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**WILLIAM
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GAULT**

**DEATH IN
DONEGAL BAY**

A BROCK CALLAHAN MYSTERY



Death in Donegal Bay

A Brock Callahan Mystery

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For Bill Pronzini

good writer, avid collector, stalwart friend

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Chapter One

ALAN ARTHUR BAKER HAD never hit it big in the field he chose for his lifetime career. The field was larceny. He had made his first appearance in court at the innocent age of seventeen. The charge was selling bogus location maps of the homes of movie stars in Hollywood and adjacent areas.

Selling these maps was not in itself unlawful. But Alan's maps were several decades old; he had inherited them from an uncle who had been in the same business as a youth. Most of the stars had moved by the time Alan hit the streets. Quite a few of them had died.

The complainants—a vindictive and elderly couple visiting from Illinois—must have hoped for punitive rather than compensatory damages from Alan. They appeared in small-claims court without an attorney.

The case was dismissed without penalty. Alan had taken the precautionary step of buying a rubber stamp to update his avuncular inheritance. The stamp bore the single word *Historic* in print small enough to fit between *The* and *Fabulous* of the original title. The couple from Illinois might have had sight too dimmed by time to read it. The original title had been "The Fabulous Homes of All the Famous Cinema Stars." Alan had made them historic.

He had gone on from there to other small con scams and had become a minor local celebrity. I had grown up in Long Beach, so I was not aware of his reputation when we first met.

I was in my second season with the Rams and being paid more than I was worth. Four years at Stanford had not made me as sophisticated as I imagined myself to be.

It was over drinks at Heinie's that Alan explained to me how short the life of the professional athlete was, how bleak the years of retirement were—unless he prepared for them. Two days later, Alan gave him a check for five thousand dollars to be invested in Stadium Mutual Funds, of which Alan claimed to be the financial adviser.

He was more than the adviser; he was the total organization. When it was forced into bankruptcy, Alan escaped with two years of probation on his promise to a tolerant and gullible judge that he would make complete restitution to the investors.

Considering the history of our relationship, I was surprised when he phoned me in San Valdes on an unseasonably hot June morning.

"Remember me?" he asked.

"Too well. Where are you calling from?"

"In town. I live here now."

"I'm sorry to hear it. What's your latest con?"

"What a thing to say! Jesus, Brock, you were the very first investor to get his money back!"

"And why was that?"

“What do you mean, why? I promised and I paid.”

“You don’t remember the scene in your office?”

“Dimly. That was a long time ago. I remember you said something about my back.”

“That’s right. I told you to come up with five thousand dollars in twenty-four hours or learn to live with a broken back.”

“Dear God! Mr. Macho. Big man, now, aren’t you? You inherited a wad from your uncle. My uncle left me a trunk full of maps. At least I made it on my own.”

“Alan!” I said sternly, and started to laugh.

“That’s better,” he said. “Look, I’m not working a pitch on you. I want to hire you. I need a detective.”

“Sorry. I’m retired.”

“Sure you are! You have worked on three cases up here since you claimed you were retired.”

“For free,” I said. “For emotional reasons. I don’t do it for pay anymore.”

“That figures. You always were an economic idiot. Well, could you recommend any other agency in town?”

“Wouldn’t I be doing them a disservice? How could I be sure they would get their money?”

“They could check my credit or they could get it up front. You’re not a forgiving man, are you?”

“I guess not. What kind of work—divorce?”

“No. But ... checking on my wife. I think she’s in trouble, not messing around. I don’t want to divorce her. I love her.”

“Would that be the former Joan Allingham?”

“Hell, no! That was my restitution to her old man. He had a quarter of a million in the fund. Where was I going to come up with that kind of money in those days?”

“He settled for you marrying his daughter?”

“He did. You never met Joan, or you would realize he got the better part of the deal. We were divorced two years ago. I tell you, Callahan, I had a lot of miserable years before she would agree to the divorce.”

“How much did it cost her?” I asked.

Silence on the line. That had been a low blow.

And then I remembered that Corey Raleigh, the boy detective, had not been doing well lately. I said, “There’s a young investigator I know in town who might be interested. He’s really sharp. Give me your phone number and I’ll have him call you.”

“I could go to his office.”

Corey’s office was in the garage of his parents’ home. I didn’t want Baker to discover that and chintz Corey out of his honest day’s wages. I said, “He’s hardly ever in his office. He’s been very busy lately. I’ll have him phone you.”

“Okay.” He gave me his phone number and added, “Believe me, Brock, I never meant to cheat you.”

“Forget it,” I told him. “I got my money back. I’ve been hurt worse by honest men since my uncle died.”

I had. By stockbrokers. I should have used my broken-back approach with them. I phoned Corey and gave him Baker’s number.

“Is he rich?” Corey asked.

“I don’t know. Why do you ask?”

“So I can charge him accordingly.”

“Corey,” I warned him, “honest investigators have a standard fee for all of their clients.”

“That’s their problem,” he said. “What part of town does he live in?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure he will tell you. Now, you be careful, damn it! This Baker used to be a con man.”

“Okay, okay! Don’t get all steamed up. This isn’t the weather for it.”

