

## CHAPTER ONE

Sunlight filtered through the open Venetian blinds, striping the opposite wall. The sole occupant, lying in the middle of one of the two double beds, opened his eyes slowly, and – carefully – exploring his surroundings -- TV set, a table desk, one overstuffed chair. The walls were painted a light green without decoration. He looked at the pale green, wall-to-wall carpeting and closed his eyes. A knock on the door startled him into full consciousness.

The door opened and a broad-shouldered man entered carrying a small bag. The man smiled.

"Sorry to barge in, but I'm Dr. Boynton. I wasn't sure you'd be awake. Mrs. Roberts gave me a key."

The doctor set his bag down on the floor beside the bed and seated himself easily on the edge. He immediately felt for the man's pulse.

"How do you feel this morning, Mr. MacMasters?"

The patient appeared to consider the question carefully. He nodded. "I feel fair." He hesitated for a moment. "What's supposed to be wrong with me?"

"Oh," Dr. Boynton smiled, "nothing special. You may have just been overtired. The police said they found you in your rental car by the side of the road. The rental agency gave us this motel as your address so the police brought you here. Whatever happened you were able to anticipate it and drive off the road so it couldn't be anything too serious." Boynton smiled reassuringly. "Possibly you've been under quite a strain lately -- business pressure, family problems? It wasn't alcohol."

"I'm glad of that."

"You planning to be here in Northboro for awhile?" Dr. Boynton reached into his bag and came up with a small green bottle.

"I'm really not sure."

"Well, this is still the summer season and I'm much busier than I should be, but why don't you come in to see me for a physical. I'll tell my secretary to fit you in within the next two days."

"All right."

"In the meantime take one of these pills in case you begin to feel jumpy."

"What are they?"

"Tranquilizers – mild – Milltowns – something new.. They're really quite harmless and they do help. I prescribe them frequently - lately. It's a stressful world we live in -- even for those of us who live up here in the north country. In the city, I believe you refer to life in general as the rat race. In the summertime you bring it with you." He frowned.

"There are suddenly so many more people to cope with and we're never quite ready for you." Boynton's smile was remote. "Well," he stood up, "if you haven't any really worrisome symptoms, I'd better run along. I'm on my way to the hospital to save mankind."

He picked up his bag and started for the door, talking as he went.

"So many medical problems today are emotional it's almost impossible to know exactly what to do." He stopped at the door and turned back. "You have your own doctor, I suppose -- a general practitioner, I hope. Too many specialists. Know all about your various organs, but damn little about you. If you do have a general man, family doctor, maybe you'd better go see him." Boynton set his bag on the bureau and began pacing.

"We're all too damned busy, you know. I didn't really mean to talk down the specialists. The body is complicated and no one man can know all there is. We are making new

discoveries all the time, of course. I guess maybe I'm a little extended. Come and see me in the next couple of days." He opened the door and left.

He returned a few seconds later, popped his head in the room.

"Sorry, but I left my bag here."

He spotted it on the bureau, picked it up and disappeared.

The patient smiled. The smile disappeared slowly, reluctantly. He got out of bed and moved toward the mirror. He stopped abruptly, just out of sight of his own reflection. He stood in his bare feet, for the moment irresolute. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly and stepped in front of the mirror. He regarded the face intently. He examined each feature carefully -- the eyes, the nose, the mouth, hairline, set of the jaw. He bit down on his lower lip and winced at the pain.

The face in the mirror was the face of a stranger!

Suddenly, he felt light-headed. He had to put his hand on the bureau to steady himself. His breathing was very rapid. He tried to swallow, but found his throat too dry.

Panic engulfed him in a great, black wave. For one wild violent moment he thought he was going to bash his head against the wall, bash it, smash it until it was a bloody pulpy mass of brains and flesh.

Gradually, very gradually, he forced himself back from that terrible abyss..

"I can't kill myself when I don't know who I am! "

He groped his way into the bathroom and managed to drink some water. He remembered the little green bottle and took a pill. He waited a moment as if expecting some miraculous change, but there wasn't any. He breathed in deeply and went to the window. He pulled up the blinds and looked out at a small lake with wooded hills behind it. The lawn sloped gently to a narrow strip of white sand, for the moment at least, unoccupied. It was a lovely summer scene, but it was totally new to him.

He opened the window wide and let a gentle onshore breeze caress his face. It smelled good -- piney and slightly moist. He began to feel better. For several moments he remained by the open window. He made no attempt to think. He sighed for no reason he could think of and turned back into the room.

