

GREYSTONE'S WAGER

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"Hey, you're Greystone, right? Chuck Greystone, the golfer?"

He looked up at the young man through bloodshot eyes. "What about it?" he asked, his voice sounding slurred. "You never seen a golfer before?"

"Yes sir," the young man said. "I've seen golfers, even famous golfers; but, I've never seen one in here."

Chuck tried to focus on the room: pale green walls; a mirror of some kind; a strangely familiar smell; damp and cold. Just as the pieces fit together, he heard a toilet flush. He looked over at the stalls and then he tried to stand up. The young man reached toward him to help.

"Leave me alone, get out of here!" Chuck ordered. "No, wait! You got any money?"

"Some. Why?"

"What's your name?"

"José."

"Well José, today you can tell your friends you bought Chuck Greystone a drink. No! Better yet, I am going to let you buy me a bottle of bourbon: the good stuff. How much money do you have?"

"I can't do that," José said. "I'm a volunteer and we are not allowed to buy anything like that for people staying here."

"What?" Chuck asked. "Where am I?"

"The Twelfth Street Mission."

"What time is it?"

"A few minutes after seven."

"Morning or night?"

"Morning."

"Where's the coffee?"

"In the dining room, this way."

Chuck stood up and staggered toward the door.

"Do you want to wash your hands first?" José asked. "I would not trust this floor to be very clean."

"Yeah," Chuck said as he wiped the drool from his mouth with his shirtsleeve. "This place is filthy. How did I get here?"

"I don't know," José said. "About twenty minutes ago you came into the Mission and headed for the restroom. We waited a while and then I came in to check on you. I guess you fell asleep in the corner. We have beds upstairs if you need one; tell them you are sick, that way you can sleep during the day."

"I don't need sleep, I need coffee."

Twenty minutes later, after a breakfast of two cups of coffee and four donuts, Chuck was leaving the Twelfth Street Mission for yet another day of panhandling and barhopping.

By 11:00 AM, double vision had set in and he was having trouble explaining to people who he was. "I won the Masters by seven strokes!" he shouted to everyone in the bar. "I chipped in on thirteen from ninety-three yards out: set a record! An eagle on thirteen; no one's done that, ever!"

Finally, the bartender called 9-1-1 and two police officers escorted Chuck from the bar. They knew him all too well; he had been a 'regular' for almost three years. He spent everyday mooching drinks and meals from anyone who remembered who he used to be. Sadly, most people would rather buy him a drink than a meal. He was a frail, trembling, thirty-six year old man wearing thrift-store clothes that were stained and smelly. The police officers told him to go somewhere and sleep it off.

As he started to walk away, he stumbled and fell.

"Is there someone who can help you?" one of the officers asked.

"Yeah," Chuck said, "my friend José, at the Twelfth Street Mission. He's working today, I saw him this morning."

"You're sure José is there now?" the officer asked.

"Yeah."

"OK. We'll run you over to the Mission."

The squad car pulled into the alley behind the Mission. One of the officers got out and entered through the kitchen door.

"José!" he called. "Chuck Greystone is with us and he needs to talk with you."

Moments later, José was in the alley speaking with the police officers. He helped Chuck out of the car and into the Mission.

"Chuck!" one of the officers snapped as if he were correcting a dog. "If we see you on the streets or in a bar anytime today: we will take you in and dry you out."

"Yeah," Chuck said. "Good luck with that."

"We'll keep him here," José said. "I'll be responsible."

Chuck passed out within moments of collapsing onto an old canvass cot. The pillowslip smelled clean and that was a rare aroma in Chuck's life.

He slept on his belly, with his head buried sideways into the pillow. He was almost motionless and every fifteen or twenty minutes, José would squat by the cot and watch for signs of breathing. Sometimes, the rhythmic flaring of Chuck's nostrils was the only indication he was still alive.

