

Since the publication of BRAIN TWISTER (Pyramid Book F-783), Mark (Laurence M. Janifer) Phillips (Randall Philip Garrett) has, or have, undergone several changes. In order to keep the reader posted on the latest developments regarding this author, or these authors, he, or they, has, or have, passed on the following details:

GARRETT is still engaged. He and his charming fiancée plan to run out of excuses during the early Fall of 1994, but this date may be changed at any time by mutual agreement, or the end of the world. He has given up an interest in river pollution in favor of a new hobby, grading type-cleaner. Garrett, who spends an hour each day expanding his repertoire, now claims the ability to distinguish year and vineyard for over one thousand type-cleaners.

JANIFER is still on the other hand. He has had his eyeglasses cleaned, and is happy to report that he has recently met a woman. The woman, however, seems to have been looking for a man. Janifer's hobbies, humming and blinking, remain constant, but in an effort to add more healthful activity to his life he has begun training in leaping to conclusions. He states that he can now clear a conclusion of better than seven feet, eight and one-half inches from a running start.

THE IMPOSSIBLES was written in six days. On the seventh day, nothing of any interest whatsoever occurred.

To John J.,

without whose accident in 1945 this series would not have been possible.

Chapter 1

The sidewalk was as soft as a good bed. Malone lay curled on it, thinking about nothing at all. He was drifting off into a wonderful dream, and he didn't want to interrupt it. There was this girl, a beautiful girl, more wonderful than anything he had ever imagined, with big blue eyes and long blonde hair and a figure that made the average pin-up girl look like a man. And she had her soft white hand on his arm, and she was looking, up at him with trust and devotion and even adoration in her eyes, and her voice was the softest possible whisper of innocence and promise.

"I'd love to go up to your apartment with you, Mr. Malone," she said.

Malone smiled back at her, gently but with complete confidence. "Call me Ken," he said, noticing that he was seven feet tall and superbly muscled. He put his free hand on the girl's warm, soft shoulder and she wriggled with delight.

"All right—Ken," she said. "You know, I've never met anyone like you before. I mean, you're so wonderful and everything."

Malone chuckled modestly, realizing, in passing, how full and rich his voice had become. He felt a weight pressing over his heart, and knew that it was his wallet, stuffed to bursting with thousand-dollar bills.

But was this a time to think of money?

No, Malone told himself. This was the time for adventure, for romance, for love. He looked down at the girl and put his arm around her waist. She snuggled closer.

He led her easily down the long wide street to his car at the end of the block. It stood in godlike solitude, a beautiful red Cadillac capable of going a hundred and ten miles an hour in any gear, equipped with fully automatic steering and braking, and with a stereophonic radio, a hi-fi and a 3-D set installed in both front and back seats. It was a 1972 job, but he meant to trade it in on something even better when the 1973 models came out. In the meantime, he decided, it would do.

He handed the girl in, went round to the other side and slid in under the wheel. There was soft music playing somewhere, and a magnificent sunset appeared ahead of them as Malone pushed a button on the

dashboard and the red Cadillac started off down the wide, empty, wonderfully paved street into the sunset, while he... The red Cadillac?

The sidewalk became a little harder, and, Malone suddenly realized that he was lying on it. Something terrible had happened; he knew that right away. He opened his eyes to look for the girl, but the sunset had become much brighter; his head began to pound with the slow regularity of a dead-march, and he closed his eyes again in a hurry.

The sidewalk swayed a little, but he managed to keep his balance on it somehow; and after a couple of minutes it was quiet again. His head hurt. Maybe that was the terrible thing that had happened, but Malone wasn't quite sure. As a matter of fact, he wasn't very sure about anything, and he started to ask himself questions to make certain he was all there.

He didn't feel all there. He felt as if several of his parts had been replaced with second- or even third-hand experimental models, and something had happened to the experiment. It was even hard to think of any questions, but after a while he managed to come up with a few.

What is your name?

Kenneth Malone.

Where do you live?

Washington, D. C.

What is your work?

I work for the FBI.

Then what the hell are you doing on a sidewalk in New York in broad daylight?

