

THOMAS GIFFORD

Writing as
THOMAS MAXWELL

Kiss Me Twice

A LEW CASSIDY NOVEL OF SUSPENSE



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Cassidy
Looking for more suspense?

About the Book

A mad Nazi plot gives Cassidy a chance to save his estranged wife - or lose her forever.

As the dust settles on World War II, detective Lew Cassidy's wife has come back from the dead. A German figure skater with a film-star face, she had returned to her home country when the war began to care for her ailing father; Cassidy later heard she died during an Allied bombing raid. But in the weeks after the German surrender, the US Army finds her in Bavaria, stricken with amnesia and married to Manfred Muller, an SS swashbuckler at the top of the army's most-wanted list.

In the war's last days, Muller escaped Germany with a historic golden minotaur sculpture, planning to sell the statue and use the proceeds to establish a Nazi underground in the United States. When Muller disappears in the wilds of Maine, the army gives Cassidy a chance to serve his country. To catch the Nazi, he'll use his wife as bait, and hope he doesn't lose her a second time.

Review Quote:

"Combines suspense, romance and derring-do in an artful mix that will make readers clamor for more." - *Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

Thomas Gifford (1937-2000) was a bestselling author of thriller novels. Born in Dubuque, Iowa, he moved to Minnesota after graduating from Harvard. After eight years as a traveling textbook salesman, he wrote *Benchwarmer Bob* (1974), a biography of Minnesota Vikings defensive end Bob Lurtsema. *The Wind Chill Factor* (1975), a novel about dark dealings among ex-Nazis, introduced John Cooper, a character Gifford would revisit in *The First Sacrifice* (1994). *The Wind Chill Factor* was one of several books Gifford set in and around Minneapolis.

Gifford won an Edgar Award nomination for *The Cavanaugh Quest* (1976). *The Glendower Legacy* (1978), a story about an academic who discovers that George Washington may have been a British spy, was adapted for the film *Dirty Tricks* (1981), starring Elliott Gould. In the 1980s Gifford wrote suspense novels under the pen names Thomas Maxwell and Dana Clarins. In 1996 he moved back to Dubuque to renovate his childhood home. He died of cancer in 2000.

Kiss Me Twice

A Lew Cassidy Novel of Suspense (Book Two)

Thomas Gifford



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for Elizabeth

Either it's love or it isn't. You can't compromise.
—Coral Chandler to Warren “Rip” Murdock

CHAPTER ONE

LEW CASSIDY'S WIFE WAS BACK from the dead and the idea of seeing her was scaring hell out of him.

He had driven north to Westchester in his 1940 Ford convertible with the top down and the sun putting a final September crisp on his tan. His bad leg was giving him trouble so he knew it was going to rain. He was out of town, out of patience, and just about out of luck. But he'd followed the summons to the vast estate hoping that maybe it was all going to work out, maybe it was going to be okay. He'd driven for another mile once he'd passed through the high iron gates and he wondered if any visitor ever got lucky in a place like this. It seemed unlikely.

Cassidy waited by himself in the unfamiliar room, a rich man's library, smelling of leather bindings and club chairs and generations of cigar smoke. He'd been shown in by a young Army officer who called him sir and said they'd been expecting him. Colonel MacMurdo would be with him in just a moment. Fifteen minutes had passed and he'd had a look at the massed bookcases, thousands of volumes, the empty fireplace, the bowls of flowers, the neatly arranged accessories on the immaculate desktop, the portrait over the mantelpiece of a long dead robber baron who'd once owned a railroad as well as this house, the rolling acreage of the estate.

The oppressive September heat was getting him down and the hour-long drive from Washington Square had given him too much time to think about all the craziness. Through the years of playing football, college and pro, he'd never felt so much on edge. He went to the mullioned casements and wound one set wide open. The breeze wasn't much and

what there was was heavy, wet, and hot. A couple of wasps darted in the bright shafts of sunlight an arm's length away.

Cassidy took a deep breath, felt sweat running down his back, fusing him to his shirt beneath the seersucker jacket. He looked out across the stone terrace, past the heavy balustrade with its enormous cement urns. The flowers had packed it in, dry stalks bent haphazardly, like old bones. Somebody hadn't been attending to the watering.

The lawn sloped away in gently layered terraces to a massive stand of weeping willows shimmering green and gold like priceless wall hangings. The sky above and beyond them was smudged with low purple clouds, full of impending rain. You could feel it coming. You prayed it would hurry.