At 6:00 PM, José squatted next to Chuck. "You have company," he said. "A good-looking lady is downstairs. She needs to talk to you."

Chuck's numbed stupor was slowly becoming a thumping headache. He stared at José and asked, "She's good-looking?"

"Yeah."

"She's not a reporter, right? No cameras?"

"I didn't see any."

"Why does she want to see me?"

"She said she has some legal matters or something," José said; "maybe she's a lawyer."

"Do you have any aspirin?"

"No, we don't have anything like that here."

As Chuck walked into the dining room, the woman stood and began walking toward him.

"I'm Lilith Newell," the woman said. "I am an attorney and my client is interested in helping you."

"Helping me do what?" Chuck asked as he looked at her outstretched hand and made no effort at the customary handshake.

"Is there someplace we may speak in private?"

José was right. She is good-looking. He could not remember the last time he was sued; but he knew he was too broke to care anymore. The tax collectors cleaned him out five years ago and his ex had destroyed whatever remained of his life; he was a penniless man with nothing and no one to lose.

"You want to help me?" Chuck asked. "Then let's pop out for a drink and—"

"No," Lilith said. "My client wants you sober. This day will bring some big changes for you if you are willing to let us help."

They walked out the front door of the mission and crossed the street. Traffic was heavy; the driver of a large truck honked his horn at Chuck and waved for him to get out of the way. Chuck responded with a rude gesture.

"Quit!" Chuck said. "Just quit now; save your time."

"I never fail," Lilith replied. "Never. Do you understand what that means?"

"You're young," Chuck said, "or, you've never tried anything tough."

"No," Lilith said. "It means I know how to do my job and I do not stop until I succeed."

"Or, you've never tried anything tough," Chuck chided, again.

"Get in the car," Lilith said, pointing to a dark green convertible. She settled into the driver's seat and asked, "Would you like to bet on this outcome?"

"Your boss permits gambling but not drinking?"

"Yes or no?" Lilith asked as they pulled away from the curb. "Do you think I'll fail?"

"At what?" Chuck asked. "What are we talking about?"

"Something you think is impossible and I will make happen."

"How much do you wanna bet? A bottle of bourbon?"

"No booze: I don't drink and we don't want you to drink."

"Name your price."

"Two million dollars."

"I'll give you an IOU," Chuck said as he chuckled at the irony.

"No," Lilith said. "You'll pay me in cash."

"Are you sure you haven't been drinking?" Chuck asked.

"My client believes you still have untapped greatness in you," Lilith said. "I know that within six months you will be richer than you ever imagined."

"So what have you been smoking and what's the bet?"

"I'm betting you're going to get to the top of your game and you'll be happier than you have ever been."

"That's it? That's the bet?"

"Yes."

"That's a sucker's bet, but you're the sucker," Chuck said. "Like I said, you're young. Let's just bet a bottle of bourbon that I fail and I'll prove it to you tonight."

"I will make the offer one more time," Lilith said. "Be sure you understand it: I am betting you're going to play the best golf of your life and you'll be happier than you have ever been."

"And if I don't become the greatest golfer?"

"I'll pay you two million, in cash."

"So, why not fail?" Chuck asked. "Why should I try when quitting makes me two million?"

"Because winning will make you happier than you can imagine."

"You can do this?" Chuck asked.

"Yes," Lilith said. "However, I have some conditions: no booze, no women, no drugs, no other gambling. If I am going to make you the best, then you belong to me: heart, mind, body, and soul. Your every thought must be on winning, every fantasy must be about golf, and every night you must fall to sleep thinking about bunkers, fairways, water hazards, and putts."

"All right," Chuck said, "I'll give it a try."

"No," Lilith said sternly. "You are going to be the best. I am going to make you the best. I will tell you what to eat and drink. I will oversee your exercise. You do not even talk with someone unless I say you can."