The Santana wind from the desert had been blowing for two days, setting new June heat records for both days. The forecast was for more of the same. Corey’s nine-year-old Plymouth was not air conditioned. No matter what he charged, he would be earning his pay, sitting and watching, waiting and sweating.

I put on my trunks and went out into the pool to soak. Where had Baker learned about my inheritance and about the three cases I had worked on since moving to San Valdesto? Had he been keeping a book on me? Was he trying to trap me into some kind of revenge con with his call?

From the edge of the pool, a familiar voice asked, “What are you mumbling about?”

It was Jan, my wife. It was the same Jan, except for her hair. I stared at her. “What are you doing home?”

“You know I wasn’t going to work today. It’s too hot. Audrey closed the shop, I told you this morning I was going to the hairdresser,”

“You didn’t tell me you were going to do that.”

“You don’t like it?”

That lustrous black hair of hers that she had worn so tightly coiffed, with a part in the middle and a bun at the back, was now a hemisphere of tightly curled ringlets, Little Orphan Annie style.

She seemed happy with it; what could I say? “I think I’m going to,” I said. “It was the change that threw me. Put on your suit and come soak with me.”

She smiled. “Do I need a suit?”

“Unfortunately, you do. Mrs. Casey told me she would be back by eleven o’clock.”

Mrs. Casey was our housekeeper, a morally rigid woman. “I’ll put on my suit,” Jan decided.

Mrs. Casey ate lunch with us in the shade of the overhang next to the pool. I told them about

Baker's phone call and my suspicions.

"So that's what you were mumbling about," Jan said. "Are you turning paranoiac?"

"Realistic would be a more accurate word. Don't forget I once threatened the man. And where did he learn my recent history—and why?"

"I don't know. You should have asked *him* that."

Mrs. Casey nodded. "That's right."

"Aagh, you two!" I said, having no better reply.

They stayed in the shade after lunch, playing gin rummy and drinking iced coffee. I stayed in the pool. Mrs. Casey's moral code is not as strict as the Baptists' when it comes to gambling. She is a devoted bingo-playing Roman Catholic.

Corey and Alan—there was a pair that deserved each other. But Corey couldn't bat in Alan's league, not yet. I soaked and thought and began to worry. If Alan needed a private investigator, I was certainly an unlikely first choice—for him.

The weatherman had called it wrong. The Santana died at two-thirty; the cooling breeze from the ocean replaced it. I dressed, and looked up the address of Alan A. Baker in the phone book. He lived in our area, in Montevista, but in a more expensive section of it.

"Where are you going?" Jan asked.

"Over to Baker's house. I want to talk with him."

"The phone is still connected."

I stared at her. "What is this, an inquisition? I thought we had this question of my working my way settled some time ago."

"Don't be angry," she said. "We did. It's only that Alan Baker seems to be too tricky for—" She shook her head. "I mean, I don't think he's worth your time, Brock."

I grinned at her. "That's not it. You think he's too sharp for me. You're afraid he's going to come after me again."

"No," she said.

"I want to talk with him face to face," I explained. "I want to watch his shifty eyes. Mostly, I just want to be sure that Corey won't be getting into trouble."

She studied me doubtfully and then looked at Mrs. Casey. Mrs. Casey shrugged. They don't always understand me, those two. They love me, but they don't understand me.

Baker's house was on Reservoir Road, on a hummock overlooking the Pine Valley Country Club. It was a big place, of fieldstone, with a brown tile roof, set well back from the road. The Mustang snickered as we drove up the long green concrete driveway. The Mustang shares my inverse middle-class snobbery.

A maid in basic black with a rounded white collar answered my ring. I gave her my name and told her that Mr. Baker had phoned me that morning.

“One moment, please,” she said, and left me standing there in front of the open door.

She didn't come back. Half a minute later, Alan stood there. “What a welcome surprise!” he said genially. “Come in.”

He was tall, he was slim. He had the perfect eyes for his former trade, a candid baby blue. As I walked down the hall, he said, “Thank God that Santana has left us. Why do the locals up here insist on calling it a Santa Ana?”

“A lot of them are new to California.”

“But not us, huh, Brock? We're natives.”

He was setting me up early, establishing a common bond. We turned from the hall into a study paneled in light mahogany at the rear of the house. “You must have sold a lot of maps lately,” I said.

“Same old Callahan,” he said. “You are one sarcastic bastard, aren't you? Drink?”

“Not unless you have Einlicher.”

“I not only have it—I have it on draft. You were the man who introduced it to me, at Heinie's.”

Bond number two. He went to a barrel front set into the paneled wall and poured us two beakers from the spigot. He handed me one and asked, “Is this a social visit?”

“Not exactly. Did Corey get in touch with you?”

“He did. And I hired him. Now sit down and tell me what's on your mind.”

I sat in a deep leather chair and said, “I am sure you will admit that I have a right to be suspicious about your phone call. We certainly didn't part as friends the last time we met.”

“That's true. But everybody isn't as vindictive as you are, Brock.”

“Not as openly, perhaps. And then I got to wondering where you had learned about my inheritance and the three cases I worked on up here.”

“I learned that at a poker game, from a police officer.”

“A local police officer?”

He nodded.

“Does he have a name?” I asked.

“I knew it, but it's slipped my mind. Sort of a Lincolnesque type of guy, with a craggy face. I don't think he was as tall as Abe was. A Jewish guy, I think.”