He tried to find an answer to that, but there didn't seem to be any, no matter where he looked. The only thing he could think of was the red Cadillac.

And if the red Cadillac had anything to do with anything, Malone didn't know about it.

Very slowly and carefully, he opened his eyes again, one at a time. He discovered that the light was not coming from the gorgeous Hollywood sunset he had dreamed up. As a matter of fact, sunset was several hours in the past, and it never looked very pretty in New York anyhow. It was the middle of the night, and Malone was lying under a convenient street lamp.

He closed his eyes again and waited patiently for his head to go away.

A few minutes passed. It was obvious that his head had settled down for a long stay, and no matter how bad it felt, Malone told himself, it *was*

his head, after all. He felt a certain responsibility for it. And he couldn't just leave it lying around somewhere with its eyes closed.

He opened the head's eyes once more, and this time he kept them open. For a long time he stared at the post of the street lamp, considering it, and he finally decided that it looked sturdy enough to support a hundred and sixty-five pounds of FBI man, even with the head added in. He grabbed for the post with both hands and started to pull himself upright, noticing vaguely that his legs had somehow managed to get underneath him.

As soon as he was standing, he wished he'd stayed on the nice horizontal sidewalk. His head was spinning dizzily, and his mind was being sucked down into the whirlpool. He held on to the post grimly and tried to stay conscious.

A long time, possibly two or three seconds, passed. Malone hadn't moved at all when the two cops came along.

One of them was a big man with a brassy voice and a face that looked as if it had been overbaked in a waffle iron. He came up behind Malone and tapped him on the shoulder, but Malone barely felt the touch. Then the cop bellowed into Malone's ear: "What's the matter, buddy?"

Malone appreciated the man's sympathy. It was good to know that you had friends. But he wished, remotely, that the cop and his friend, a shorter and thinner version of the beat patrolman, would go away and leave him in peace. Maybe he could lie down on the sidewalk again and get a couple of hundred years' rest.

Who could tell? "Mallri," he said.

"You're all right?" the big cop said. "That's fine. That's great. So why don't you go home and sleep it off?"

"Sleep?" Malone said. "Home?"

"Wherever you live, buddy," the big cop said. "Come on. Can't stand around on the sidewalk all night."

Malone shook his head, and decided at once never to do it again. He had some kind of rare disease, he realized. His brain was loose, and the inside of his skull was covered with sandpaper. Every time his head moved, the brain jounced against some of the sandpaper.

But the policemen thought he was drunk. That wasn't right. He couldn't let the police get the wrong impression of FBI agents. Now the men would go around telling people that the FBI was always drunk and disorderly.

"Not drunk," he said clearly.

"Sure," the big cop said. "You're fine. Maybe just one too many, huh?"

"No," Malone said. The effort exhausted him, and he had to catch his breath before he could say anything else. But the cops waited patiently. At last he said, "Somebody slugged me."

"Slugged?" the big cop said.

"Right." Malone remembered just in time not to nod his head.

"How about a description, buddy?" the big cop said.

"Didn't see him," Malone said. He let go of the post with one hand, keeping a precarious grip with the other. He stared at his watch. The hands danced back and forth, but he focused on them after a while. It was 1:05. "Happened just—a few minutes ago," he said. "Maybe you can catch him."

The big cop said, "Nobody around here. The place is deserted—except for you, buddy." He paused and then added: "Let's see some identification, huh? Or did he take your wallet?"

Malone thought about getting the wallet, and decided against it. The motions required would be a little tricky, and he wasn't sure he could manage them without letting go of the post entirely. At last he decided to let the cop get his wallet. "Inside coat pocket," he said.

The other policeman blinked and looked up. His face was a studied blank. "Hey, buddy," he said. "You know you got blood on your head?"

"Be damned," the big cop said. "Sam's right. You're bleeding, mister."

"Good," Malone said.

The big cop said, "Huh?"

"I thought maybe my skull was going to explode from high blood pressure," Malone said. It was beginning to be a little easier to talk. "But as long as there's a slow leak, I guess I'm out of danger."

"Get his wallet," Sam said. "I'll watch him."