Lew Cassidy was still contemplating the skyline when he caught a flicker of movement at the corner of his vision and when he looked she was there. She was standing alone, wearing a sundress that showed her arms and shoulders and a broad-brimmed straw hat with a band that was a bright blur, that turned into a ribbon and dangled softly on her tanned back. She was turned away from him, watching the same dark clouds, but he didn't have to see her face. He knew. Then she turned slowly, her profile the same.

He hadn't seen her in nearly six years.

She'd been killed in the bombing of Cologne back in 1942.

And she'd come back from the dead, as if she'd risen from the ashes of the Third Reich, somehow immortal.

Karin.

Lew Cassidy's late wife. A stranger now.

He met her at the winter Olympic Games in 1936. The football season had ended and his father, Paul Cassidy, the movie producer, had put him on the payroll as a talent scout and they'd gone to Europe with the idea of finding a French leading man to bring back to Los Angeles to play

the lead in an escape-from-Devil's-Island picture. They couldn't land the actor as it turned out and Adolphe Menjou finally signed to do the role and then the picture fell through because two others just like it beat them to the theaters. But it was no big tragedy, Paul Cassidy said, because Menjou was a horse's patoot and, anyway, if they'd signed the frog they might never have gone on to Germany and found Karin Richter and then all their lives would have been different and what the hell, the last thing the world needed was Menjou escaping from Devil's Island. Dying on Devil's Island, maybe, but escaping, no.

They were staying in the swanky resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen where the games were held, enjoying the excitement and getting a firsthand look at the Nazis people were beginning to talk about back in the States. The Germans seemed to think this Hitler character was the answer to their problems which, God knew, had been pretty all-encompassing. There were posters of the mustachioed face with the burning eyes everywhere you looked. The Charlie Chaplin mustache didn't seem funny once you were standing in a crowd of blond, pink-cheeked German athletes who weren't laughing. He seemed to have the country revved up and out of the dumps and everyone in Garmisch was having a hell of a fine time.

The Führer was said to have high hopes for the young skater, Karin Richter, who was nineteen and, the Germans kept saying, a threat to dethrone the twenty-four-year-old Norwegian girl, Sonja Henie, who'd won gold medals at Saint Moritz in 1928 and at Lake Placid in '32. In the end Karin Richter skated well and captivated the crowds with her youth and determination and beauty, but she didn't win a medal, let alone dethrone Henie, who won again.

The first time Lew Cassidy saw Karin Richter he was having breakfast in the hotel dining room and she was skating on the rink outside, just beyond the long windows where he sat. He watched her move like a snow queen

emerging from the morning mist and fog, gliding across the ice, the skirt molded to her thighs, her face held high, eyes fixed on some distant point. Her concentration was almost palpable, like a protective coating. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

Paul Cassidy thought maybe he was on to something when Lew dragged him out to the rink to watch the gorgeous girl working on her figure eights in the fog. Paul Cassidy liked to insist that he was the first one in Hollywood who thought of making Sonja Henie a movie star. He'd come up a brick shy of a load in the money department but, then, that was show business for you. If you were in the movie end of things, giving up on a good idea never even crossed your mind. If somebody else came up with the same idea, then it meant you did, indeed, have a good idea—unless it had anything to do with Adolphe Menjou and Devil's Island.

Karin Richter was certainly a good enough skater to build a lightweight movie career around and, to be frank, Paul had never seen her as Lady Macbeth or Desdemona. He was, however, looking past strictly icebound pictures, past her legs, which were unusually long for a skater, past that cute little fanny. Paul was looking at her face. He might not know a damn thing about skating but he sure as the devil knew about movies. He knew it was the face that mattered. The face did all the heavy work in the movies and one look told him that Karin Richter had the face, all right.

Cheekbones higher than Mont Blanc, a nose just short of unapproachable, level eyebrows over solemn, oddly pale brown eyes, dark brown hair cut short with a kind of triangular wedge at the nape of her neck. Her upper lip was thin, the lower full, hinting at a pout. Lew said he couldn't get her face out of his mind. Paul knew exactly what he meant.