“Bernie Vogel?” I asked.

“That's the name.”

I said, “Bernie knows I'm retired. What was it, a gag?”

“No. I asked him, while we were having a snack after the game, if he knew of an honest private investigator in town. He told me that you were the only one he knew of, but that you were retired. He mentioned the three cases you had worked on with him, and he told me about the inheritance from your uncle. He made it clear that you weren't active any longer. But I took the chance and phoned you despite that.” He sipped his beer. “Next question?”

“Did you tell him that you knew me?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t want to explain to a police officer why I knew you. You can understand that, can’t you?”

I nodded.

He smiled. “Vogel probably figured he owed me something. He got into me for four hundred dollars. He’s a whiz at poker, isn’t he?”

I nodded again.

He smiled again. “Speechless? You?”

“I can’t think of any other questions,” I explained. “Well, maybe one. This job you hired Corey for—is it dangerous?”

“It shouldn’t be,” he said. “My wife seems troubled about something lately. There were two times she lied about where she had been. The chance of there being another man involved is remote but—”

“That’s enough,” I said. “It’s Corey’s case and none of my business.” I stood up, getting ready to leave, when a woman appeared in the doorway.

“I don’t like to interrupt, Alan,” she said, “but our appointment is for four o’clock.”

He frowned. “What appointment?”

“With the attorney,” she said. “With Mr. Farini.”

“Oh, yes. I’d forgotten. Felicia, this is Brock Callahan, an old friend from Los Angeles who lives up here now.”

She smiled at me. “We’ve met before, but you probably don’t remember it.”

“Guilty,” I admitted.

“It was at a party at Jan Bonnet’s house in Beverly Glen,” she explained, “years ago. Weren’t you a baseball player at one time?”

“Football,” I said. “I find it hard to believe that I would ever forget you, Mrs. Baker.”

She sighed. “You had eyes only for Jan that night. My name was Rowan then. Mike Anthony brought me to the party. You remember him, I’ll bet.”

“I do. He was ranked number three in the middleweight division at the time. Whatever happened to him?”

She shrugged. “I have no idea. And Jan?”

“She married me,” I said.

“Lucky, lucky girl!” she said, and winked at me.

“Enough,” Alan said petulantly. “We’ll be late for our appointment. It was good seeing you again, Brock. I’m sure you can find your way out.”

Chapter Two

DOWN THE LONG DRIVEWAY, back to Reservoir Road. How could I forget a svelte redhead with green eyes and high cheekbones? They had flooded the dreams of my adolescence. Was I getting senile?

Alan had seemed confident that there was no other man involved in Felicia's lies. Was he getting senile, too?

They had an appointment with Joe Farini, the most expensive and least reputable criminal attorney in town. Why?

Our brief respite from the heat was over; the wind was coming from the desert again. I considered driving down to the station to have a talk with Vogel or over to Corey's to counsel him. But it was too damned hot. My car, like Corey's, was not air-conditioned.

Jan was back in the pool when I got home. I went to the den, which was air-conditioned, and dialed Corey's number. There was no answer. I dialed his parents' number and Mr. Raleigh answered.

He didn't know where Corey was, he told me, but he had said he would be home for dinner. He asked, "Is he in any kind of trouble?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"With him, that's my standard question. I'll have him call you as soon as he gets home."

I phoned the station and Bernie was there. I asked him, "Who appointed you my public-relations man?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Giving Alan Baker my name and history. Do you know what he is?"

"The second worst poker player I've ever met, after you. What else is he?"

I was about to relate my history with Alan but decided that wouldn't be cricket. I said, "He was known as a very slick operator down in Los Angeles."

"So were you. Calm down, you hothead! I told him you were no longer active. I made that clear to him. I had no idea he would try to hire you. By the way, did he hire you?"

"You know better than that."

"And you know more than you're telling me. What's going on, Brock?"

"Only my petty annoyance. It must be the heat. I apologize, Bernie."

"For the second time, what is going on?"

"Nothing, I hope. If I learn more, you'll be the first to know."

"I had better be. Your apology is accepted."

"I'm so glad!" I said, and hung up.

Jan was again in the shade of the overhang when I went out. "Well, Hawkshaw," she asked, "what did you learn?"

“I learned that Baker is married to the former Felicia Rowan. Do you remember her?”

“Only by reputation.” She frowned. “Wait—I think Mike Antonio brought her to a party at my house one night.”

“He did. She remembers it, and me. Why did you call him Antonio?”

“Because that was his name at Hollywood High. He was president of our senior class. He changed his name to Anthony when he started to box.”

“And her reputation?” I asked.

“At the level where she operated, I guess you would have to call her a *demimondaine*. At the less expensive level, a hooker would be the word. How is it that she remembered you?”

I shrugged.

She studied me suspiciously. “Was Mr. Baker home?”

“Of course! How high did Anthony go? He never got a title shot, did he? He never fought the champion of his division?”

“I have no idea,” she said. “I didn’t follow his career. The last I heard, he was a bartender somewhere.” She mopped her forehead with a towel. “Is it too early for a drink?”

“Not if we drink them slowly.”

We sat and sipped our vodka and tonics and thought our separate thoughts. Jan was probably wondering if Alan had been home. I was worrying about Corey. He could be in over his head.