A hand went into Malone's jacket pocket. It tickled a little bit, but Malone didn't think of objecting. Naturally enough, the hand and Malone's wallet did not make an instantaneous connection. When the hand touched the bulky object strapped near Malone's armpit, it stopped, frozen, and then cautiously snaked the object out.

"What's that, Bill?" Sam said.

Bill looked up with the object in his hand. He seemed a little dazed. "It's a gun," he said.

"My God," Sam said. "The guy's heeled! Watch him! Don't let him get away!"

Malone considered getting away, and decided that he couldn't move. "It's okay," he said.

"Okay, hell," Sam said. "It's a .44 Magnum. What are you doing with a gun, Mac?" He was no longer polite and friendly. "Why [are] you carrying a gun?" he said.

"I'm not carrying it," Malone said tiredly. "Bill is. Your pal."

Bill backed away from Malone, putting the Magnum in his pocket and keeping the FBI agent covered with his own Police Positive. At the same time, he fished out the personal radio every patrolman carried in his uniform, and began calling for a prowler car in a low, somewhat nervous voice.

Sam said, "My God. A gun. He could of shot everybody."

"Get his wallet," Bill said. "He can't hurt you now. I disarmed him."

Malone began to feel slightly dangerous. Maybe he *was* a famous gangster. He wasn't sure. Maybe all this about being an FBI agent was just a figment of his imagination. Blows on the head did funny things. "I'll drill everybody full of holes," he said in a harsh, underworld sort of voice, but it didn't sound very convincing. Sam approached him gently and fished out his wallet with great care, as if Malone were a ticking bomb ready to go off any second.

There was a little silence. Then Sam said, "Give him his gun back, Bill," in a hushed and respectful tone.

"Give him back his gun?" the big cop said. "You gone nuts, Sam?"

Sam shook his head slowly. "Nope," he said. "But we made a terrible mistake. Know who this guy is?"

"He's heeled," Bill said. "That's all I want to know." He put the radio away and gave all his attention to Malone.

"He's FBI," Sam said. "The wallet says so. Badge and everything. And not only that, Bill. He's Kenneth J. Malone."

Well, Malone thought with relief, that settled that. He wasn't a gangster after all. He was just the FBI agent he had always known and loved. Maybe now the cops would do-something about his head and take him away for burial.

"Malone?" Bill said. "You mean the guy who's here about all those red Cadillacs?"

"Sure," Sam said. "So give him his gun back." He looked at Malone. "Listen, Mr. Malone," he said. "We're sorry. We're sorry as hell."

"That's all right," Malone said absently. He moved his head slowly and looked around. His suspicions were confirmed. There wasn't a red Cadillac anywhere in sight, and from the looks of the street there never had been. "It's gone," he said, but the cops weren't listening.

"We better get you to a hospital," Bill said. "As soon as the prowl car gets here, we'll take you right on down to St. Vincent's. Can you tell us what happened? Or is it classified?"

Malone wondered what could be classified about a blow on the head, and decided not to think about it. "I can tell you," he said, "if you'll answer one question for me."

"Sure, Mr. Malone," Bill said. "We'll be glad to help."

"Anything at all," Sam said.

Malone gave them what he hoped was a gracious and condescending smile. "All right, then," he said. "Where the hell am I?"

"In New York," Sam said.

"I know that," Malone said tiredly. "Anywhere in particular, or just sort of all over New York?"

"Ninth Street," Bill said hurriedly. "Near the Village. Is that where you were when they slugged you?"

"I guess so," Malone said. "Sure." He nodded, and immediately remembered that he shouldn't have. He closed his eyes until the pain had softened to agony, and then opened them again. "I was getting pretty tired of sitting around waiting for something to break on this case," he said, "and I couldn't sleep, so I went out for a walk. I ended up in Greenwich Village—which is a hell of a place for a self-respecting man to end up."

"I know just what you mean," Sam said sympathetically. "Bohemians, they call themselves. Crazy people."

"Not the people," Malone said. "The streets. I got sort of lost." Chicago, he reflected, was a long way from the easiest city in the world to get around in. And he supposed you could even get confused in Washington if you tried hard enough. But he knew those cities. He could find his way around in them. Greenwich Village was different.

