

"Oh, come now," Harry interrupted, "I don't pretend to any medical knowledge, but I don't think I'm especially deficient in moral sense. It seems to me that you are going out of the way to take the blame on yourself, Stinker."

"Another thing" — Red tried his hand at coaxing Stinker out of the gloom — "although I can't say it's impossible that a man should fall in a faint and hit his head hard enough to fracture his skull, the odds are always overwhelmingly against it. People just don't keel right over. They crumple. Their legs fold up under them. Most often, when a man passes out that way, he falls with just about as little force as you can have and call it a fall at all."

"Also," said Schmidty, "you have to remember that neither Red nor you saw him die. There are plenty of things that could have happened to him."

"As for instance?" Stinker asked.

"As for instance," said Schmidty, "Stitch was into something. I still think he tried to run me off the road with his car even though he reported it stolen. There are a lot of things I want to know about Stitch. You're forgetting that we haven't cleared up his connection with Bellringer."

"What makes you think there is a connection?"

Young Larraby, who had been silent for quite a while, tried to make his question sound casual, but there was a nervous tension in his voice that made me stare at him.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BOY LOOKED as though any answer Inspector Schmidt made to his question might mean a lot to him. I could not for the life of me see why the kid should act as though it meant so much to him. Obviously he admired Stinker with an awe that approached worship, and it would be natural under the circumstances that he should be feeling even very considerable concern about the whole thing as it affected his hero. Otherwise, however, I could have understood interest and boyish excitement over a murder case, but I could not understand this breathlessness with which he asked the question.

It was a breathlessness that sounded and looked too much akin to plain ordinary fear.

Schmidty, however, ignored the question. He preferred to ask a few of his own, and he started with the lad. As you may remember, when we left Stinker's Run, that first time we went out to the roadhouse, the kid stayed behind for a few minutes to wait for the Zipper and Brink while the rest of us went out to the cars. Schmidty wanted to know what happened in those few minutes.

"I waited for them," the boy said. "Mr. Benjamin went into the roulette room."

"Where?" Schmidty asked.

"The back room," Larraby explained. "They have a roulette wheel back there."

"I see," said Schmidty. "Then what?"

"That left me alone with Mr. Johnson," the boy explained. "He got up and stood for a bit holding on to the table with one hand while he sort of felt of his jaw with the other. Then he sat down on a chair and just sat. I didn't say anything and he didn't either."

"When he got up," Red asked, "did you notice any blood on the floor or on him? Was he bleeding?"

"No sir," the kid answered, without a moment's hesitation. "He had a pencil behind his ear — maybe you remember — when Stinker knocked him down."

"I didn't notice," Red murmured.

"I did," said the boy. "He always had a pencil behind his ear. He used it to figure out how much people owed."

"You seem to know his habits pretty well," Schmidty murmured.

"I'd been out there before, sir." The boy flushed. "A lot of us got out there for beer."

"And that roulette wheel, I warrant." Harry grinned. "The dean's been talking about complaining to the mayor about the gambling out there."

"About that pencil," the kid said abruptly. "When he got up I happened to notice that it had fallen to the floor. I picked it up for him. I would have seen the blood on the floor then if there had been any."

"I guess you would have," said Schmidty. "Then what happened?"

"Then Mr. Brinkley came out, and I went in to tell Mr. Tracy that you were waiting," Larraby answered.

Schmidty looked questioningly at the Zipper.

"That's right," Zip volunteered. "Larraby came in a moment or two after Brink left me."

"What were Brinkley and Stitch doing when the two of you came out?" Schmidty asked.

"Well," said the Zipper, "I came out first. Stitch was there, not doing anything, just sitting in a chair. But no Brink. I thought he had already gone out to join you, so I waited for Larraby. I asked Stitch if he felt any better and he nodded. While I was waiting though, Brink came out of the back room with that man Benjamin. Larraby joined us at the same time, and the three of us came out to the cars."

"Yes," Larraby added. "That's the way it was."