"OK," Chuck said and he realized that spending a lot of time with this cutie would be just fine with him and obviously, she was going to pick up the tab for getting him into shape. Right? Suddenly he was not sure.

"Who pays for all this 'getting ready' stuff?" Chuck asked.

"My client will assume all expenses," Lilith said. "Starting tonight you will stay at the Bradley Arms on 86th Street. We have arranged for a room and amenities. Use room service for every meal. Just call, tell them who you are, and that you are hungry. They will deliver your meal and you should eat everything on the tray."

"That's a good arrangement," Chuck said. "I'm going to like this."

"Remember: no booze," Lilith continued. "Tomorrow morning, at 9:00 AM, a tailor will arrive at your room to measure you for your wardrobe. At 11:00 AM, representatives from Klegail Golf will ar-

rive to fit you for their clubs. Order anything you want from them; but do not discuss endorsements. I will be there at noon and we will continue our planning.”

The car slowed and Lilith turned into an alley.

“So,” Chuck said, “back to the Mission?”

“No,” Lilith said. “This is a discreet entrance to the hotel. No one will notice you here. If you need to contact me, dial the operator, and ask for me. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As the car stopped in the alley, two men stepped out from a doorway.

“This way, Mr. Greystone,” one man said as he pointed toward the door. “Any luggage?”

“The airline lost my bags,” Chuck said, sounding pompous. “Just a bunch of inept clowns out there. They’ll be sorry when my lawyers get finished with them.”

“Yes, sir. Please follow us.”

As Chuck stepped through the door, he heard Lilith’s car pull away.

“My girlfriend will be joining me later,” Chuck announced. “You gentlemen can be trusted with that information, right? No paparazzi or you are both fired. I hate those low-life leaches.”

“We will keep the reporters away,” one man said. “You will have a pleasant stay with us.”

The following three months passed at record speed. Lilith dictated every moment of Chuck’s life.

Each morning he rose at 6:00 AM, exercised, showered, ate a breakfast of protein and fiber, and swallowed a half-dozen vitamin and mineral pills. Each morning he added more clothing to his wardrobe and swung various golf clubs while a team of heartless golf coaches recorded and analyzed every nuance of every move.

Each day, at noon, he ate the same dull lunches concocted to improve his health and stamina. He spent each afternoon walking; covering miles and miles at an increasingly faster pace. He was now walking twelve miles without rest and without becoming short of breath.

Each evening he ate a light supper and argued with Lilith that he was ready for his public. Each evening Lilith told him she

would tell him when he might once again swing a club in public.

"Tomorrow," Lilith said, as she poured herself a club soda, "we go to the golf course."

"Which course?" Chuck asked, trying to control his excitement.

"You don't know this course," Lilith said. "I will pick you up at 7:00 AM. Wear the hunter green slacks with the yellow polo shirt. Be sure to bring a change of clothing for dining."

"Where are we going?" Chuck asked with a hint of irritation at Lilith. She continued to treat him as if he were her private property.

"You'll see it tomorrow," Lilith said. "You've made good progress and I want this to be a surprise. My client wants to meet you and play eighteen holes. If all goes well, we'll go to dinner."

"And if it doesn't go well?"

"I never fail," Lilith said. "Remember? It will go well."

At 7:00 AM Chuck stood at the hotel's delivery entrance in the alley. Lilith pulled up in her convertible, Chuck put his golf clubs and suitcase in the backseat, and they drove off. After navigating through the downtown traffic, they pulled up onto the expressway.

"I don't know of any courses in this direction," Chuck said, trying to tease out their eventual destination.

"I don't either," Lilith said.

They rode for fifteen-minutes more, then Chuck announced, "You missed the turn: this road ends at the airport."

"Yes, it does," Lilith said without even glancing in his direction. "Have you always had this much trouble knowing what is happening?"

"We're meeting someone?" Chuck speculated aloud.

"We're taking a trip," Lilith said.