It was harder to navigate in than the trackless forests of the Amazon. The Village had tracks, all right—thousands of tracks. Only none of them led anywhere in particular.

"Anyhow," Malone said, "I saw this red Cadillac."

The cops looked around hurriedly and then looked back at Malone. Bill started to say, "But there isn't any—"

"I know," Malone said. "It's gone now. That's the trouble."

"You mean somebody got in and drove it away?" Sam said.

"For all I know," Malone said, "it sprouted wings and flew away." He paused. "When I saw it, though—when I saw it, I decided to go over and have a look. Just in case."

"Sure," Bill said. "Makes sense." He stared at his partner as if defying him to prove it didn't make sense. Malone didn't really care.

"There wasn't anybody else on the street," he said, "so I walked over and tried the door. That's all. I didn't even open the car or anything. And I'll swear there was nobody behind me."

"Well," Sam said, "the street was empty when we got here."

"But a guy could have driven off in that red Cadillac before we got here," Bill said.

"Sure," Malone said. "But where did he come from? I figured maybe somebody dropped something by mistake—a safe or something. Because there wasn't anybody behind me."

"There had to be," Bill said.

"Well," Malone said, "there wasn't."

There was a little silence.

"What happened then?" Sam said. "After you tried the door handle, I mean."

"Then?" Malone said. "Then I went out like a light."

A pair of headlights rounded the nearby corner. Bill looked up. "That's the prowl car," he announced, and went over to meet it.

The driver was a solidly built little man with the face of a Pekingese. His partner, a tall man who looked as if he'd have been much more comfortable in a ten-gallon Stetson instead of the regulation blue cap, leaned out at Bill, Sam, and Malone.

"What's the trouble here?" he said in a harsh, high voice.

"No trouble," Bill said, and went over to the car. He began talking to the two cops inside in a low, urgent voice. Meanwhile, Sam got his arm around Malone and began pulling him away from the lamp post.

Malone was a little unwilling to let go, at first. But Sam was stronger than he looked. He convoyed the FBI agent carefully to the rear door of the prowl car, opened it and levered Malone gently to a seat inside, just as Bill said, "So with the cut and all, we figured he ought to go over to St. Vincent's. You people were already on the way, so we didn't bother with ambulances."

The driver snorted. "Next time you want taxi service," he said, "you just call us up. What do you think, a prowl car's an easy life?"

"Easier than doing a beat," Bill said mournfully. "And anyway," he added in a low, penetrating whisper, "the guy's FBI."

"So the FBI's got all kinds of equipment," the driver said. "The latest. Why don't he whistle up a helicopter or a jet?" Then, apparently deciding that further invective would get him nowhere, he settled back in his seat,

said, "Aah, forget it," and started the car with a small but perceptible jerk.

Malone decided not to get into the argument. He was tired, and it was late. He rested his head on the back seat and tried to relax, but all he could do was think about red Cadillacs.

He wished he had never even heard of red Cadillacs.

Chapter 2

And it had all started so simply, too. Malone remembered very clearly the first time he had had any indication that red Cadillacs were anything unusual, or special. Before that, he'd viewed them all with slightly wistful eyes: red, blue, green, gray, white, or even black Cadillacs were all the same to him. They spelled luxury and wealth and display, and a lot of other nice things.

Now, he wasn't at all sure what they spelled. Except that it was definitely uncomfortable, and highly baffling.

He'd walked into the offices of Andrew J. Burris, Director of the FBI, just one week ago. It was a beautiful office, pine-paneled and spacious, and it boasted an enormous polished desk. And behind the desk sat Burris himself, looking both tired and somehow a little kindly.

"You sent for me, Chief?" Malone said.

"That's right." Burris nodded. "Malone, you've been working too hard lately."

Now, Malone thought, it was coming. The dismissal he'd always feared. At last Burris had found out that he wasn't the bright, intelligent, fearless, and alert FBI agent he was supposed to be. Burris had discovered that he was nothing more or less than lucky, and that all the "fine jobs" he was supposed to have done were only the result of luck.

Oh, well, Malone thought. Not being an FBI agent wouldn't be so bad. He could always find another job.