His trousers were hanging over the back of the desk chair. As he removed the wallet from the back pocket he felt anxious, as if in opening the wallet he would be looking into something that didn't belong to him. It was as if he were deliberately reading someone else's mail. He held the wallet in his hand and stared at it until, his eyes went out of focus and the wallet was only a blur.

It was odd. He knew about tranquilizers and motels, medicine, specialists. Certainly he realized what a wallet was and even what it was likely to contain, yet he had no recollection of the pond, this particular motel, the name MacMasters or, and this brought him completely around, the face in the mirror. How was it possible to have any knowledge without an accompanying memory of when or exactly how he had acquired it?

He placed all of the wallet's contents on the bureau. There were \$200.00 in cash and a blank check on a Boston bank. He stopped there. He knew Boston. A few street names crossed his mind. The name of the street on which the bank was located was familiar but not the bank. When he asked himself why he knew Boston or what his association had been there, he had no answer. He tried to think of people he knew in Boston, but that was fruitless.

The wallet contained a gasoline credit card, a Canadian driver's license issued in Windsor, Ontario and a few business cards with totally unfamiliar names. The driver's license had been issued to Harry MacMasters. His age was listed as forty-five. A

Canadian passport, found in the inside pocket of a lightweight sport jacket, listed MacMasters as single. His occupation was salesman. That bit of information produced a frown, but no memory. The passport had been issued within the last month, and the picture was clearly the same as the face in the mirror.

In the suitcase he found a key to a safety deposit box. The bank's name was the same as the one on the blank check.

He also found a personal-sized checkbook. The balance was \$15,000.00. The amount startled him. He couldn't have said why, but he felt fifteen thousand was an unusually large amount of money to have in a checking account.

He sat down on the bed.

All right, he said to himself, obviously I'm Canadian and my name is Harry MacMasters. I'm a salesman. I have a checking account in Boston and also a safety deposit box, and none of it means a thing to me. Anyway, at least I have some money. And then a moment of panic. If he couldn't remember who he was, he might also have forgotten how to sign his name.

He opened the passport to his signature, found pen and paper in the desk and signed his name. The signature was okay.

He said the name over and over again, willing himself to remember it.

"You are Harry MacMasters. You are Harry MacMasters. I am Harry MacMasters."

He went to the mirror and regarded the face intently. "You are Harry MacMasters." He smiled.

"You're not bad looking - Harry. Matter of fact you look pretty damn well for 45 -- no gray hair, nice white teeth, a bit of a paunch but good shoulders. A little soft maybe, but in these days of the big fat American male it's good to be on the thin side. Now," he paused, "how did I know American males are overweight?" He shrugged.

"Maybe they aren't."

MacMasters phoned Dr. Boynton and the secretary set up an appointment. MacMasters felt unaccountably light-hearted. He was thinking, quite positively, that it would be an excellent idea to find out what kind of shape he was in. A lot of men at 45 were in poor physical condition. MacMasters took a shower and inspected himself. He towed vigorously, shaved, dressed and stepped outdoors. His intention was to inspect Northboro.

MacMasters turned left toward the motel office, noticing everything as he walked. The sky was a pale blue with high wispy clouds. The grass was brittle and short with brown areas indicating its great thirst. The earth was powdery. The motel was of frame construction with narrow clapboards which would shortly require repainting. The cement sidewalk had an occasional crack caused by the frost. An attempt had been made to fill them in. The surface of the patches was smooth, smoother than the walk, but their edges did not blend. It was the attempt, the intent of the owner to keep the place up, that impressed MacMasters.

There was a rather tired looking woman who appeared to be in her late thirties seated behind the office counter. She tried to be friendly, greeting him by name and inquiring after his condition.

"I'm fine. Dr. Boynton told me liquor was not the problem. I was just awfully tired, I guess. The strange thing is I can't remember what my rental car looked like or even the name of the agency."

She smiled. "I've had a few nights like those. Here are your keys. It's the red Plymouth hard-top in front of your unit. There's only one rental agency in town so that's no problem. It's the first Mobil gas station on your right on the way into town."

"You don't happen to have a road map, do you? I'd kind of like to get better oriented. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to help me."

"Surely." She moved out from behind the counter and took a Tourist Guide map from a rack on the opposite wall.

MacMasters apologized. "Guess I'm blind. I could have done that."