Lew dropped like a stone into those brown eyes. He followed her back to Cologne after the games, met her

austere scientist father and faintly dismayed mother, and convinced her to marry him. They came back to the States together, Lew and Karin and Paul. There was some traipsing back and forth to Germany. Paul had to convince Herr Doktor Josef Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda genius in Berlin, that it was useful to have a beautiful German girl starring in American movies. When Lew and Karin were married up at Lake Placid in January of 1938, Goebbels sent them all the roses in town. Karin said the gesture proved that the Nazis had no taste, no sense of restraint. She found the Nazis intolerably vulgar and common, from their manners to their obsessive attention to their uniforms to their torchlight rallies. "They are trying to manufacture a myth," she said, "and they are so hopelessly small. They have the meanness of unworthy people who quite rightly have never gotten anywhere on merits of their own." She once told Lew, referring to the air ace of the Great War, Hermann Göring, "The only one I ever liked was Fat Hermann. He bounced me on his knee once when I won a children's skating competition. He pinned the medal on my blouse. It must have been 1927. ... I was ten. He wasn't so fat then." That was the only good thing he'd ever heard her say about the Nazis.

By the autumn of 1939 she'd made three movies: *Murder Goes Skating* with George Brent and James Gleason, *Murder on Ice* with Tom Tully, and *Bless Your Heart*, a Christmas story in which she only skated once while playing a young nun at an orphanage. Dick Foran had been the priest. Then she'd found out that her father was very ill. It sounded like cancer. It sounded like he needed his daughter. His wife, her mother, had died a year before.

Hitler was lopping off chunks of Europe, but a lot of people were saying that now he had the *Lebensraum* he'd been yelling about for years. The sooner Karin went home for a visit, the better. And the sooner she'd be back in New York.

She sailed one bright and chilly fall day from Pier 42 on the Hudson, the American Export Line bound for Lisbon where she'd catch a Lufthansa flight for Berlin, then on to the family home in Cologne.

There was only one problem once she got there.

They wouldn't let her leave.

Her father needed her to nurse him while he kept working in the special laboratories the Reich had built for him and, maybe, she would have the time to make a movie or two for the German audience. She'd be staying for a while. And when the time stretched on Lew said he was coming to get her. She wrote him begging him not to do anything rash. She pleaded with him to stay in New York. She said that there were old family friends who had become Nazi sympathizers: not monsters, she wrote, just friends of the family, people she'd known and trusted all her life. They assured her that there were no plans for a wider war, that it was all over, that peace in Europe was at hand.

The only thing she had to worry about, they told her, was an impetuous American husband who didn't understand the way things stood in Germany. Keep him back home, these old friends of the family said, and the time will fly and you'll be together again. But if he came barging into Germany making a fuss, well, they couldn't be responsible for the consequences. They clucked and shook their heads and peered through their monocles. They were full of good advice.

So Lew didn't go.

He waited and played football and read the papers and watched the Nazis club Europe damned near to death. He watched the Blitzkrieg and Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain and eventually not even Karin's letters were getting through. And World War II finally murdered her in 1942 when the largest bombing assault in history turned the city

of Cologne to smoking rubble. She and her father, who'd clung to life so steadfastly, were reported dead.

He watched her strolling slowly, her hands clasped behind her, the full skirt catching a breeze and billowing like a sail, her head down, the long slope of her neck with the ribbon blowing. The breeze worked its way up across the terrace and he felt it on his face. The coming rain smelled earthy and fresh.

He remembered the first of June 1942, the way he'd learned that she was dead. The huge headline—a three-decker—had spread the width of the *Times*, proclaiming the end of the city of Cologne. A thousand bombers—Lancasters and Halifaxes, Stirlings and Manchesters—had unloaded bombs for ninety minutes, one every six seconds, and had left seven-eighths of Cologne, a city the size of Boston, a flaming inferno. ...

Berlin radio had called it a “terror attack” and had listed the prominent scientist and his movie-actress and Olympic-skater daughter among the dead.

And now, more than three years later, he stood in a stranger's library watching her strolling on an unfamiliar lawn, as if he were still locked in one of the dreams of her that had come so often through the years since her death. So many nights she'd come alive only to disappear into the shadows when morning came and there was another day to be faced. Lew Cassidy had fallen in love with another woman in those strange years since he'd said good-bye to Karin on Pier 42, but she was dead, too. He knew that she, Cindy, would stay dead because he'd watched her die, had held her dead body in his arms. But Karin was something else. ...