They pulled up to a security gate and the attendant waved them through. Lilith parked in a reserved stall outside a private hanger.

"This way," she said as she exited the car and walked toward an unmarked doorway.

They entered the hanger and walked toward a small jet.

"Leave your clubs and suitcase at the bottom of the stairs," Lilith said.

They were the only passengers. The jet taxied into position and

was airborne within twenty-minutes. Lilith had said nothing and Chuck was growing tired of the silent treatment.

"Where are we going?" Chuck asked, not expecting an answer.

"New Mexico," Lilith said, as she opened a magazine and began flipping through the pages.

"What course am I going to play?"

"It doesn't have a name, it is a private course."

"Private?"

"Yes."

"You mean a Country Club?"

"If I meant Country Club, I would have said, 'Country Club.' You will be playing on a private course."

"OK, that's good with me."

The jet touched down and taxied toward the hanger. A black Bentley pulled beside the jet as its turbines shut down.

"Come and meet your benefactor," Lilith said.

As they started down the steps, a tall thin man exited the Bentley. He appeared to be in his late fifties.

"Mr. Jackson," Lilith said. "I am pleased to introduce Chuck Greystone to you."

"I am honored, sir," Jackson said as he shook Chuck's hand. "Please, call me Rick."

Chuck's golf bag and suitcase were quickly transferred to the Bentley's trunk.

"The clubhouse are only a few minutes from here," Rick said. "I thought we might play nine holes before lunch, if that is all right with you?"

"Sure," Chuck said.

As the Bentley started down the boulevard toward the golf course, Chuck knew Lilith had been confused. It was a Country Club; the clubhouse was nestled against the base of a mountain range, it stood three stories tall and stretched for a hundred yards in either direction. The driveway housed at least a dozen exotic cars. People were everywhere: gardeners, valets, and wait staff on the veranda.

"I've never seen this course," Chuck said. "Who has played here?"

"Me," Rick said. "And in a little while: you."

"Who else?" Chuck asked.

"Just us," Rick said. "I prefer it that way; no one holding me up and no one wanting to play through. I'm a stickler for convenience."

"Who are your other guests?" Chuck asked, trying to make sense of the size of this place supporting a course for one man.

"What guests?" Rick asked, sounding sincerely puzzled. "Why would I have any other guests when you are here?"

"Let's get on the course," Rick said. "I know you will like this. Your locker room is down the hall, second door on the right."

The door had a brass nameplate with 'Mr. Chuck Greystone' inscribed in old English lettering. Chuck changed clothes and walked out to the first tee. Rick and two caddies stood waiting for him.

"I designed this course," Rick said. "Each hole is a tribute to the world's best golf."

Chuck walked to the front of the tee and stared in amazement at a pristine fairway that extended flawlessly toward the horizon.

"It's a 430 yard, par four, dogleg right," Rick said.

"It's magnificent!" Chuck said.

"Go ahead," Rick said. "Drive the center of the fairway for 238 yards and your approach to the green is assured. Too short and you will need to lay up for your approach; too long and you're in a bunker."

Chuck reached into his pocket and fished out a ball and tee. He paced for a while on the tee box, trying to sense that magic spot for teeing up the ball. He picked it, gently thrust the tee into the soft earth, and balanced the ball on top. He stepped back. His caddie handed him a three iron.

"Is that too much club?" the caddie asked.

"No," Chuck said.

His left hand, padded by a smooth white leather glove, began his increasingly vice-like grip on the iron's handle. It felt good. He lined up with his ball and wrapped his right hand around the grip as he slightly relaxed his left hand. He felt the exhilaration of beginning his swing. The clubface traveled backward, faster and faster, then peaking at the height of his stroke, he began the downward momentum that brought the clubface into a brutal con-

frontation with the ball. He thought he could see the ball contorting, then an instant later, only grass remained where the ball and tee had been. It was flawless.