He phoned when Jan was taking her shower. “What’s on your mind?” he asked me.

“You. I don’t like that set-up. I understand Baker hired you.”

“That’s right. I start tomorrow. What’s wrong with the setup?”

“I’m not sure. I’m ... just uneasy about it.”

“Brock, I’m a big boy now. How am I ever going to get a downtown office with the penny-an-hour jobs I’ve been working? He gave me a five-hundred-dollar retainer!”

“Okay. Keep your wits about you. You are dealing with a slippery man. And if the going gets sticky—”

“I’ll call on old Uncle Brock, natch. Where else can I find free help? I’ll be careful. I promise.”

What was he to me? I was too young to be his father and he already had a father. I guess Arthur Miller said it best: They are all my sons.

Night came on, but the temperature in the house dropped very little. There was no breeze, the air too ominously quiet—what the superstitious natives call earthquake weather. Brush fires all over the southern counties dominated the eleven o’clock news on the tube. Thirty-eight homes had been destroyed in Los Angeles County, twelve in Orange County, none (so far) in San Valdesto County.

Jan and I slept in the den that night, one of the two air-conditioned rooms in the house. The other was Mrs. Casey’s room, one of the many fringe benefits of her employment. She knew how to take advantage of my addiction for Irish stew.

Was I worried about Corey, or was it envy I was feeling? Getting grounds for divorce had never been my favorite assignment—only slightly more interesting than credit checks. This case was shaping up to be more interesting than either of those.

A con man who had married an heiress under duress, divorced her and married a high-echelon hooker? Investigating that had to be more fun than splashing around in a backyard pool. And Baker may have been telling the truth; grounds for divorce may not have been his reason for hiring a private detective. Nobody lies *all* the time. Why, then, was he having her followed? That was the intriguing question.

I didn't dwell on the questions over the weekend. I played golf. But maybe in my unconscious mind I was thinking about them. For whatever reason, I shot my worst eighteen-hole rounds of history. Which made Monday the wrong time for Jan to ask, "Golf again today?"

"Not in this heat."

She smiled. "And not after the way you played with me yesterday. You're restless, aren't you?"

"Yup. The weather and the golf combined, I suppose. Do you have to go to work today?"

She nodded. "I have an appointment with a client at ten o'clock. Maybe you should have said yes to Mr. Baker."

"Maybe."

"Why," she asked, "would any man marry a prostitute, especially a man as cunning as he seems to be? Could it be compassion, maybe love?"

"I don't know. Maybe she told him, 'No more until we're married.' It's even possible that he was telling the truth; it might have nothing to do with infidelity."

"That's a lot of maybes, isn't it? You used to relish those kinds of cases."

I studied her suspiciously. "Why this sudden urge to get me back to work? You never approved of my trade before we were married."

"I understand you better now," she said. "And I love you even more. I want you to do anything that will make you happy."

"Don't fret about me, honey. Once this absurd weather goes away, I can get back to golf."

"Golf will never be enough for you," she said. "The real golf addicts play in typhoons and hurricanes. Why don't you catch up on your reading?"

"A very sound idea."

The work ethic, that is the curse of the middle class. If I had inherited ten times the money I had inherited, I still would be a middle-class middlebrow. As Heinie had explained to me during a philosophical interlude in his bar, no matter how much wealth some men accumulate, their shoes still turn up at the toes.

There were a half dozen current best-sellers in the den that I had sampled and found wanting. Some sage should explain to these hacks that sex is not a spectator sport, except to voyeurs. The

sales figures would indicate the voyeur population in this country is enormous.

Back to the legendary heroes of my formative years, back to Hemingway and Steinbeck and Fitzgerald. I was deep in my umpteenth reading of *The Great Gatsby* when the phone rang.

It was Bernie. "I've been checking the background of that Alan Baker and his wife."

"Why?"

"Why not? You were the man who alerted me. Some history they have, right?"

"Nothing that should interest a homicide detective. I don't remember mentioning his wife to you."

"You didn't need to. She's famous—in her way. And I got report this morning that they went to see Joe Farini yesterday."

"Who would report that to you, and why?"

"We have a reason, at the moment, for keeping him under surveillance."

"What reason?"

"That would be police business. I phoned to find out if you recommended any other agency in town to Baker."

"That would be private investigator business," I said. Thanks for calling, Bernie, and good-bye."

"Wait, damn you!" he said. "What's with you lately? You got boils or something?"

"I'm allergic to police arrogance," I explained. "I tell you everything. You tell me nothing. I pay your salary, buddy."

"No, you don't," he said in his patient voice. "You live in the county. I work in the city." A moment's silence." All right! We don't know what Farini is up to, if anything. All we have are rumors, so far, from a possibly unreliable snitch who has reason to hate Farini. If we learn more, and you want to know, I'll tell you about it over some of your expensive Scotch some evening. Now you."

"I recommended Corey Raleigh."

"That punk?"

"He is not a punk. He is a mature and perceptive private investigator who learned his trade under a master."

"You?"

"No. Hercule Poirot. Is there some other master you can think of in this hick town? He learned under me."

"Do you know if Baker hired him?"

"He did. To shadow his wife."

"Are you going to pay the kid's bail if he gets out of line?"