"H'm," said Schmidty. "I didn't know the three of you were so busy giving each other chances to be alone with Stitch."

"What," I asked, "do you mean by that?"

"Nothing much," the inspector answered. "I'm figuring with Red here that something happened to Stitch after we saw him. I've got to figure on the people who had a chance at him after we left. I don't mean a thing, but I've got to figure. Now look, if

there is a connection between Stitch and this Bellringer business — and I think there is — we have Brinkley as a Bellringer investor. Maybe it wasn't so good that he was alone with Stitch even for a minute."

"But I saw Stitch after Brink was alone with him," Zip objected.

"Sure," said Schmidty. "Now I don't mean any offense, but you turned up in Bellringer's pants and he turned up in your jersey, and then you had it again or something like that. I don't know yet just how you get into this thing, but you do some way."

"I see what you mean," the Zipper answered with a graceful lack of resentment.

"Then," Schmidty added, "there's Mander. How do I know Mander didn't get a chance at Stitch alone? He was out there. We know that."

"What about me while you're suspecting everybody?" Larraby asked, showing less grace than the Zipper had displayed.

"You found the body," Schmidty answered, preserving his detached, scientific manner. "I have only your word for it that you found it by accident."

"Mine," said Larraby, "and Peggy's."

"Sure," said Schmidty. "But you both admit that she left you alone with the body for a while."

"That's pretty slim," I objected. "I was alone with the body out in the alley. It doesn't mean anything."

"Not necessarily," Schmidty agreed, "but we have to watch every angle. Anyway, it's no use thinking too much about this part of it until we have the results of the post mortem on Stitch. We'll find out maybe that he had a bad heart all the time. These angles are just something to keep in mind. If somebody did something to him after we left, it was somebody who didn't have much time, and I am interested in anyone who had just a moment with him."

"Look," said Gilligan. "I don't like to say this, but here's another way of looking at it. As you said, Mr. Tracy is mixed up in the Bellringer killing some way, and Mr. Smith and Doctor Sweeney are Mr. Tracy's friends."

"So," Stinker shouted, "I killed Stitch purposely, and Red tried to cover me up. That's the nicest idea of all."

"Please, Mr. Smith" — Gilligan spoke with every evidence of acute unhappiness — "don't take it personally."

"Wait, all of you," Harry interrupted. "Let's be sensible. It's damn late and everybody's very tired. As I see it, there's nothing more that can be done till morning. Would it be unprofessional, Inspector, if we all got some sleep and postponed having horrid thoughts about the grandest guys we know, until you can really do some investigating?"

"That," said Schmidty, "is the best idea anybody's had in a long time."

Harry saw us out and we drove back to town. Things had quieted down a lot. After all, the boys who go it the strongest do pass out eventually, and it was late

enough for them all to be out cold. We heard occasional voices lifted in song and saw occasional drunks reeling along the street. A few of the lads were draped over doorsteps sleeping it off, but in general the night had gone down to the dregs and all but a few diehards had gone to bed. Schmidty had a few requests to make of Gilligan, and we stopped in front of the police station while he made them. He asked Gilligan to let him know if Stitch's car should be found, and he wanted a general inquiry on Bell-ringer, just in case he had a police record anywhere. Red reminded Gilligan about letting him know in time so that he could watch the post-mortem examination of Stitch's body and we started for the hotel.

On the way the question arose about a bed for Schmidty. We were all down to one car now — the inspector's — and it was quite a jam with Inspector Schmidty, Red, Stinker, the Zipper, Jim Dale, young Larraby and myself all in a not too large sedan.

"I guess," I said, "You'll have to share my bed. It will be less crowded than this."

We explained that the hotel is always booked solid months in advance for reunion week end, and Schmidty grumbled about it but resigned himself to sleeping double.

"You don't have to do that," young Larraby offered. "I have a perfectly good couch in my study. One of you can have my bed. I can sleep fine on the couch."

"I'll go with the kid," Stinker suggested. "I'm a great couch sleeper."