The woman regarded him in surprise - and with new interest.

"Think nothing of it. I'm the step'n fetchit girl around here."

She became more animated, and her looks improved accordingly. She stood beside MacMasters and opened the map out on the counter. MacMasters regarded it for a moment without recognition.

"Here's Boston and here we are. It's only about a hundred miles. Might as well be a thousand as far as I'm concerned.

"I never get to go there. My husband hates cities -- Boston in particular. He says it's dirty. I don't want to eat off the streets. I want to go to the symphony, opera, museums, lectures, shows. Trouble is he's gone native."

"Is it a bad thing to be content with where you are? Sounds to me like your husband's got it made."

By her expression he could see he had said the wrong thing.

"I mean," he added hastily, "he's got a lovely wife, a going business and he lives in a place he likes. I wish I were so lucky."

She smiled and she really did look quite attractive.

"Well, I do try to take care of myself."

"With excellent results. Now all you have to do is invite him to a show in Boston."

"Yeah." She shook her head and the smile vanished. "Oh, well, he's not so bad."

"And he has excellent taste in women." MacMasters grinned.

"You are good for this lady's morale. You better move along. Who knows I might ask you to spend a night in a motel."

They both laughed.

MacMasters got into the red Plymouth and drove off without the slightest difficulty. The encounter with the woman made him feel cheerful. He'd brightened her morning and so, in return, she brightened his day. Unquestionably a fair trade.

He drove into the Mobil station and cranked down the passenger window.

"Did you rent me this car?"

"You're Mr. MacMasters. I heard you had some problem yesterday. You feeling better?"

"Yes."

The man regarded MacMasters with interest.

"Something the matter?"

MacMasters suddenly felt anxious.

"Oh, no. I didn't mean to stare. Sorry. It's just that you look different this morning -- uh -- better somehow. I guess you were just pretty tired yesterday. I'm sorry I had to give you a red car."

"That's all right. As a matter of fact I like red."

"Well, sure, ordinarily, but I could see why you wouldn't want to drive a red car to a funeral." He shook his head. "I still don't have enough rental cars. Every summer I underestimate the number I'm gonna need, even though I add more each year. Northboro is having a real population explosion."

MacMasters tried to think of some way to pursue the funeral without showing his ignorance.

"Did you know the deceased?"

"Who?"

"The person for whom the funeral was held?"

"Oh," he chuckled. "Yeah, the deceased. I thought you said the diseased." He shook his head and grinned.

"You talk like our local funeral director. No, I didn't know the guy. He was outta my league. His wife was loaded with money and he was loaded with booze, though he wasn't a bad guy really. Oh, gee, I'm sorry. You must 'a been a friend of his."

"No, not really. Did he buy his gas here?"

"Once in a while. He used all the gas stations. I never saw anybody with so many credit cards. Every time he came here it would take him five minutes to find his Mobil card.

"I guess rich people never carry cash."

MacMasters gave up further pursuit and handed the man his only Mobil card.

"I feel like a piker. I only have one credit card.

"What's the best route to Boston?"

Two hours later MacMasters entered the vault of the Copley Square branch of the State Street Trust Company. He signed his name on the time card and gave the attendant the key. The attendant found the number, inserted the bank's key and then MacMasters' key, opened the door and withdrew the long oblong metal box. He led MacMasters to a small cubicle and left him alone.

MacMasters lifted the top and closed it immediately.

He turned around and closed the door to the cubicle and then, cautiously, reopened the box. There were neat packages wrapped in plain paper. Carefully he removed the paper.

The package contained a stack of five hundred dollar bills, twenty of them. There were five packets. He checked them all. Fifty thousand dollars!

He then proceeded to check the serial numbers, but none of the bills appeared to be in sequence. He held the bills up to the light and looked for any unusual marks, but he couldn't find any. He carefully rewrapped the money and returned it to the box. He didn't breathe easily until the box was safely back in the vault. He cashed a check for \$500.00 on his checking account and headed back to Northboro.

At 4:30 MacMasters entered the local stationery store on Main Street and purchased the Northboro News. Since this was a Friday and Friday was the day the paper appeared each week, MacMasters had one of the first copies of the latest edition. He checked it over immediately before asking if there were any copies of the previous edition, but there was no need. He found what he was looking for immediately on the front page. The article read:

"A special memorial service was held Thursday for John Morland age 49. Mr. Morland was a short time resident of Northboro, though his wife and family had spent several summers here. He and local real estate broker, Arthur Marsh, formed the Northboro Land Co., developers of the Lakewood Colony Club. Mr. Morland was a graduate of Hotchkiss and Yale. He spent some years in banking.. He is survived by his wife, Luci, a daughter, Diana, 20, and a son, Carter, 18."