The news that Karin was alive came by way of his father, who served as a major in a documentary film unit and had gone to France shortly after the D-Day landings. As the war

in Europe ended, Paul Cassidy had been seconded to the team collecting the looted art treasures that were turning up all over the German landscape. In the course of preparing a filmed record of the discoveries he was summoned for an interview with an OSS man, Colonel Sam MacMurdo, who informed him that his daughter-in-law had been found alive and, more or less, well. MacMurdo said it was a complicated story he was only just beginning to piece together himself but the upshot was simply that the young lady, who was now twenty-eight, was in a position to do a great service for her country. He referred, of course, to the United States of America. He didn't go into detail since the whole business was very hush-hush at the moment but the idea was to get her back to the States and reunited with her husband, Paul's son Lew. MacMurdo needed Paul's help.

Paul couldn't see any particular problem with Lew, though it was bound to come as a shock, a wife coming back from the grave.

"Well, Major Cassidy," MacMurdo said, puffing his pipe and running a huge hand through his dark blond, curly hair, "there is a problem or two. Hell, the truth is, this is one very delicate matter. She got the *merde* bombed out of her in Cologne, pardon my French, and most of her memory went with it. Now three years have gone by, she's had the best medical care the Reich could offer, and physically she's okay. Absolutely okay." He sounded like a man trying to reassure himself. "But she does have this memory problem. ... The girl has some pieces missing." MacMurdo seemed lost in thought, staring into the bowl of his pipe. They were sitting in an old Luftwaffe hangar that had become a kind of vast museum warehouse. Paintings were being catalogued, photographed, inspected by experts from Paris, London, and New York, then carefully crated for storage. On the wall behind MacMurdo hung a framed photograph of Reichsmarshal Göring that no one had

bothered to remove. Painted on the wall next to Göring was the depiction of the ubiquitous big-nosed chap peering over the fence, his legend carefully inscribed below. KILROY WAS HERE.

Paul Cassidy waited, thinking about Karin and what she'd had to endure in the six years since he'd seen her. The war had proven that people were, among other things, almost infinitely resilient.

"And, too," MacMurdo said at last, "there's the question of Herr Moller." He sucked the pipe but it had gone out.

"I don't know the name," Paul Cassidy said. It was hot and still in the tiny office in the corner of the hangar.

"No reason why you should, none at all. That's what I'm here to tell you. Somewhere along the way, after the bombing of Cologne, your daughter-in-law picked up another husband."

"Give me another crack at that one—"

"She has another husband, Major. That's the problem insofar as your son goes. Husband Number Two is a man named Moller." He smiled sympathetically at Paul Cassidy. "So, you can see, the plot thickens, Major."

Paul Cassidy hadn't known quite what to say.

Two weeks later he was back in New York telling Lew that he had good news and bad news.

Now, in late September, Lew had been told that she was back and they wanted to brief him. It was still terribly hush-hush and he wasn't sure who *they* were or what the great service was that Karin could do or how he fit into what everybody had been calling the big picture ever since there'd been a war to talk about. He didn't give a damn about the big picture. He wanted to get the whole story about his wife and get it straight. That was a plenty big enough picture for the moment.

There hadn't been any effective way to prepare himself for the first sight of her. Somehow he thought she'd be different, that the war might have worked some sad magic

on her. But there she was, trim and girlish, moving slowly, solemnly, almost floating across the deep green lawn. The willows swayed behind her. Then she stopped and turned back, one hand up to hold the straw hat in place. She said something and then a man came into view. She reached out and took his hand. Lew Cassidy flinched at the sight, as if someone had dug a knifepoint into his ribs.

The man was tall, wore a brown suit and a Panama hat. He stood with her, their backs to the house, looking at the darkening afternoon sky. Two people talking about the weather.

Then Lew Cassidy heard the door opening behind him and right away he smelled the pipe.

The library was a huge room. It had to be twenty-five feet square with seas of Oriental rugs, eighteen-foot ceilings, furniture from the den of the Mountain King. Yet it seemed too small to hold the man who'd just come in. Cassidy had once known a gangster's iceman called Bennie the Brute who had been a very large man in anybody's league, but this guy seemed to have six inches on Bennie in every direction. He was wearing full warm-weather officer's kit with enough ribbons on his left breast to stock the notions counter at Macy's. He was the biggest damn thing on two legs Cassidy had ever seen. He crossed the room in a couple of huge strides.