There was some argument about who'd take the bed and who the couch, with Schmidty objecting that he didn't want to put everybody out. It ended with the whole lot of us going over to the campus to have a look at Larraby's rooms and see whether that couch was really sleepable. In town it had been fairly silent but on the campus it was quiet as the grave. Turner Hall, where Bob roomed, is a long low rambling building with numerous wings running from a single central entrance. Bob's room was at the end of one of the wings. There is no need to bother you with floor plans of Turner Hall or any detailed descriptions of architectural layout. The campus is spacious and so much of the land adjacent to it is college owned that there has never been any need to be sparing of space. Long, low, sprawling buildings are the rule with two stories the standard building height. A few of the academic buildings are taller, running to three or four stories, but all the dormitories have been kept close to the ground. Turner Hall is typical in that it is two stories high. Less typical is its plan of sprawling in all directions from a single central entrance. Later dormitories were more sensibly designed with numerous entries, eliminating the tremendously long, twisting, narrow hallways which are characteristic of Turner.

Since Bob Larraby's ground-floor rooms were at the end of one of the wings, there was a great length of hallway to traverse from the building entrance to Room 41. Here, as in other parts of the campus and the town, almost every available electric bulb had been smashed early in the evening by bands of gay marauders, and throughout its tortuous length that hall leading to Larraby's room was dark, so dark that we had to feel our way down it. To make matters worse, the hall was full of trunks. You understand, of course, that reunions come at commencement time, at the end of the

academic year. Seniors are likely to be packing for the final departure and other students are going home for the summer. Virtually every student has his trunk brought up from the storerooms, and what seemed like millions of trunks were out in that hall. Larraby led the way because he was most familiar with the twists and turns of the corridor. When we started, we were all closely bunched behind him, warning each other of turns and trunks as we came to them. After fumbling our way about halfway down the hall, however, Jim Dale missed directions on one of the trunks and slammed into it hard. He was third in line right behind Larraby and Stinker. The Zipper was behind Jim, and when Jim tangled with the trunk Zip piled up on top of him, hurting his wounded arm. We got them untangled, and Schmidty and I held matches while Red tried to see whether any real damage had been done the Zipper. The bandage looked all right, so we started feeling our way down the hall again. Larraby and Stinker, however, who had been in the van all the time, had not waited for the rest of us. Later Larraby explained that they had hurried on to his rooms to pick up his flashlight with the idea of coming back for the rest of us.

At any rate, we were feeling our way down the hall when we heard the scuffling noises up ahead. Our first thought was that either Stinker or Larraby had fallen afoul of one of those parked trunks.

"All right up ahead?" Schmidty called.

We listened for an answer, but there was none — just the sound of labored breathing and scuffling and bumping noises.

"Come on!" Schmidty shouted, and started charging toward these inexplicable noises. It wasn't a bit funny at the time, although it is hard to tell about it without making it sound like something out of the funny papers. It had been tough enough getting through that hall when we had been feeling our way slowly. Now, of course, with the lot of us charging ahead, we took at least a dozen falls in as many yards. We ran into trunks, bumped into blank walls, tripped over ourselves and each other. In general, we raised the most unholy din, making more noise than progress. In one way, however, the noise did help. It woke several of the boys in the rooms along the corridor, and two or three opened their doors and stuck their heads out. Some of them had turned on the lights in their rooms, and the light filtering through opened doors and transoms helped past the last couple of turns and over the last few trunks. It seemed as though hundreds of people were yelling "Pipe down" at us all at once, and the few who had bothered to get up and open their doors were asking what went on. We didn't bother to answer any of them, but made straight for the door at the end of the corridor. We had enough light now to see the open door and a man lying across the threshold. All we could see was his legs. Schmidty got there first, and he reached around inside the door fumbling for a light switch. We were huddled right behind him when he found the switch and the light went on in Larraby's study. What it revealed was about as baffling a scene as anyone could expect. Lying flat on his face across the threshold was Bob Larraby. In the middle of the room beside an

overturned chair stood Stinker with his hands palm up in front of him. He wasn't doing anything, just stood there blinking at his hands.