"I'm sure Mr. Baker can scratch up enough money to pay for a bail bond. Is that all? You interrupted me in the middle of a good book."

"I apologize, sir. When will I learn not to annoy the citizens of the upper class?"

“Screw you,” I said, and hung up.

Bernie always has to play cop. He is a cop first, a friend second. But I guess that is the way it has to be if you're a good cop, and Bernie is certainly that.

There was no reason to connect the Bakers' visit to Joe Farini's office with Alan's husband's suspicions. There was a reason to suspect Alan had not completely retired from his larcenous profession. Joe Farini confined his practice to criminal law. And also to something more dangerous than that, as an intermediary between the law and the lawless.

That could involve some hairy characters. I had the uncomfortable feeling that I had sent a boy out to do a thug's work. Corey was equipped to handle a case of wife watching. He was neither physically nor emotionally equipped to handle violence. I tried to ease my sense of guilt by telling myself that Alan was a con man and con men rarely indulge in violence. I didn't convince myself.

I climbed into my car and headed for Reservoir Road. There was no Plymouth parked in the shelter of the eucalyptus trees on either side of the Baker driveway. I drove down to the station, but Bernie wasn't there.

I went home and finished *Gatsby*, and those four last paragraphs knocked me on my ass as they always had. The twenties, that had been America's golden age—and they had happened twenty years before I was born.

Mrs. Casey and I ate lunch in the cool den, along with a glass of good Irish whiskey for her and bourbon for me. When Jan isn't home, Mrs. Casey and I live it up.

Then I stayed in the den to make another futile attack on William Faulkner. She went to her air-conditioned room to watch her soap operas on the nineteen-inch color television set that Jan and I had bought her for Christmas.

Faulkner had eluded me again; I was back in the pool when Ian came home earlier than she had expected to be.

“Put on your suit,” I suggested, “and join me in a game of underwater grappling.”

“I'll put on my suit,” she said, “but we'll save the grappling for tonight.”

A breeze from the north began to drift in after dinner. We opened all the windows to cool off the house and sat in deck chairs on the front lawn.

A little before eleven, Jan said, “Let's not watch the news on the tube. All we'll see are liquor store holdups, car crashes, fires, and milling crowds chanting hate slogans from the troubled Middle East. Let's go to bed and start grappling.”

“If you insist,” I agreed.

Chapter Three

I WAS ON MY second cup of coffee in the morning when Mr. Raleigh phoned. “That crazy Corey,” he told me, “didn’t come home all night. His mother was worried stiff! Then he phones us early this morning from Donegal Bay. What is he doing up there?”

“I have no idea, Mr. Raleigh. Didn’t he tell you?”

“Not him. *Confidential*, he called it. Huh! But I thought as long as you were working with him you might know.”

“Did he tell you I was working with him?”

“Not right out. When does he ever say anything right out? Let’s say he led me to believe you were.”

“He had a reason to,” I explained. “I did tell him I would help him any time he needed help. Evidently, he hasn’t needed it.” I took a breath and said, “If he was on an all-night stakeout, he probably didn’t have a chance to phone you before this morning. I think you underrate your son, Mr. Raleigh. He is more mature for his age than you seem to think.”

“When he gets mature enough to pay us some room and board and rent for the garage, I’ll be ready to agree with you. Mr. Callahan, as one adult to another, if you learn anything I should know you’ll tell me, won’t you?”

“Of course,” I lied. “Tell Mrs. Raleigh not to worry.”

“I’ll do that. She thinks a lot of you. And thanks.”

Donegal Bay was a beach hamlet about twenty-five miles north of San Valdesto. It had started as an artist’s colony in those long-ago days when land along the coast cost less than a million dollars an acre. The colony was still there, and the area was also a mecca for clam diggers and dune-buggy itinerants. The bluff above the beach held the impressive homes of the latecomers who could afford the current prices.

What, I asked myself, was Mrs. Alan Arthur Baker doing in Donegal Bay? Was she painting a picture, digging for clams, racing a dune buggy? Or perhaps visiting a wealthy lover on the bluff?

This case was getting more interesting by the hour. Jan had called it right; it was my kind of case full of maybes. The first three maybes were doubtful—but who can be sure?

“Who was that?” Jan asked.

“Mr. Raleigh. Corey stayed out all night and he’s worried. I wish he would let Corey grow up. He’s twenty-one years old.”

“Only chronologically. Do you think something happened to him?”

I shook my head. “He phoned home this morning from Donegal Bay. He must have followed Felicia Baker up there.”

“And spent the night with her?”

“Watching her, not wooing her!”

“I know. It was my little joke. Why don’t you run up to Donegal Bay and question your protégé?”

A little joke followed by a little rhyme; my bride was chipper this morning. Grappling often had that effect on her. I said, “He’s probably on his way home by now—and it’s none of my business.”

She smiled.

“What’s funny?” I asked.

“Your little joke. Let Mrs. Casey know if you’re not going to be home for lunch. And now I must trudge off to my day of labor.”

She trudged off to her day of labor in her little Mercedes, and I went into the den to resume my remedial reading. I had lasted six rounds with Faulkner yesterday before throwing in the towel; how many rounds could I go against Joyce?