"Hiya, pard," he said. "Good to see you. I'm Sam MacMurdo, sorry to keep you cooling your heels this way. Take a pew. You must wonder what's going on and I don't blame you one damn bit. I won't waste your time with a lot of bullshit, but listen, pard, I gotta tell you I was at the Polo Grounds on December 7, 1941, when you got your leg torn up. I was sitting next to DiMaggio. Said he'd never seen anything like it." He placed the buff folder he was carrying on the leather-edged blotter and sat down behind the

massive desk. He still looked like he was standing up. An immense black pipe was stuck in the corner of his mouth.

Cassidy sank into a club chair with cracks of age in the burgundy leather arms. "Well, he was right. I'd never seen anything like it either."

"How's the leg now?"

"Okay most of the time. Sometimes I use a walking stick, not often."

"But you're still in the detective business with your pal Leary?"

"Sure." Cassidy shrugged. "But Terry owns Max Bauman's old nightclub now—"

"That would be Heliotrope, right? Story I heard is that Leary shot Bauman full of holes and Bauman left him Heliotrope in his will. That true?"

"You've done your homework," Cassidy said, wondering what MacMurdo had on his mind. Some birds were twittering beyond the open windows, warning of the coming rain. Was Karin still watching the darkening sky? Was she still holding the man's hand? MacMurdo slowly filled his pipe from a yellow oilskin pouch.

"Now, when do I see my wife? And what's Leary got to do with this—"

"All your questions will be answered, Mr. Cassidy. We got a real situation here and I'm going to have to beg your indulgence. Couple things I've got to find out, get the lay of the land." He struck a wooden match on the side of a pewter holder and slowly sucked the flame down into the bowl. "So," he puffed, "you and Leary, you've still got Dependable Detective. ..."

"Terry's still one of the owners, if that's what you mean."

"Interesting man. All those years he was a cop he was Max Bauman's boy. ... That's a man who can walk a tightrope." He smiled easily. "I like that in a man."

Enlightened duplicity. He'd have been right at home with the rest of us in OSS."

"Terry's the best friend I've ever had."

"I hear you've got another partner—"

"Harry Madrid. Another ex-cop."

"Sure, Harry Madrid goes way back. I heard Bat Masterson taught him a thing or two when Bat came back to New York to be a newspaperman. Good teacher." He smiled again. The large-featured face had a boyish cast, signifying a man who was used to being liked and trusted. "Harry must be sixty."

"Harry doesn't worry much about his age." Cassidy felt the sweat running down his face again. "But what has this got to do with Karin and me? I don't have much patience these days."

"I know. I'm sorry." MacMurdo smiled calmly through the wavering pillar of smoke. It was a clean, woodsy-smelling English blend. His eyes were narrowed, blue as summer's best skies, his nose long and fine with flared nostrils. His teeth were so white they looked like bad dentures but somehow you knew this guy was all original equipment. His skin was pale, with a slight flush of color in his cheeks. He looked like the biggest graduate in the history of Groton. He was trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, and kind, at the very least. Cassidy had done some research of his own. He'd felt somewhat humbled because, according to those records that were not classified Sam MacMurdo had a shot at Most Valuable Player for World War II. Paul Cassidy had asked around and Clem Witt, who was close to Wild Bill Donovan at OSS, said Sam MacMurdo was the bravest son of a gun he'd ever known. MacMurdo had spent two years working with the Norwegian, French, and Greek resistance fighters. He'd spent the better part of a month in Berlin being a Wehrmacht officer and came out with a German rocket man who'd been one of the Peenemunde bunch working on the

V-bombs. "He doesn't have ice water in his veins," Clem Witt told Paul who told Lew, "He doesn't have veins. He's all muscle and brains. No emotion, no fear, no blood to spill. He just goes in and does the job. He's the only hero I've ever seen who never takes a day off. Thank sweet Jesus he's on our side."

MacMurdo pressed a flathead nail down on top of the ash in the bowl, puffed slowly, deliberately, then applied another match. Halfway through the operation Cassidy was nearly overcome by an impulse to leap across the desk and make him eat the goddamn pipe, no matter how big and brave he was. He wisely fought off the inclination.