Carefully we stepped over Larraby's inert body. We had had plenty of practice with the trunks.

"Now," said Schmidty, when we had hurdled the obstacle of Larraby and had gotten into the room. "What's all this?"

Stinker turned his hands slowly and looked at them as though he had never seen them before.

"Huh?" he said.

Schmidty grabbed his shoulder and shook him. Red and Jim turned Larraby over, and Red went to work to bring him around. The Zipper nursed his bad arm and stared around the room. There was nothing much to see. The curtains blew gently in the night breeze and one was torn and hung over the sill. There was the overturned chair and Larraby and Stinker. Otherwise the room looked ordinary enough.

"What happened?" Schmidty shouted, shaking Stinker.

"I could have killed him," Stinker mumbled. "If I hadn't remembered, I would have killed him."

Naturally I assumed that he meant Larraby, and I wondered what the boy could have possibly said or done to bring Stinker down on him that way. After all, one thing I did know was that Stinker is as amiable as he is big, and I was quite sure that he had taken a liking to the kid. It was all quite beyond me, but Schmidty's wits were nimbler and he dashed to the window. There was a sliver of moon that night, and although it had started clouding over, it was not a very dark night. The lawn outside Turner Hall is studded with clumps of trees, and under the trees the ground was darkly shadowed.

"Come on, Baggy," Schmidty ordered, and went out the window.

I followed him over the sill and we stood outside the window, peering into the tree shadows. After looking around for a few minutes, Schmidty sighed.

"I guess," he said, "this is no use. He got away."

"Who?" I asked.

"I don't know," Schmidty shrugged. "Whoever it was Stinker didn't kill."

We climbed back in through the window. The Zipper had righted the overturned chair and Stinker was sitting in it, his face buried in his hands. Jim and Red had lain Larraby on the sofa, and Red was working on him. The boy had a nasty abrasion behind his ear and another on his forehead.

Those combined with a trickle of blood from his nose made him look as though he were in a bad way.

"Hurt bad?" Schmidty asked.

The kid managed a grin. He mumbled something that sounded like no, but the word got tangled up on the way out because Red at that moment was wiping the blood away from his upper lip.

"It's nothing," Red answered for him. "He has a bloody nose and some scrapes and bruises. Also he was knocked silly for a minute."

Stinker raised his head from his hands. "Did he get you, kid?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said Larraby. "As I remember it, he just tripped me up and then everybody jumped up and down on me."

"Are you sure he's all right, Red?" Stinker asked anxiously, coming over to the couch. Looking down at the boy, he finished scowling. "He doesn't look right to me."

Red stared at Stinker for a moment and, shaking his head, he examined Larraby all over again. We watched until he had finished. The kid's nose stopped bleeding, and Red cleaned up his bruises and cuts. That left him looking as though somebody had knocked the stuffing out of him, but anyone could see that it was nothing serious. He just looked like a boy who had been in a fight.

"Now," said Schmidty, "suppose you drag yourself together and tell me exactly what happened."

Larraby sat up on the sofa and tossed his bloody handkerchief at the wastepaper basket across the room. Although Schmidty's question had been addressed to Stinker, the boy answered.

"There was somebody waiting in here," he said, "laying for me, I guess."

"Who was it?" Schmidty asked.

"I don't know," Larraby answered. "I unlocked the door and reached in for the light switch. You probably know better than I do what happened after that. Whoever it was in here tripped me up."

"I tripped you," Stinker interrupted.

"You tripped me?" The kid looked puzzled. "Why?"

"I had to," said Stinker.

"Is this a gag or something?" The kid addressed the question to all of us. "We come to the door and Stinker trips me up, and then you all trample on me. I don't get it."

"It was all over when we got here," I began but Schmidty interrupted me.

"What happened, Stinker?" he said.