His shoulders, pulled by the force of the club, pivoted his head and he gazed down the fairway and watched the tiny white orb disappearing in the distance, straight down the center of the fairway. It looked like it would not be returning to Earth. Then it began its slow descent, bounced and raced along the ground, coming to rest on a slight rise.

"That was beautiful," Rick said. "I am honored to play this hole with you, sir."

Rick teed up his ball and drove it down the center of the fairway. He used a metal driver, the kind with the oversized head. He swung the club confidently; however, he came up short of the ideal spot.

The two men walked down the fairway, followed by their caddies and a golf cart carrying drinks and snacks. Chuck did not see any other golfers. Just ahead, a crew was gathered on the far right side of the number one green.

"I like to increase my chances of making my putts," Rick said, "so I have the grass groomed just before my approach shot."

"That's a great plan," Chuck said, as Rick accepted a three-wood from his caddie.

Rick swung beautifully and the ball, lofting deftly above a row of poplar trees, shot toward the green in a straight line.

"That could do it," Chuck said.

"I believe you're on, sir," the caddie said, as he slipped the three-wood back into the golf bag.

Chuck approached his ball and studied the fairway down to the green. He selected a club and swung with an ease that brought back memories of major wins. The ball rose gradually and returned to earth gently, rolling to within inches of the cup. Both caddies began clapping as Rick approached Chuck and shook his hand.

"That sir," Rick said with authority, "is the style and grace we have all admired in one of the world's finest golfers."

Every hole they played was a study in technical perfection. Chuck birdied or eagled every one of the first nine holes. He walked to the clubhouse with a scorecard showing 25 strokes. The

caddies spoke as if they had each had a gallon of coffee. They jabbered on and on about the best golf they had ever seen.

Chuck and Rick had sandwiches and potato salad for lunch and started out on the back nine. Number 10 was a par three; carrying across a water hazard and tightly flanked by the most unforgiving bunkers Chuck had ever seen. He teed up his ball and studied the wind: a slight breeze crossed left to right. The pin was on the backside of the green; but it was near the centerline of a slight valley. He knew he could get very close.

He pulled his seven iron and settled into his stance. He was playing the best golf of his life. He swung. He watched the clubface crush into the ball as it tore bits of grass from the ground. The ball rocketed off the tee. He studied its trajectory over the water, onto the green, bouncing twice and rolling into the cup: *a hole in one*.

"Did we have money on this game?" Chuck asked, as he handed the club to his caddie.

"My money's on you," Chuck's caddie said, laughing.

"Can you do that again?" Rick asked. "I'll bet ten thousand dollars you can't do that again."

"You're on," Chuck said. "I may need to give you an IOU, but I'll be good for it, eventually."

"Same club?" Chuck's caddie asked, handing him the seven iron.

"Yeah," Chuck said. "All I need to do is repeat everything exactly."

He settled into his stance, it felt right. He studied the wind: just a bit breezier. Should he correct or wait a minute? He paused and stepped back.

"Fifty thousand dollars," Rick said. "Let's make it fifty thousand, at five to one against. You do it, you get the fifty, if you don't, then you owe me ten."

Chuck studied the face of his iron; it gleamed.

"Let's make that forty-nine thousand in a nice briefcase: ox-blood red leather with a brass plate with my name on it. How's that sound to you?" Chuck wanted to negotiate. He wanted to stall a bit and let the breeze settle.

"All right," Rick said. "It's a bet."

The breeze had settled. He took his stance, paused for only a second, and swung. Once again, the ball rocketed off the tee onto the green, bouncing softly, rolling into the cup: *a second hole in one and a briefcase with forty-nine thousand dollars!*

"Outstanding!" Rick announced. He opened his cell phone and pushed a speed dial number, spoke for a minute or two, then returned to Chuck.

"Your briefcase will be here in an hour," Rick said. "The engraving is the slow part."