Only at the moment he couldn't think of one he liked.

He decided to make one last plea. "I haven't been working so hard, Chief," he said. "Not too hard, anyhow. I'm in great shape. I—"

"I've taken advantage of you, Malone, that's what I've done," Burris said, just as if Malone hadn't spoken at all. "Just because you're the best agent I've got, that's no reason for me to hand you all the tough ones."

"Just because I'm what?" Malone said, feeling slightly faint.

"I've given you the tough ones because you could handle them," Burris said. "But that's no reason to keep loading jobs on you. After that job you did on the Gorelik kidnaping, and the way you wrapped up the

Transom counterfeit ring—well, Malone, I think you need a little relaxation."

"Relaxation?" Malone said, feeling just a little bit pleased. Of course, he didn't deserve any of the praise he was getting, he knew. He'd just happened to walk in on the Gorelik kidnapers because his telephone had been out of order. And the Transom ring hadn't been just his job. After all, if other agents hadn't managed to trace the counterfeit bills back to a common area in Cincinnati, he'd never have been able to complete his part of the assignment. But it was nice to be praised, anyhow. Malone felt a twinge of guilt, and told himself sternly to relax and enjoy himself.

"That's what I said," Burriss told him. "Relaxation."

"Well," Malone said, "I certainly would like a vacation, that's for sure. I'd like to snooze for a couple of weeks, or maybe go up to Cape Cod for a while. There's a lot of nice scenery up around there. It's restful, sort of, and I could just—"

He stopped. Burriss was frowning, and when Andrew J. Burriss frowned it was a good idea to look attentive, interested, and alert. "Now, Malone," Burriss said sadly, "I wasn't exactly thinking about a vacation. You're not scheduled for one until August, you know."

"Oh, I know, Chief," Malone said. "But I thought—"

"Much as I'd like to," Burriss said, "I just can't make an exception; you know that, Malone. I've got to go pretty much by the schedule."

"Yes, sir," Malone said, feeling just a shade disappointed.

"But I do think you deserve a rest," Burriss said.

"Well, if I—"

"Here's what I'm going to do," Burriss said, and paused. Malone felt a little unsure as to exactly what his chief was talking about, but by now he knew better than to ask a lot of questions. Sooner or later, Burriss would probably explain himself. And if he didn't, then there was no use worrying about it. That was just the way Burriss acted.

"Suppose I gave you a chance to take it easy for a while," Burriss said. "You could catch up on your sleep, see some shows, have a couple of drinks during the evening, take girls out for dinner—you know. Something like that. How would you like it?"

"Well... " Malone said cautiously.

"Good," Burriss said. "I knew you would."

Malone opened his mouth, thought briefly and closed it again. After all, it did sound sort of promising, and if there was a catch in it he'd find out about it soon enough.

"It's really just a routine case," Burriss said in an offhand tone. "Nothing to it."

"Oh," Malone said.

"There's this red Cadillac," Burriss said. "It was stolen from a party in Connecticut, out near Danbury, and it showed up in New York City. Now, the car's crossed a state line."

"That puts it in our jurisdiction," Malone said, feeling obvious.

"Right," Burriss said. "Right on the nose."

"But the New York office—"

"Naturally, they're in charge of everything," Burriss said. "But I'm sending you out as sort of a special observer. Just keep your eyes open, and nose around and let me know what's happening."

"Keep my eyes and nose what?" Malone said.

"Open," Burriss said. "And let me know about it."

Malone tried to picture himself with his eyes and nose open, and decided he didn't look very attractive that way. Well, it was only a figure of speech or something. He didn't have to think about it.

It really made a very ugly picture.

"But why a special observer?" he said after a second. Burriss could read the reports from the New York office, and probably get more facts than any single agent could find out just wandering around a strange city. It sounded as if there were something, Malone told himself, just a tiny shade rotten in Denmark. It sounded as if there were going to be something in the nice easy assignment he was getting that would make him wish he'd gone lion hunting in Darkest Africa instead.

And then again, maybe he was wrong. He stood at ease and waited to find out.