"I'm not too sure myself," Stinker murmured. "When the kid opened the door, it seemed as dark in here as out in the hall. The only thing was I could see the window across the room lighter than the rest. I was right behind the kid and, just as he leaned in to get the light switch, I saw a hand come up over his head. I couldn't see it very clearly — just what I could make out silhouetted between me and the window across the room — but it looked like a hand holding something. Maybe it was a hammer or a stick. Whatever it was, it was all set to bash the kid on the top of the head."

"So there was somebody in here laying for me!" Larraby exclaimed.

"Of course there was," Stinker answered. "That's why I tripped you. It was too close to do anything else. The only chance to save the kid from having his skull cracked was to knock him out of the way of that hammer or whatever. I kicked hard against the back of his knees and grabbed his shoulders and hauled him down at the



same time. You see, I figured that if I couldn't make the hammer miss Larraby entirely at least I could knock and pull him far enough out of range so that he'd get only a glancing blow."

"Good stuff," Jim Dale applauded.

"I did what I could," Stinker groaned. "I must have caught you off balance, Bob, because you went right down flat under my feet. Whoever it was in here must have put all his weight behind that crack on the head he was aiming at you, because when I hauled you out from under it I saw a man's head and shoulders come catapulting forward. At the moment I thought he was trying to jump you while you were down, but I guess it wasn't that. I guess, when his hammer didn't hit anything, it was like a fighter taking a big swing and missing and flooring himself by his own momentum. Anyhow I made a grab for him and got him around the neck."

"Who was it?" Schmidty asked. "Couldn't you see?"

"No," said Stinker. "All I could see was the shape of a man's head between me and the window. I grabbed and held on."

"O.K.," said Schmidty. "Then what happened?"

"Then," Stinker faltered. "Then I let go."

"As simple as that," Schmidty growled. "Then you just let go."

Stinker nodded.

"Now, listen, Schmidty," Red interrupted. "Don't blame Stinker. You can see how it was. It was pitch-dark. He had Bob here under his feet, and he and this other man are struggling and walking all over the kid. Suppose Stinker did relax a second to get a better grip and the guy got away from him. The conditions weren't ideal."

"I didn't relax to get a better grip," Stinker said suddenly. "I let go deliberately."

"Why?" Red sputtered.

"Because I felt the man's throat under my hands and suddenly it came over me that I was choking him, that if I didn't stop I would kill him." Stinker shuddered. "It was horrible. I just let go. For a moment I could see him there against the window right in front of me. My hands felt numb as though they were suddenly paralyzed. Then he made a dive for the window and he was gone."

"Didn't you even try to chase him, to follow him?" Schmidty asked. "All right, you didn't want to grab him around the throat again, but you could have tackled him or something."

"I just didn't want to touch him again," Stinker mumbled. "I wanted him to get away, out of my sight. I wanted to forget that I ever had my hands on him."

"But why?" Schmidty asked. He sounded thoroughly exasperated.

"Because," said Stinker, "I came that close to killing him."

The light had dawned for me because I knew Stinker so much better than Schmidty did. For the Zipper and Red and Jim Dale and myself it was just history repeating itself. We could remember Stinker's last football game, the week after he tackled that end and broke his leg. Stinker had been no good in that game. He had been afraid to



touch anybody for fear he'd do it again. He had been scared that he'd injure somebody. Well, here it was again. He had socked Stitch out at Stinker's Run, and Stitch had died. Suddenly the old feeling came over him. It was perfectly understandable. He found himself with his hands around a man's throat, found himself practically choking a man to death. What could be more natural than that he should let go, forget everything but that he had killed a man that night, and now not many hours later had been within a hairbreadth of killing another?

"Well," Schmidty sighed. "It's too bad he got away, but that can't be helped any more. If you had killed him it would have been no more than he had coming to him."

"Yeah," Stinker groaned. "If he had landed with that hammer or whatever it was, he probably would have killed the kid. It certainly looked as though that was what he was trying to do, and a guy who tries to kill deserves to be killed I guess, but I don't want to be anyone's executioner. I haven't the appetite for it."

"Uh-huh," said Schmidty. "I know how you feel."