"I'm not going to pose as something I surely am not," MacMurdo drawled, "which is a doctor. I'm not going to talk about your wife's condition. We've got someone here who can do it in detail before you leave. Believe me, you'll see her, you'll talk to her, and you'll get the whole story. Here and now. Today." He looked down at the contents of the file folder and for the first time Cassidy got a look at the top of his head. A wide white scar slid like a knife's path from the hairline through the thick hair that was layered in waves back from his forehead. MacMurdo raised his eyes from the papers and noticed Cassidy's stare. He tapped his pipestem against the huge white slabs of teeth.

"I'm here to brief you on the military situation. I'm running something called Operation Hangover, a name you probably won't hear again because code names are boring and silly. I'm working for Allen Dulles and Bill Donovan, who has been my boss at OSS for a long time. The other fella I'm working for is President Harry S Truman himself. I met with him a week ago at the White House and I'm telling you this because you're supposed to get the idea that my mission is damned important, as important as the atomic bomb. More important because I'm of the mind that we've just dropped the only two atomic bombs anybody'll ever drop on anybody else.

"More important. So you wonder what could be more important than the old atom whammy? Well, some folks say the commies over there. I myself had dinner with General George S. Patton not long ago and you know what he said? He said we've spent all these years beating the shit out of the wrong enemy—he believes we should have just kept on fighting over there and whipped the Russians while we were at it. Well, I'll tell you, Lew, I'm not so sure we could whip 'em unless we took the bomb to 'em and damned if I don't think that'd be a bad habit to get into. So, what's more important than the bomb and the reds? The damn old Nazis, that's who." He flashed the sincere, disarming, boyish smile. "That's my job. The Nazis. I'm in charge of catching the bastards and it's looking like a hell of a big job, I promise you.

"They're coming to America, They're coming in through this whole Northeast corridor. They're coming in to Florida, smuggled in from Cuba and the Bahamas and you name it. The Tortugas, for all I know. They're coming in from Martinique, coming up from the Gulf Coast. Some will try to stay here, in New York and in the backwoods country in New England. Some will head for safety in Texas, damn big place Texas. Some will go to California. There'll be escape routes from the West Coast fanning out to Central America, South America. Argentina, Brazil, Peru, anywhere they can lose themselves among folks who agree with their politics.

"Now, there are two kinds of Nazis. ... First, there are those who want to forget the war and what they did, who want to take up ordinary lives, never pay up for their crimes, and pray to God no one ever finds them. Lots of them will succeed for a while but when you and I are old men, forty, fifty years from now, in the 1980s and 1990s, there are still going to be Nazi war criminals turning up, potbellied old duffers in Waco and Dubuque and Waltham who've lived all those years in total anonymity, and some fine day they're gonna come out of the hardware store or

the cigar stand and they're gonna bump right into some other old duffer, probably an old Jew who can't ever forget the face of the Devil who killed his wife and kids, and there's gonna be one of those moments of recognition ... and that rheumy old Nazi is gonna have to face the music, pay the piper for what he did back in 'forty-two at Auschwitz or Treblinka or Belsen ... the world ain't never gonna forget these old guys. ...

"And I for one," MacMurdo said, tapping his pipe on the blotter and sprinkling dead ash, "frankly don't give a hoot in Hades for these guys. They've pretty near done all the bad stuff—the real villainy—they're gonna do. From now on they're just harmless old farts who had their day as monsters. ... Lew, m'boy, it's the other ones I'm after. ..."

"The other ones," Cassidy said. The breeze had freshened at the window. He was still stuck to his shirt but the clouds had blocked out the sun. Where was Karin? Was the man in the brown suit her husband ... ?

MacMurdo reached behind his desk chair and tugged at a cord dangling beside the heavy drapery. The door opened almost at once and the soldier who'd welcomed Cassidy brought in a tray with bottles of tonic, a bottle of Gordon's gin, a gleaming ice bucket, glasses, and a plate of sliced limes. Everything perfect, the way it always was at Terry's place on Park Avenue, or in the movies.

MacMurdo got up, built two drinks in the tall glasses, handed one to Cassidy, and said: "Chin-chin, Lew. Here's to doing our job together and doing it right!"

"About this job," Cassidy said, but MacMurdo held up his bear paw of a hand.

"I'm just about there," he said, moving back behind the desk, sitting down again. "You've been very patient, Lew, but this is all necessary, the big picture, y'know."

"I've heard about that."

