

was a heavy man in his fifties, with straight thinning hair. "There's no story. There just won't be any factory of mine in Galesburg, that's all. I'm leaving this town on the first train I can get."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that," I said untruthfully, and dragged up a chair from an adjacent table. Straddling it, I sat down facing Marsh across the chair back, chin on my folded arms. "But that's not why I'm here," I added softly, and waited. I'm a tall, bone-thin man; my pants legs flop like sails when I walk. I have a bony face, too, more or less permanently tanned, and straight Indian-black hair; and I'm still young, I guess. People generally like me all right.

But Marsh was mad now, his face reddening, his jaw muscles working; he knew what I meant. I glanced quickly around the room; it was still early and there were only a few people here. We were at a corner table looking out on Kellogg Street; no one was near us.

Leaning closer to Marsh's table, my chair legs tilting forward, I said, "I'd rather get the story from you as it really happened than try to piece it together from a lot of half-true rumors floating around town."

He glared. Then he leaned toward me, voice quiet but furious. "I wasn't drunk. I can tell you that!"

"I'm sure you weren't. Tell me about it." And because I'm a reporter, he did.

He sighed a little, going through the motions of reluctance, but actually—and this is usually true—he was glad to talk now that he had to or thought he did. Ilene brought over the coffee I'd ordered when I walked into the room and I picked up my cup and tasted it; the coffee's good at the Custer. Then

I dropped my chin to my folded arms, feeling alive and eager, anxious to listen. Because the only reason I was here, the only reason I'm a reporter at all, was simple curiosity. Haven't you ever wished it were somehow possible to cross-examine an absolute stranger about something none of your business but damned interesting all the same? Well, think it over—if you're a reporter, you can. There's no law says it has to be printed.

"I had two drinks before dinner," Marsh said. "We all did. We ate up in my suite—the property owner, a Chamber of Commerce man, an attorney from the city, and a couple of councilmen. If you want a list of their names, ask them for it. After dinner most of us had a brandy. But we sat at the table from seven till ten and whatever drinks I had were spread over a considerable time; I wasn't drunk or even close." Marsh shrugged impatiently. "We worked things out—the price of the factory site, option terms, the probable contractor. Both councilmen and the attorney assured me there'd be no trouble about changing zoning restrictions, if necessary, or running my trucks down Broad Street to the Santa Fe depot. All friendly and pleasant." Marsh took a cigar from the breast pocket of his suit coat and offered it. I shook my head and he began pulling off the cellophane wrapper. "But I like to sleep on a deal of any importance and told them I'd think it over. They left about ten and I took a walk."

Marsh stuck the unlighted cigar in his mouth, bulging one cheek out, and leaned toward me. "I always do that," he said angrily. "I take a walk and go over the facts in my mind; then home to bed, and when I wake up in the morning I usually know what I want to do. So I left the hotel here,