"Hey," Larraby exploded out of a clear sky. "Peggy!"

"What about Peggy?" Schmidty was immediately alert.

"I'm going to get Peggy out of that hotel right away." The kid started for the door.

"Why?" asked Schmidty. "What's the matter with the hotel?"

"It isn't safe," Larraby answered. "Gee! I hope we're not too late."

He hesitated at the door a moment and then turned to the open window.

"Come on," he shouted. "Let's go this way. It's quicker."

He climbed through the open window, leaving the rest of us speechless in his room. Schmidty came out of it first.

"Come on," he said. "We better follow him."

So we all flocked out through the window. We could see the kid loping along across the lawn toward the roadway where Schmidty had his car parked.

"Hey, wait for us," Red shouted as we started after him.

"If he's planning to take my car," said Schmidty, "he'll wait. It's locked and I have the key."

Larraby, however, tried the door of the sedan and, finding it locked, ran on down the road. We, when we got to the car, piled in, and Schmidty started after him. We overtook him quickly, and Schmidty slowed down beside him. The kid jumped on the running board and hung on.

"Step on it," he pleaded.

He was trembling so violently that I could hear his teeth chatter.

"Why the sudden panic?" I asked.

"I should have thought sooner," he gabbled. "One of us should have thought. Peggy saw that car come out of the boathouse road. The man that left Bellringer's body down at the boathouse must have seen us down there. He doesn't know that I didn't see him, and he doesn't know that when Peggy saw the car she didn't see the face of the man driving it. For all he knows we may be witnesses against him. That's

why he was laying for me in my room there. I hope he didn't go for Peggy first."

"What do you think of all that?" I asked Schmidty.

"Some sense to it," he answered. "It won't hurt to be too careful."

We pulled up at the hotel and tumbled into the lobby. The night clerk heard us coming and was all set in an attitude of defense by the time we got to his desk. I could just read from his face what was passing through his mind. "More drunks," he was thinking. "I thought I had put all of them to bed already."

"Did anyone go up to Miss James' room tonight?" Bob panted. "Is Miss James in her room?"

The clerk stared at him.

"Everything has been quiet around here for hours," he said stiffly. "Miss James, I suppose, is asleep."

"Ring her room," Larraby ordered. "Quick."

"Look," said the clerk. "It's very late. Hadn't you better wait till morning?"

"Do as he says," Schmidty said quietly. "We're not drunk, and this is important."

The clerk shrugged and picked up the phone. He handed the instrument to Larraby and plugged a cord in the switchboard. The kid held the receiver to his ear and sweated visibly while the clerk was ringing the girl's room. Suddenly his face lighted up all over and he grinned happily.

"Peggy," he shouted into the phone. "Are you all right? Has anybody been around bothering you?"

She must have been startled out of her sleep by the telephone bell because apparently her first question was what time it was.

"Oh," Larraby said. "It's very late. You're sure nobody has tried to get into your room or anything?"

"Really," murmured the clerk indignantly.

"Toss something on," Larraby continued on the phone. "We're coming right up."

He slammed the receiver on the hook and started for the stairs.

"She's all right so far," he shouted. "He hasn't been here yet. Come on."

When he started to take the steps two at a time, we followed him. The clerk came sputtering after us. He was full of protests and expostulations, but Schmidty sent him dithering back to his desk.

"Two men have been killed in this town tonight," he said. "You better go back to your desk and keep quiet."

Of course, Schmidty didn't mean it as a threat, but that was evidently the way the clerk took it. He turned tail and ran back to his desk. We went upstairs. At Peggy James's door we stopped while Bob Larraby knocked. When she opened that door, I knew that here was one of those rare women: a girl so genuinely pretty that she looked lovely without any make-up, with one cheek all reddened where she had been lying too heavily on it, with her hair in a disordered jumble of little curls. She had a dark blue robe gathered close around her and the trouser bottoms of a pair of pale blue

silk pajamas just showed around her ankles. She took one look at the boy and gasped. "Bob!" she shrieked discreetly in the silence of the sleeping hotel. "What happened to you? Your face?"