The two men finished the back nine. Chuck continued to play golf that seemed impossible. Every swing, every short shot, and every putt was flawless. He read every green as if he had played each one a hundred times before: he never two-putted a hole. On the back nine, he had seven birdies, one eagle, and one par. He walked off the eighteenth hole with a score of 54.

"Congratulations," Rick said as they approached the clubhouse. "You must be excited about getting back into the game."

"Yes," Chuck said. "I feel ready. I feel more than ready."

Lilith was standing in the doorway to the dining area.

"Are we eating here?" she called out.

"Yes," Rick said. "Let's eat here and talk about Chuck's future."

The evening was a carefully balanced blend of boredom and amusement. Rick recounted each hole they had played. His praise for Chuck's skill was unbounded. Lilith listened to every detail, politely attentive and occasionally smiling at Chuck.

"Chuck? Are you ready?" Lilith asked.

"Yes."

"We'll start next month," she said. "I'll make the arrangements and with your permission, I'll handle the negotiations and the contracting side of your work."

"Stay here tonight," Rick said. "In the morning, I want you to fly to Phoenix and stay at the Biltmore. You can use my suite. Play the Links and the Adobe courses all week; I will arrange for your partners. No interviews and no autographs: keep a low profile."

Chuck stayed at the Biltmore for two weeks. Each morning, by 8:00 AM he was on one of the Biltmore's two courses. He played

with different partners each time, occasionally he played a three-some, though typically he played in foursomes.

His game was 'spot on.' The ball always landed where he wanted it to land. His partners always praised his skill and they always spoke highly of Rick Jackson. At the conclusion of each game, the golfers would shake Chuck's hand and tell him that he had fulfilled one of their greatest dreams: to play golf with Chuck Greystone.

Each night, Chuck fell asleep dreaming of lush green fairways, the aroma of freshly mown grass, and the satisfaction of watching a golf ball scurry across a green and fall into the cup. Each morning when he awoke, Chuck felt enthused and invigorated; each day was a delight. His enthusiasm for meeting new golfers and seeing how thrilled they were to be playing with him never waned.

This was more fun than tournaments. On the tour, everyone is pensive; everyone on the course despises everyone else; it is a competition with only one winner and everyone else slips into anonymity until the next event. If he could, he would stay here forever; but he knew he had to earn his keep. He knew the time was coming when he would tee up his ball and dash the aspirations of every other golfer on the links.

If he thought about that too much, he would start to have the nightmares, again. When he thought about the young pros, those starry-eyed dreamers who thought fame and fortune was only 72 holes away, he saw men beaten by bad bounces or a gust of wind.

He had not seen Lilith for more than a week, so when she showed up he suspected she was ready to put him to work.

"How's the game?" she asked as Chuck walked off the 18th hole on the Adobe course.

"Good, real good," Chuck said as he handed his putter to the caddie.

The other members of the threesome did not even notice Lilith and they all headed toward the clubhouse.

"What did you shoot?" Lilith asked.

"I don't know," Chuck said. "I don't keep track anymore. I just swing and walk and putt."

"Lot's of eagles and birdies?"

"Yeah, I suppose so," Chuck said.

"Ready for some news?"

"Not really; but I'll listen."

"I've booked six tournaments, four interviews, and an endorsement deal with Klegail Golf."

"How much?" Chuck asked with almost no enthusiasm.

"You don't sound thrilled," Lilith said.

"I'm just tired," Chuck said. "How much?"

"Between twelve and eighteen million, depending on options to be picked up after wins."

"How long till I make two million?"

"What do you mean?"

"How long before I make the two million I owe you for getting my game back?"

"Win two tournaments, sign the Klegail deal and keep your nose clean for three years and that should net you two or three million. You also have a stock option on Klegail that might be good for several hundred thousand."