"Ain't we all, pard, ain't we all." MacMurdo was shaking his head. He took a pull on the gin and tonic. "I want the

ones who are trying to keep the Reich alive ... the Fourth Reich. These guys are already laying the foundations for the Fourth Reich. I've just come from Germany, Lew, and we've got to accept some hard truths. We've got to rebuild Germany, we've got to have a strong Germany to stand up to the reds ... it's the frying pan and the fire over there. A new era has already begun. We're in the postwar world already and old George Patton had a point, we can't let the reds swallow up Western Europe. And the only way to rebuild Germany is to use a whole wagonload of the guys who were running it before. Which means we've got to use the Nazis, get right into bed with some of 'em. Oh, we're trying to sanitize them, delouse them in a political sense, lie about 'em if we have to, but facts are facts and we need 'em. We need 'em to make the country start working again—judges, industrialists, scientists, politicians, police officials, academics, civil servants. We need them and they need us. You read me on this, Lew? So these Nazis are just part of the new equation and we're all gonna have to look the other way. We let them survive and they do what we need them to do. They're scared of the reds and so are we. ... Funny old world, pard, but there it is.

"And then there are these other Nazi coots who are filtering into our country—*our* country, damn it—and these are the ones who don't want to just disappear and be forgotten, and they don't want to run their own country for us ... they're the unreconstructed Nazi bastards who honest to God think they've just suffered a slight setback. And they're organized, they're financed, they've got networks backing them up. The Condor Legion operating out of Madrid ... Die Spinne, do you know German? Well, I do, I spent some time in the Fatherland during the recent hostilities." He fixed Cassidy's eyes with his own and the little smile played across his wide mouth. "I saw you sneaking a gentlemanly peek at my little scar. Let me digress for just half a mo' and I'll tell you how I got it. It's a

long story which I may bore you with some other time if we wind up in a foxhole together, but sufficeth to say, I was deep inside the Reich a while back trying my hand at kidnapping and, hell, look at me, I look like Hitler's perfect Aryan asshole, right? So I cut a pretty wide swath over there, pulled a lot of hijinks, as my daddy used to say. So I was up to my hind end in Nazis, lyin' my ass off, all fitted out with phony papers, the works, but like a jerk I did something dumb and an SS officer realized I was not quite what I seemed ... well, hell, it looked pretty dark for the Mudville nine all of a sudden." He smiled at the memory, relishing it. "So, this SS guy got his Luger out and told me the jig was up. His hand was shaking like a little old widder woman in a cyclone and I made a move he didn't like and he squeezed off a round, point blank. ... He'd have missed me entirely if I wasn't the big economy size, but as it was he shot me in the head—the one place he couldn't hurt me!" His laugh suddenly boomed through the room, a physical kind of thing. A deaf person would have felt it. "Lew, you should have seen the look on that kraut's face when he pulled the trigger again and nothing happened! Luger jammed. ... I'll never forget his face. He suddenly realized it was just him and me, there I was, this big blond bastard, face covered in blood, and I was unhappy with him—man, he was lookin' his destiny right in the eye! Well, pard, when I finished him off there wasn't enough left to wipe up. ..." His hand momentarily went to the scar on his scalp, stroked it. "I call it my dueling scar." He looked away for a moment, staring out the window and bringing himself back from Nazi Germany to Westchester County.

"Just another war story. The world's full of 'em, better ones. Hell, I got better ones myself." MacMurdo flashed the wide grin. "Now, back to these Nazi diehards coming our way. There's a whole lot of money involved here, Lew. Hell, these people *looted* Europe ... you wouldn't believe how much money we're talking about."

He leaned back and his weight brought a squeak from the chair. He stared at Cassidy, his pipe engulfed in one hand. "Now we're getting down to the short strokes, Lew. I stumbled onto one of these escape networks during the course of some researches I was carrying out a few months ago—it's like God having his say, pard, putting the right man in the right place at the right time. It isn't big, not like the Condor Legion or Die Spinne, but it's real and I've got a handle on it. I've made this one my own private preserve. I found it, I don't think we'd ever have known of its existence had it not been for Sam's sheer dumb luck ... and it all happened mainly because I'm a movie fan, Lew, if you can believe that. History gets made in funny ways. Now this network, this modest enterprise I'm intending to bring to grief, with your help—hell, look at it this way, Lew Cassidy's finally gonna get his chance to win World War II ... this one's got another funny name, it's called Ludwig's Minotaur. Y'know, it was Allen Dulles himself who gave it the name. Ludwig's Minotaur."