None. I couldn’t concentrate. I phoned the Baker house and the maid answered. I identified myself and asked for Alan.

Mr. Baker wasn’t at home, she informed me. “He went to Los Angeles early yesterday morning and we are not sure when he will be back. He’ll be phoning here this afternoon to tell us. Perhaps you could call back tonight?”

“Could I speak with Mrs. Baker?”

“Mrs. Baker is not home, either. She is visiting friends in Lompoc. Would you like to leave a message?”

“Yes. Please tell him I am worried about a young man we both know. He’ll know who I mean. The young man’s father is worried about him.”

Five minutes later, I decided to do what Jan knew I would. I told Mrs. Casey I wouldn’t be home for lunch. I told her that if a man named Baker phoned this afternoon, she should tell him I was out playing golf.

She looked at me suspiciously. “Is that a lie?”

“Yes. But it’s only a venial sin, not mortal. It’s not even venial enough for three Hail Marys.”

“And what if Mrs. Callahan wants to know where you are?”

“She’ll know. It was her suggestion.”

School was out. It was vacation time, and Highway 101 was loaded with vacationers, heavy with campers and house trailers. The petroleum shortage had turned into a petroleum glut and we were back to Mr. Veblen’s conspicuous consumption.

The Donegal Bay off-ramp was wide, the road it led into was narrow and pitted with potholes. It turned under the freeway and started to climb gradually toward the sea. It was a small rise. From its crest, the spread of Donegal Valley lay before me. It was studded with wild mustard blossoms and about a dozen large ranches.

The climb was steeper and longer coming out of the valley. A cool breeze from the ocean drifted into the car about halfway up the grade. There had been avocado trees or cattle on most of the ranches at one time. Several of them were still working ranches; the others had been converted leisurely spreads for the horse set.

The road grew wider as I neared the top. At the bluff end, an even wider and unpitted macadam road lined with olive trees intersected it. This was the road that served the large homes looking down on the town and the sea.

I drove along it slowly but spotted no nine-year-old Plymouth. At the far end, the road narrowed and started its steep and sharply curved descent to the town and beach below. I stayed in low gear all the way down.

The main street of the town ran laterally with the beach; the five side streets that crossed it extended for only a block on each side. Back and forth I drove, covering every house. Corey's car was not in sight.

He was probably home by now. I was about to turn for home myself after I had covered the final street. But then I saw the sign that read *Einlicher On Tap*.

It was a weathered building of unfinished barn siding with a shake roof. An immense rust-eroded anchor was set on a concrete base in the small patch of ice plant next to the parking area. The place was named (of course) the Rusty Anchor.

There were only two customers in the place. One was a tall, tanned, long-haired, blond, bearded youth wearing cut-off jeans and a T-shirt. He was sitting at a corner table with a tall, tanned, long-haired, blonde but unbearded girl wearing cut-off jeans and a T-shirt. They glanced up as I came in and then went back to consuming the immense bowls of clam chowder in front of them.

The ceiling was festooned with fishnets, the rough wooden walls were adorned with dried, multicolored kelp. The man behind the bar could have passed for Clark Kent, except for the scar tissue over one eye and a slightly cauliflowered ear. That should have been the tipoff, but it had been a long time since I had seen Mike Anthony in action.

It was the blown-up photographs on the back bar that alerted me—Mike standing over Jess Leppert as Jess went down in the third round at Las Vegas, Mike's murderous overhand right slamming Chico Maracho halfway through the ropes in their San Diego brawl.

"Mike Anthony," I said, "as I live and breathe!"

He smiled. "Right. And where have I seen you before? I've seen you somewhere, I know that."

I shrugged. "Maybe at Burke's Gym? I used to spar a little with Charlie Davis there. My name is Greg Hudson. Could I shake your hand?"

He shook my hand and said, "That was too bad about Charlie, huh? He had a lot going for him."

Charlie Davis, heavyweight, had been killed in a plane crash. I said, "That's for sure. He was heading for the top when it happened."

He studied me. "It couldn't have been at Burke's. I didn't train there often. Hey, wait, didn't you used to hang around Heinie's?"

"At times. That could be where you saw me. I never got on a card you were on and never more than four-round prelims. How about a tall glass of Einlicher and one for yourself?"

"Coming up," he said. "It was Heinie who steered me onto Einlicher." He poured us a pair of glasses and asked, "Visiting friends here?"

"Nope. Looking for a place to live. I can't breathe that L.A. air anymore. Do you like it here?"

He shrugged. "I like the air. I could use a little more action. My cousin owned this place, and he sold it to me cheap."

"It might be a little rustic for my wife," I said. "Are you married?"

He shook his head and smiled. "That kind of action I can get even around here. I never saw any need to sign a long-term contract." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He withdrew a business card from it and laid it on the jar. "If you decide to come up here, deal with the guy. He's a buddy of mine. He'll do all right by you."

I took the card. "Thanks. How's your clam chowder?"

"You'll never know until you try it," he said.

I tried it. It wasn't bad. It wasn't good, either. "Good," I said. "How about another couple of beers?"

We had those and then I told him that as long as I was in town, I might as well look at a couple of houses. I didn't add that maybe his buddy would know if Anthony was still messing around with Felicia Baker, the woman who had told her maid (and husband?) that she would be visiting friends in Lompoc.