"Oh, that," he murmured. "That's nothing. I fell down."

He had to persuade her that his injuries looked worse than they were, and that he was really not hurt at all, before she was ready to listen to what he had to say. When he did get his opening he put it very simply.

"We've decided," he said, "that it isn't safe for you to be here alone."

"Nobody's bothered me at all," she demurred. "Oh, I heard men singing and things like that before I fell asleep, but that was all."

"That's fine." The kid grinned at her. "But it's no use taking the risk. Maybe the man in that car coming out of the boathouse road saw you. We don't know."

"All right," she said, "but I can't ask you in, and I have to get into some clothes."

"Sure," Larraby agreed. "You go back in and dress as quick as you can. If anything bothers you, just yell. We'll be right here outside the door."

"What could bother me with you people watching the door?" She laughed.

"Somebody might come in by the window," Bob suggested.

"Oh," said the girl.

"Yes, miss," said Schmidty. "You leave this door ajar just about an inch, so's we can hear anything. It'll be safer."

The girl gasped and grew pale.

"It's all right, Miss James." Jim Dale smiled at her. "I won't let any of them peek."

She left her door open a crack as instructed, and she went back into her room to dress. We stayed clustered around her door, and Schmidty began questioning Bob Larraby.

"You're sure," he asked, "that you can't think of anybody at all who might have been laying for you?"

"Not a soul," said Larraby.

"No reason in the world why anybody should be out to get you?"

"Of course not, Schmidty," Red answered for the kid. "After all, he's just a kid in college. What reason could there be?"

"I can't think of any," Larraby added. "Except, as I told you, if the man who brought Bellringer down to the boathouse was around there when we came. If it was the man who killed Bellringer that was driving the car Peggy saw, he might be after me because he might think that I saw him and could identify him when you catch him."

"He might," Schmidty agreed rather grudgingly. "He might at that."

Jim Dale fished around in his pocket and brought out a cigarette lighter. He held it out to Stinker.

"You dropped this," he said.

"Me?" said Stinker, looking at the lighter. "No. I've never owned one."

"Then," said Jim, turning to Larraby, "it must be yours."

Larraby brought a lighter out of his pocket, pigskin covered and bearing his class numerals.

"Not mine," he said. "I have mine."

"That's funny," said Dale.

"What made you think it belonged to one of us?" Larraby asked.

"I found it," Jim explained, "just inside the door of your room. I was about to give it to you or Stinker when you dashed off here to the rescue. This was the first chance I've had to mention it."

"Some of the fellows in my class were in for beer this afternoon," Larraby said. "I guess one of them dropped it. I'll take it and ask the boys."

He made a snatch for the lighter.

"Let's see that."

Schmidty beat him to it. He held it in the flat of his palm, and we all gathered around, looking at it.

"When we picked Bob up and put him on the sofa," Jim explained, "I caught the glint of it on the floor. Then we got busy bringing him around and you were all talking. I went back to see what it was and it was this lighter. You see it was on the floor under Bob, so I thought he or Stinker must have dropped it in the melee."

Schmidty stared at the lighter's shiny surface. It was gold and had a smooth expensive look. He flipped it over in his hand. On the other side it was engraved with neat block letters.

The letters were HM.

## CHAPTER NINE

WE WERE ALL so intent on those initials that a little thing like voices at the end of the hall didn't bother us. The first any of us realized that there was anybody out for us was when we were collared.

"All right," said Gilligan. "Break it up. Get away from that door."

It was well that Gilligan spoke when he did because we were all in just that state of nerves that we would have tried making a fight for it without even looking to see who had grabbed us. We were in the hands of the local cops and our pal Gilligan, who must have been acting as rear guard with the hotel clerk, came hurrying toward us.

"Hello, Gilligan," said Schmidty, "what's up?"

Gilligan laughed. He laughed hard enough to rock the old hotel on its ancient foundations.

"Shh," cautioned the clerk. "Our guests are asleep."