"Well," Burriss said, "it is just a routine case. Just like I said. But there seems to be something a little bit odd about it."

"I see," Malone said with a sinking feeling.

"Here's what happened," Burriss said hurriedly, as if he were afraid Malone was going to change his mind and refuse the assignment. "This red Cadillac I told you about was reported stolen from Danbury. Three days later, it turned up in New York City—parked smack across the street from a precinct police station. Of course it took them a while to wake up, but one of the officers happened to notice the routine report on stolen cars in the area, and he decided to go across the street and check the license number on the car. Then something funny happened."

"Something funny?" Malone asked. He doubted that, whatever it was, it was going to make him laugh. But he kept his face a careful, receptive blank.

"That's right," Burriss said. "Now, if you're going to understand what happened, you've got to get the whole picture."

"Sure," Malone said.

"Only that isn't what I mean," Burriss added suddenly.

Malone blinked. "*What* isn't what you mean?" he said.

"Understanding what happened," Burriss said. "That's the trouble. You won't understand what happened. I don't understand it, and neither does anybody else. So what do you think about it?"

"Think about what?" Malone said.

"About what I've been telling you," Burriss snapped. "This car."

Malone took a deep breath. "Well," he said, "this officer went over to check the license plate. It seems like the right thing to do. It's just what I'd have done myself."

"Sure you would," Burriss said. "Anybody would. But listen to me."

"All right, Chief," Malone said.

"It was just after dawn—early in the morning." Malone wondered briefly if there were parts of the world where dawn came, say, late in the afternoon, or during the evening sometime, but he said nothing. "The street was deserted," Burriss went on. "But it was pretty light out, and the witnesses are willing to swear that there was nobody on that street for a block in either direction. Except them, of course."

"Except who?" Malone said.

"Except the witnesses," Burriss said patiently. "Four cops, police officers who were standing on the front steps of the precinct station, talking. They were waiting to go on duty, or anyhow that's what the report said. It's lucky they were there, for whatever reason; they're the only witnesses we've got."

Burriss stopped. Malone waited a few seconds and then said, as calmly as he could, "Witnesses to what?"

"To this whole business with Sergeant Jukovsky," Burriss said.

The sudden introduction of a completely new name confused Malone for an instant, but he recovered gamely. "Sergeant Jukovsky was the man who investigated the car," he said.

"That's right," Burriss said. "Except that he didn't."

Malone sighed.

"Those four officers—the witnesses—they weren't paying much attention to what looked like the routine investigation of a parked car," Burriss

said. "But here's their testimony. They were standing around talking when this Sergeant Jukovsky came out of the station, spoke to them in passing, and went on across the street. He didn't seem very worried or alarmed about anything."

"Good," Malone said involuntarily. "I mean, go on, Chief," he added.

"Ah," Burris said. "All right. Well. According to Jukovsky, he took a look at the plate and found the numbers checked the listing he had for a stolen Connecticut car. Then he walked around to take a look inside the car. It was empty. Get that, Malone. The car was empty."

"Well," Malone said, "it was parked. I suppose parked cars are usually empty. What's special about this one?"

"Wait and see," Burris said ominously. "Jukovsky swears the car was empty. He tried the doors, and they were all locked but one, the front door on the curb side, the driver's door. So he opened it, and leaned over to have a look at the odometer to check the mileage. And something clobbered him on the back of the head."

"One of the other cops," Malone said.

"One of the—who?" Burris said. "No. Not the cops. Not at all."

"Then something fell on him," Malone said. "Okay. Then whatever fell on him ought to be—"

"Malone," Burris said.

"Yes, Chief?"

"Jukovsky woke up on the sidewalk with the other cops all around him. There was nothing on that sidewalk but Jukovsky. Nothing could have fallen on him; it hadn't landed anywhere, if you see what I mean."

"Sure," Malone said. "But—"

"Whatever it was," Burris said, "they didn't find it. But that isn't the peculiar thing."

"No?"

"No," Burris said slowly. "Now—"

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "They looked on the sidewalk and around there. But did they think to search the car?"

"They didn't get a chance," Burris said. "Anyhow, not then. Not until they got around to picking up the pieces of the car uptown at 125th Street."