The blonde and the blond went out with me. They climbed into a dune buggy and headed for the beach. I climbed into my car and headed for the office of Duane Detterwald, real estate, trust deed insurance, notary public. Just meeting a man named Duane Detterwald should make the trip worthwhile.

His office was half of a converted beach bungalow. The other half was occupied by a bait, fishing tackle, and boat rental shop.

Duane Detterwald was a jockey-size man with a ferret face. He was clothed in a tan Palm Beach type suit, a yellow oxford cotton shirt, but no tie. His tan loafers glistened with polish. Or maybe varnish.

"Could you give me a rough estimate of the price range you're considering, Mr. Hudson?" I asked me.

"It would depend," I told him, "on what I could get for my house in Brentwood. I suppose the homes up on the bluff are out of sight?"

"Not any more than the homes in your area. I have only one listing up there. They're asking for

hundred and thirty thousand, but I'm sure that they would consider a smaller offer. How large is your home in Brentwood?"

"Twenty-eight hundred square feet. It has three bedrooms, a den, and two and a half baths. It's right next to the Brentwood Country Club. It's paid for, so the buyer can't assume a low-interest loan, but I'd be willing to take back a sizable second trust deed."

He nodded. "I'll phone and see if we can get in this morning."

He phoned and we could. On the small dirt parking lot behind the building, he said, "So long as there's only the two of us, we'll take the little car."

The little car was a Datsun 280-Z, the other a Cadillac De-Ville. Why, I wondered, would Duane Deterwald have to share office space with a bait store?

Zoom, zoom, the Datsun rumbled, rolling out of the lot. Tuned twin tail pipes ... *Duane, baby, what goes on here?*

On the climb up the winding road, I said, "I sure thought Mike was heading for the title."

"So did he. Until he ran into Duke Ellis. Duke was the guy who put Mike out of business. He took his guts out. I won a bundle on that fight."

"Have you known Mike long?" I asked.

He nodded. "Since high school. I told him he wasn't ready for Ellis. But Mike is one stubborn wop."

"You've known him since high school, but you bet against him?"

"I did. And I told Mike I was going to."

And Mike went into the tank, I thought, *and split the wad with you*. I asked, "How long have you been in the real-estate business up here?"

He smiled. "I had a hunch that question was coming. I came up here three months after I joined Gamblers Anonymous. Don't get nervous, Mr. Hudson. You are riding with an honest broker."

"I'm sure I am," I lied.

The house he parked in front of was more Georgian than Californian, a two-story red brick place with white shutters bordering each window, and fronted by a wide, low porch. Fluted pillars supported the roof of the porch.

"The lady of the house," he told me, "never got over *Gone With the Wind*. But now she's found an even bigger all-frame colonial in San Luis Obispo."

The lady of the house had red hair. Any resemblance to Scarlett O'Hara ended there. She was tall and angular and bony, a woman of about sixty trying to look thirty.

"Duane, darling!" she said. "I missed you at the Ellers' party last night."

"I was out of town," he explained. "This is Greg Hudson, Marilyn. He might be interested in your house."

She smiled at me. "This way, Mr. Hudson."

Cutesy, chintzy rooms, crowded with maple furniture and too many oval rugs and oval-framed pictures. There were four-poster beds in two of the bedrooms. I was glad Jan wasn't here. It was the kind of house she would ache to do over—with an axe.

I told Marilyn, "It's a charming place. But I can't make an offer until my wife sees it. Will you be home this weekend?"

She nodded. "But you'd better hurry. A buy like this doesn't stay on the market long."

Outside, Duane chuckled. "Not very long. I've only had the listing for ten months."

He still seemed amused as we headed down the steep road. About halfway down, he started to chuckle again.

"What's so funny?" I asked him.

"You are, Callahan," he told me. "What's the scam?"

Chapter Four

I SAID NOTHING, STARING straight ahead.

“Greg Hudson!” he said. “What hat did you pick that name out of?”

“I was thinking of calling myself Duane Detterwald,” I explained, “but I was afraid people would laugh.”

“Some people have. A few learned to regret it.”

“Midgets?”

“You’re really nasty, aren’t you? I went along with your gag to find out what your pitch was. Hell, man, I must have seen you dozens of times when the Rams were still playing in the Coliseum. Mike was never a football fan. Is he having husband trouble again? You’re a peeper now, right?”

“Wrong,” I said.

“You were afraid to go up against Mike,” he went on, “so you thought you might get some dirt from me. Well, you won’t. Mike is my friend.”

I said nothing.

“A twenty-eight-hundred-square-foot house in Brentwood and driving a seventeen-year-old Ford. How dumb do you think I am?”

“Dumb enough. That Ford has six thousand dollars’ worth of Spelke conversion on it in 196 dollars. I turned down thirteen thousand for it just last month. How about a guy with a Cad DeVil and a 280-Z sharing an office with a bait store?”

He laughed. “You got a point there. What married woman is Mike messing with now?”

“I don’t know. I came to town to look for a friend who is missing. He was last heard of up here. I didn’t find him. I saw the Einlicher sign just before I was about to start for home, so I dropped in. I didn’t know Anthony owned the place. He didn’t recognize me, and I didn’t want to be recognized by the owner of the only bar in town. My friend could still be here, and word gets around in a town that size. That could mean trouble for him.”