"OK," Chuck said, "let's do that: get me to the two million mark so I can pay you off."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't want it," Chuck said. "Winning is only fun when you are scared of loosing. Playing with these guys—these amateurs—is more fun. They just have fun and I have fun. I will pay you off, find a job at a course somewhere, and play when I can. I do not want fame or money; I want to have fun and I do not want to spend my day frustrating all the other players. Does that make sense to you?"

"I'll need to check in with Mr. Jackson about this," Lilith said.

"He can be a bit quirky at times; I have no idea what he will say."

"Fine," Chuck said. "Let me know. I want to work something out."

Lilith returned two days later. Chuck sat on the veranda at the clubhouse, sipping lemonade, laughing and listening to the tales of the other golfers. Greg had a triple-bogie on seven because of a series of clumsy shots getting out of the bunker. Larry had watched three balls in a row make that cute 'splunking' sound as they plopped into the water thirty feet from the shoreline.

"Chuck?" Lilith asked as she approached the table. "May I speak

with you in private?"

"Yeah, sure."

They walked to a table at the edge of the veranda and sat down.

"Rick has a deal for you," she said. "Think about it and let me know; I'll work with him on your behalf."

"OK," Chuck said. "Tell me the bad news first."

"I don't think there is any bad news," Lilith said.

"Yeah," Chuck said with a sarcastic drawl, "I'm sure it's all good."

"You can decide that for yourself," Lilith said. "Rick has agreed that you may stay here, for as long as you like and play as much golf as you like."

"And?" Chuck asked, sounding skeptical.

"He would like you to continue playing with the partners that show up to play with you," Lilith said; "though that is not a strict requirement, just a request. He knows how happy his friends are when they get to meet and play with Chuck Greystone."

"What's the catch?" Chuck asked.

"There isn't a catch."

"How do I pay you off?"

"Mr. Jackson will cover all of your expenses."

"How is this possible?"

"Why would it be impossible?" Lilith asked. "For most people making two holes-in-one is the impossible feat and someone covering the costs of a talented golfer seems far more likely."

"How long would I need to do this?" Chuck asked.

"Until you want to do something else."

"OK," Chuck said. "I'll stay here and play golf and meet people and have fun until I get tired of it."

"Good," Lilith said. "I know that will please Mr. Jackson."

"How did you do this?" Chuck asked. "How did you get me to the top of my game? How did you know this would make me happier than I have ever been?"

"I didn't," Lilith said. "You did."

"Hey, you're José Arroyo-López, right?" The man asking the question was overbearing and he had a curious odor of aftershave and laundry detergent.

José looked at the man and wanted to deny his accusation; but he gave in and admitted that he was 'José.'

"I'm from the Morning Sentinel and I've heard you were Chuck Greystone's friend."

"Yes."

"In your own words, what happened?"

"Read it in the other papers," José said. "I've told this story a dozen times. I don't want to tell it any more."

"I want the human angle," the reporter said. "How long had you known Greystone?"

"A day."

"That's not much of a friendship."

"See?" José asked. "There isn't a story here. Just leave me alone."

"Is it true the drink had destroyed his mind?"

"I don't know."

"What did he say to you before the accident?"

"He sat up on the cot, stared right through me and he said, 'She's good-looking?'"

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything; I think he was hallucinating."

"What happened after that?"

"He asked for an aspirin and then he walked down to the kitchen, stood there for a while, acting like he could see someone, then he mumbled: helping me do what?"

"And after that?"

"He walked out the front door and stepped in front of the truck."

"Well, that was useful," the reporter said as he folded his note pad and dropped it into his pocket. "Another has-been booze hound ends his pathetic life."

"Do you believe in an afterlife?" José asked.

"Yeah, I suppose I do."

"Do you think heaven exists and if it does, would someone like Greystone go there?"

"I don't know," the reporter said. "Maybe the afterlife is a chance to make up for the before-life. This morning, I heard a man say that he hopes that when he dies he gets to play golf with Chuck Greystone. Can you imagine that? I guess we could only hope he is in better shape than when he died."