Malone closed his eyes. "Where was this precinct?" he said.

"Midtown," Burris said. "In the forties."

"And the pieces of the car were eighty blocks away when they searched it?" Malone said.

Burris nodded.

"All right," Malone said pleasantly. "I give up."

"Well, that's what I'm trying to tell you," Burriss said. "According to the witnesses, after Jukovsky fell out of the car, the motor started and the car drove off uptown."

"Oh," Malone said. He thought about that for a minute and decided at last to hazard one little question. It sounded silly—but then, what didn't? "The car just drove off all by itself?" he said.

Burriss seemed abashed. "Well, Malone," he said carefully, "that's where the conflicting stories of the eyewitnesses don't agree. You see, two of the cops say there was nobody in the car. Nobody at all. Of any kind. Small or large."

"And the other two?" Malone said.

"The other two swear they saw somebody at the wheel," Burriss said, "but they won't say whether it was a man, a woman, a small child, or an anthropoid ape. And they haven't the faintest idea where he, she, or it came from."

"Great," Malone said. He felt a little tired. This trip was beginning to sound less and less like a vacation.

"Those two cops swear there was something—or somebody—driving the car," Burriss said. "And that isn't all."

"It isn't?" Malone said.

Burriss shook his head. "A couple of the cops jumped into a squad car and started following the red Cadillac. One of these cops saw somebody in the car when it left the curb. The other one didn't. Got that?"

"I've got it," Malone said, "but I don't exactly know what to do with it."

"Just hold on to it," Burriss said, "and listen to this. The cops were about two blocks behind at the start, and they couldn't close the gap right away. The Cadillac headed west and climbed up the ramp of the West Side Highway, heading north, out toward Westchester. I'd give a lot to know where they were going, too."

"But they crashed," Malone said, remembering that the pieces were at 125th Street. "So—"

"They didn't crash right away," Burriss said. "The prowler car started gaining on the Cadillac slowly. And—now, get this, Malone—both the cops swear there *was* somebody in the driver's seat now."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "One of these cops didn't see anybody at all in the driver's seat when the car started off."

"Right," Burriss said.

"But on the West Side Highway, he did see a driver," Malone said. He thought for a minute. "Hell, it could happen. They took off so fast he could have been confused, or something."

"There's another explanation," Burris said.

"Sure," Malone said cheerfully. "We're all crazy. The whole world is crazy."

"Not that one," Burris said. "I'll tell you when I finish with this thing about the car itself. There isn't much description of whoever or whatever was driving that car on the West Side Highway, by the way. In case you were thinking of asking."

Malone, who hadn't been thinking of asking anything, tried to look clever. Burris regarded him owlshly for a second, and then went on:

"The car was hitting it up at about a hundred and ten by this time, and accelerating all the time. But the souped-up squad car was coming on fast, too, and it was quite a chase. Luckily, there weren't many cars on the road. Somebody could have been killed, Malone."

"Like the driver of the Cadillac," Malone ventured.

Burris looked pained. "Not exactly," he said. "Because the car hit the 125th Street exit like a bomb. It swerved right, just as though it were going to take the exit and head off somewhere, but it was going much too fast by that time. There just wasn't any way to maneuver. The Cadillac hit the embankment, flipped over the edge, and smashed. It caught fire almost at once. Of course the prowl car braked fast and went down the exit after it. But there wasn't anything to do."

"That's what I said," Malone said. "The driver of the Cadillac was killed. In a fire like that—"

"Don't jump to conclusions, Malone," Burris said. "Wait. When the prowl car boys got to the scene, there was no sign of anybody in the car. Nobody at all."

"In the heat of those flames—" Malone began.

"Not enough heat, and not enough time," Burris said. "A human body couldn't have been destroyed in just a few minutes, not that completely. Some of the car's metal was melted, sure; but there would have been traces of anybody who'd been in the car. Nice, big, easily seen traces. And there weren't any. No corpse, no remains, no nothing."

Malone let that stew in his mind for a few seconds. "But the cops said—"

"Whatever the cops said," Burris snapped, "there was nobody at all in that Cadillac when it went off the embankment."

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