Cassidy had found himself wrapped up in MacMurdo's story, almost against his will. For a moment he'd forgotten that there was a point to it, that it was coming back to himself, and to Karin. "So how *do* I fit in? Do I have any choice about any of this?"

"Oh, I'll leave that up to you, Lew. You remember King Ludwig, the Mad King of Bavaria. Fella who was Wagner's patron, same fella who built himself all those fairyland castles and whatnot. I saw a movie about the old boy once and now I know more. For instance, I know he had this minotaur statue, like something in a movie. Sometimes I get the feeling I'm *in* a movie ... like that time with the Luger jamming. This minotaur makes me think about *The Maltese Falcon*. You catch that one at the Bijou, Lew?" Cassidy nodded. "Well, Ludwig had this Italian craftsman sculpt a minotaur out of gold—then Ludwig had the whole statue encrusted with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, the

works; then he just put it on a table and looked at it. Who knows what he was thinking? But Wagner saw it, mentions it in some of his correspondence ... then it wound up in a museum in Munich, then the Kaiser glommed onto it for a time, then it turns up again when Reichsmarshal Göring got hold of it. When he built Karinhall, to memorialize his first wife, he made a big show of installing the minotaur there. ... And then once it began to look really bad last winter—the Battle of the Bulge, the Breakout in the Ardennes, whatever you call it, it didn't fool Hermann into thinking the outcome of the war was gonna be any different, he knew they were whipped. So Göring wanted to set up his own private, personal, first-class escape route. He figured that America was the place to go. He figured that no one could use the Jewish thing against him because he'd smuggled Jews out of Germany, friends of his wife Emmy's from the theater, and he thought what the hell, maybe his old pal Lindbergh could take care of him. Well, he was nuts and full of drugs by then, but that was his idea." MacMurdo leaned back, took another long drink, and went back to the tray of fixings. The heat had melted the ice in Cassidy's and MacMurdo freshened both drinks. "Don't ya just love this stuff, Lew? Here we are, two old boys sittin' around bustin' our gums about Göring and King Ludwig and Charlie 'Lone Eagle' Lindbergh. ... Well, Göring decided to finance his escape route with plenty of do-re-mi, some real, some forged from plates the Nazis had, all in dollars, and something else negotiable anywhere ... the Ludwig Minotaur.

"And he picked an SS man he happened to like, to trust, a man he knew could build his escape route. He gave the money and the statue to Manfred Moller. One very tough galoot who'd been around, all over Europe for the last ten years, a swashbuckler, used to hang around with Otto Skorzeny—Skorzeny's the only guy in the war big as me!" He chuckled at the improbability of such a thing. "So,

anyways, Manfred Moller took off across the North Atlantic by U-boat on his special mission and the Reich collapsed and Göring never got to make his escape ... and Manfred Moller was out there somewhere with his money and the minotaur and no Reichsmarshal. ...

"Now that brings us back to yours truly, scoutin' around the Germany that was left. Found myself up in the mountains, pretty little village, birds singin', I'm just pokin' around, followin' up on some hints we'd gotten about this Moller character. I thought I might see if I could dig up his brother, a respected doctor, name of Rolf Moller. Maybe Manfred might have told Rolf about what he was doing for Göring ...

"It was no problem to find Rolf. He had a nice little clinic in this village, sort of a rich man's retreat. ... Turns out Rolf was a head doctor, a psychiatrist as well as a surgeon, and he had a staff of other doctors, nurses, a damn nice little setup. Some of the Party leaders had gone there for everything from face-lifts to happy pills to clap cures. And his brother in the SS was a pal of Göring's and when you looked at his clinic and went out to the house, one of those gingerbread chalet places lookin' out across this beautiful peaceful valley, damned if you'd ever think there'd been a war on. I hated to leave. I *didn't* leave for a few days—most particularly after Rolf invited me to stay with him. So I bunked there in the lap of luxury for a spell and had me some long talks with Rolf and on the second, third day I met Mrs. Moller and I just knew I'd seen her somewhere before.

"Then one night, I woke up like a scared rabbit, twitchin' my nose, floppin' my ears, blinkin' my eyes—I knew where I'd seen Frau Moller.

"*Murder on Ice. Murder Goes Skating.* I'd seen the movies and this woman, Frau Moller, was the star! The skater. Karin Richter." He grinned, watching Lew stiffen. "Your dead wife."