“Okay, you’re beginning to make sense. You *are* still a peeper then?”

“Not on this. As for being afraid to go up against Mike Anthony, you and he can round up all the friends you both have and I’ll take you on en masse or one at a time.”

He smiled. “I hit a nerve, didn’t I? Look, I believe you. And I won’t tell Mike who you are. He’s got too much mouth. What does your friend look like?”

“Tall and skinny. He’s twenty-one years old and he’s driving a nine-year-old Plymouth, a grand two-door sedan. His father is worried about him, so I came here. I’ll give you my phone number, and if you spot the kid, you can call me—collect. I live in San Valdesto now.”

“Fair enough. Now about me. The Datsun is mine, the Cad is leased. I don’t need a bigger office.”

I make a very satisfactory income out of the office I have. I sold two ranches so far this year. You know what the commission was on that?"

"Plenty, with the prices in this area."

"The package went for four and a half million."

"At six percent," I said, "that reads out to two hundred and seventy thousand dollars. You ought to buy that bait store."

"I own the building," he told me stiffly. "My nephew and his live-in girl friend run the tackle shop and boat rental that you keep calling a bait store. They don't pay me *any* rent. Now, God damn you, get off my back!"

I patted his knee. "Okay, Duane. I apologize for the things I said. I was embarrassed. I . . . overreacted."

He smiled. "I should have expected that. I've watched you overreact plenty of times on the field. Trust me, you dumb jock! I'm your fan. Now I'm going to take you over to meet my only nephew. He was a footballer, too. An all-state high-school tight end. He played in the North-South Shrine game."

It was the blond youth I had seen at the Rusty Anchor. His name was Jeff Randolph. He shook my hand and asked, "How are the Rams going to do this year?"

"All right, if they can settle the quarterback question. Are you going to college now?"

He shook his head. "I had a year at S.C. That was enough. This is my life, the surf and the beach and the sailboat."

A girl came out from the storage room at the rear of the shop. It was the blonde I had seen with Jeff. Duane said, "And this, Brock, is Laura Prescott, Jeff's bride-to-be."

She shook my hand and smiled. "Don't mind what Uncle Duane says. We're trying to drag him into the twentieth century."

As we walked toward my car, Duane muttered, "Twentieth century! Don't they think I ever played house? But you can't go on like that forever. What if they have kids? They'll be bastards!"

"They mean a lot to you, don't they?"

"Jeff does. I have no kids. And I like Laura, too." He shook his head. "Oh well, they can change. We can hope."

I gave him my phone number, he promised he would keep a watchful eye open for Corey, and we parted better than we had started. That ferret face of his, that was what had made me suspicious. Why did I trust him now? Maybe he had called it right; I was a dumb jock.

I phoned the Raleighs when I got home and asked Mr. Raleigh if their son had phoned again.

"He did. He phoned about twenty minutes ago from Lompoc and told us not to worry. And the missus and I decided it's maybe time that we stopped being so . . . so protective. But, as you know, he is an only child and—"

"I know," I said. "I was one, too."

Felicia had gone on to her friends in Lompoc after a stop in Donegal Bay. If it had been an overnight stop, there was reason to believe Mike Anthony had been her host. Which made the case what it had originally seemed to be—adultery. Which could be grounds for divorce. Yet Baker had claimed that he didn't want one. Why hadn't he assumed the obvious? It's not easy to con a con man. Unless, of course, he's in love.

When Jan came home, I asked her if she remembered Duane Detterwald.

She nodded and smiled. "I remember him well. When he first came to school, the boys called him Weasel. But they soon quit calling him that."

"Don't tell me he scared them out of it, a man his size."

"Mike Anthony put a stop to it. They were inseparable." She frowned. "How do you know how big Duane is? Where did you meet him?"

"In Donegal Bay."

"I knew you would go up there. Did you find Corey?"

"Not up there. But I phoned the Raleighs, and Mr. Raleigh told me Corey is in Lompoc now. Your old classmate Mike Anthony runs a bar in Donegal Bay. I wonder if Felicia spent the night with him."

Jan smiled. "Felicia—does that mean faithful?"

I shook my head. "You're thinking of Fidelia. Felicia means happiness."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I always know? I looked it up."

I was making a lot of assumptions on Corey's case that were based on the obvious. The obvious one of my strengths (or weaknesses). I was assuming facts not in evidence, as usual. So what? It wasn't my case.

Which Corey made clear to me on the phone just before dinner.

"Some friend you are," he said. "You and your big mouth!"

"Could I have a translation of that?"

"Telling Mr. Baker my father was worried about me, trying to make me look like a punk. When I reported to Mr. Baker from Lompoc this afternoon, he was steamed. I had to talk fast to save my job."

"I didn't tell Mr. Baker that."

"No, you told the maid to tell him. Why the hatchet job?"

"Corey, I was worried about you, and so were your parents. And let me tell you, if you tangled with Mike Anthony, you'll find out I had reason to worry."

"Who is Mike Anthony?"

"The man who owns that bar near the beach in Donegal Bay. Didn't you talk with him?"

"You're not making sense," he said.

"Corey," I asked, "are you still in Lompoc?"

"No. I'm home. Why?"

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