend of the mayor's, and one of the civic leaders of our community. I don't like the way you have spoken to me, the words you have employed, nor the tone of your voice. If you cannot give me the respect that is due me I'll see to it that you are both discharged from the police force.'

Both the cops looked at her as if they didn't believe they were hearing right. I had to look at her too.

Finally one of them asked her, 'Your car?'

'Mine,' I said.

He gave me a long hard look. 'I suppose your pa is a senator,' he said.

I didn't say anything. The other one said to Alice, 'Lemme see your operator's licence.'

'I left it in another bag,' she said imperiously. 'Mr. Jones called to escort me to dinner and I didn't think I'd need it.'

The cop grinned evilly. 'Been to a gin party, eh?'

Alice turned a slow red. 'May I have your names and identification numbers?' she said.

The cop looked at the other cop, then said, 'Okay, fall in behind me.' As an afterthought he added, 'And move over and let Rufus drive. You got your licence, haven't you, Rufus?'

I got out and walked around the car. He blocked my path. The other cop closed in beside me. I took a breath, let it out, said: 'Rufus isn't the name on it.'

'Lemme see it,' he said.

I let him see it. He spat, moved aside, and let me get into the car. They took us to the station in Santa Monica. I put up cash bail and the desk sergeant said, 'Now get back where you belong and stay there.'

We went out and got into the car and I drove down to the beach. I parked and we sat for a time looking out over the Pacific Ocean. There were two bright red spots in Alice's cheeks and she clenched and unclenched her hands.

'You could kill 'em, couldn't you?' I said. Suddenly I felt sorry for her. I put my arm about her shoulder and tried to pull her to me. 'Don't let it get you down, baby,' I said, trying to turn her face around to kiss her. 'You're not just finding out you're a nigger?'

She jerked away from me. 'I wish I was a man,' she said.

'If you were a man what would you do?' I asked.

Suddenly she began crying. 'I never had anybody talk to me like that,' she sobbed. 'People have always respected me. My father's known all over California.'

I reached for the key, kicked on the motor. 'Too bad they don't know me,' I said.

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I turned the car and drove down to Venice, came back into Los Angeles on Venice Boulevard. By the time we reached the city Alice had stopped crying and repaired her make-up. I glanced at my watch. It was eleven-thirty.

'Shall I take you home?' I asked.

'No, let's go by some friends of mine,' she said. 'I want some excitement.' Her voice had a hard dry gaiety and her face kept breaking apart like glass.

I followed her directions, drove over to a little cottage on San Pedro, past Vernon. A short, dumpy, brown-skinned girl with slow-rolling eyes and a tiny pouting mouth let us in.

'Alice,' she greeted, then to the others in the room, 'Her Highness.'

A light-complexioned, simple-looking girl with a pretty face and dangling hair sat on the arm of an empty chair, the skirt of her loud print dress pulled high over her thighs. She looked at Alice and jerked her head disdainfully.

A slim, good-looking fellow about her colour with conked yellow hair and a hairline moustache sat on the middle of the davenport. He was dressed in tan slacks, tan and white sport shoes, and a cream-coloured rayon shirt. His face was greasy and his eyes were muddy from drinking. I followed Alice into the small, cramped room, wondering how she knew such people; they were more the kind of people I should know.

'Stella, Bob,' she said. I nodded to the dumpy girl.

Stella said, 'Bob, Chuck,' waving her finger.

The blond boy stuck up a sweaty languid hand. I dropped it as soon as possible.

'Bob, Dimples,' Stella went on.

I nodded to the long-haired girl. She didn't look at me; she was eyeing Alice with a petulant, jealous look. I flopped down on the chair beside her and looked at her smooth yellow thighs. 'Nice gams,' I commented. She stood up and let her dress fall.

A gallon bottle of wine and three dirty glasses sat among the littered ashtrays and half-emptied cigarette packages on the little cocktail table in front of the davenport. Against the back wall was a Philco combination player with records stacked on its top. Beside this was a door leading into the bedroom. Across the room was another door into the kitchen, where Alice had gone with Stella. After a moment they came back with two

clean glasses and Stella filled them with the cheap warm Tokay. 'Champagne?' I murmured facetiously. Stella rolled me a look, grinned, showing a gaping hole in the middle of her upper teeth.

She moved over to the player and said, 'We were just getting ready to play some jive.' She had a husky liquor voice with queer undertones and she wasn't even half pretty. But there was an animal sensuousness in her actions and she moved with a slow slinky grace. My gaze followed her on its own.

She put on Harry James's 'Cherry,' stacked several other records on the arm drops, and did a slow-motion boogie to the hot licking lilt of James's trumpet, rolling her body from breasts to knees in undulating waves. Near the end of the piece she broke the slow, smooth motion of her boogie and put frenzied jerks in it.

'Well, knock yourself out, girl,' Dimples muttered.

'Goddamn, that knocks me out!' Stella said with feeling when the piece came to an end. Then she asked suddenly, 'Where you kids been, all sharpened up?'

Dimples said, 'Doesn't Alice look lovely?' in a saccharine voice.

'We had dinner and went for a drive,' Alice murmured affectedly.

I stuck a cigarette in my mouth and said, 'Alice had a wonderful time,' talking around it. I looked up just in time to catch her furious glance.

Stella looked curiously from one to the other of us. 'What happened?' she asked. 'Didn't they want to serve you?'

I didn't answer.

'Men are such boors,' Alice commented acidly.

Stella took her cue and dropped it. The box was playing 'All For You' by the King Cole Trio, and I closed my eyes to listen. '... life would be a symphony, waiting all for you ...' It went off into an instrumental trio and I opened my eyes again. For an instant my vision was out of focus and I knew I was getting drunk. I got up to fill my glass again.

'Who wants some more wine?' I asked, then began filling everybody's glass without waiting for an answer. I quoted:

*'A Jug of Wine . . . and Thou*

*Beside me singing in the Wilderness—*

*Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!*

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Chuck stood up then and said, 'Take it easy, Jack.'  
I looked at him a moment. I knew I had to hit something, so  
I drew back and hit him. He fell back against the wall, slumped  
to the floor.

Stella said, 'What'd you have to hit Chuck for?'  
I picked up my coat, put it on without replying. I lifted my  
my hand and waved foolishly, then I went to the door and went  
out and got into my car. I remember turning around; I banged  
the curb hard with my front tyres and cursed.

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