MacMasters examined Morland's picture. It was unusually clear for a newspaper photograph, but the face meant nothing and neither did the article. He checked the obituary column but there were no other funerals. To be absolutely certain, MacMasters stopped at the Mobil station on his way back to the motel and asked if the operator knew Morland.

"No, I told you he only came in occasionally and when he did, it took him a helluva long time to find the right credit card."

At that moment a younger man drove up and waved. The owner waved back and asked MacMasters for a lift home. MacMasters looked blank and the man grinned.

"You haven't hooked up the names yet, have you? Roberts' Mobil Station and Roberts' Motel. You're staying at my motel." Roberts grinned. "You gotta wear more than one hat, you wanna survive in the north country. My wife runs the motel. I run the gas station. Anyway, she's got the car and I don't have any to spare. She'll be down to get me in 15 minutes, but Joe's here so I can go now."

"Hop in. Such industry impresses me. You have a most charming wife."

"Mary? Charming?" He shook his head. "You're not talking about my wife. She's the original complainer."

"I find her very attractive."

"You do? Honest?"

"Yes." MacMasters barely suppressed a laugh.

"Christ! You're not married to her. That's why you find her charming. Yeah!" He looked heavenward.

"That must be it."

MacMasters laughed.

"Why don't you take her to the theater in Boston?"

"See! She was complainin'. I knew it! I haven't got the time. I do nothin' but work. Anyway, that city's one dirty place. I told her she could go by herself; but when she gets home, I'd take her out back and hose her down before I'd let her in the house. That's what I think of the city."

MacMasters stopped the car in front of the motel office. Mary appeared.

"Did you remember to bring a bottle, Charlie?"

Charlie got out.

"Forget the bottle. He," Charlie nodded his head towards the car, "thinks you're charmin'." He shook his head. "Plump, even horny maybe, but charmin'! Christ!"

He walked past her into the office.

"God damn you, Charlie Roberts, you're a son of a bitch, you know that?"

Charlie stuck his head back out of the screen door.

"Ask your lover in for a drink. I think we can find him something."

Mary turned to MacMasters.

"He is a son of a bitch, you know that?"

"Aren't we all -- uh -- all of us men, I mean."

"You want to come in for a drink, lover? I do have a bottle of gin and I can always send Charlie to the liquor store for anything else you might like."

"No thank you, gin would be fine, but I've got an appointment for a physical and I don't think I'd better have anything to drink. You tell Charlie I think he's a lucky man."

"The hell I will -- excuse the language -- and don't you tell him either. I shudder to think what he would do with that compliment."

"He is a character."

"Oh, he's a love, that son of a bitch." Mary grinned.

"What's theater when you have so much devotion?"

MacMasters returned to his room, kicked off his shoes and stretched out on one of the beds. He placed his hands behind his head and tried to put things together. As far as he could tell, there were only two people he had met so far who had known him before he had his accident -- Charlie and Mary Roberts, well, Charlie anyway.

MacMasters had to admit, as puzzled as he was, the fact of his amnesia was no longer making him anxious. Since that moment of wild furious desire to injure himself, he had

been gradually feeling better. Was that strange behavior in one who had amnesia? He decided to go to the local library and read whatever was available on the subject. In the meantime he began wondering what MacMasters was really like. Did MacMasters drink? Did he smoke? There were matches in his pockets, but no cigarettes. Did he want a cigarette? Did he want a drink? He shook his head. He didn't think so.

He wondered why he hadn't told Dr. Boynton about his amnesia. Surely he should have. Boynton would be the logical starting point. Was he now afraid because of the 50,000.00? Did anyone ever keep honest money in a safety deposit box, especially that much? It was drawing no interest. He could not borrow on it. He could only spend it. Something was not right but, for the moment at least, he was glad he had no memory of how he had acquired approximately \$65,000.00. The important fact was he had enough money to permit him some time and the freedom to go with it. He had no idea what his financial skills might be. According to his passport he was a salesman, but for whom? And for what? The idea of selling did not appeal to him. It produced an image of a confidence man deceitfully selling some poor soul something he neither needed nor could really afford, and MacMasters knew he wouldn't do that.