

## Fielding Dawson / TWO STORIES

### THE MAN WITH THREE NAMES

*for Lew Archer*

I was driving along 101 in a light blue mood in a dark blue Jag when I saw her on the shoulder, hitching. I slowed, and stopped, and she got in beside me. I put the Thompson on the back seat to put her at ease, and then I looked at her.

She looked Greek which meant she was probably Italian, or even Jewish.

"Wow," I whispered.

She was very tan, about fifty, and a knockout, in a blue and white polka-dot mini-dress, white shoes and white button earrings. Her hair was raven black with streaks of grey. I couldn't see her eyes because of her dark glasses, like a defense, but I knew they'd be black and as beautiful as the rest of her. She was built like an enamelled cobalt sauna, and her teeth were perfect.

"Thanks," she said.

"Sure," I said.

"What's your name?" she asked. Her voice was the voice of an older woman, with a lot of experience behind it.

"Boy!" I thought. But I said,

"I've got three, which one do you want?"

"The real one."

I told her.

"No kidding," she said. "Do you know Trav M — ?"

"Hey," I interrupted —

She laughed.

"How far are you going?" I asked.

"Isn't that what I'm supposed to ask?"

"I don't know," I said. "Is it? I don't think so."

"Shall we run through this again?"

"No," I said. "I've got too many problems as it is."

"Yeah? Like what? How old are you?"

"Nobody knows," I said.

"You're older than Trav," she joked.

"He's not so old," I said defensively, "and he has his problems okay."

"His eyes are the color of spit," she said.

"Why's a good looking dish like you following your thumb down  
101?"

"I have to meet somebody in 'Frisco."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Don't say 'Frisco' when you get there," I warned.

"I'll say anything I want," she said, like a girl.

"Reach into the glove compartment, would you? I'm thirsty."

She did, and handed me my bottle of Death. I took a slug and offered her some, which she accepted, and afterwards capped the bottle and lay it on the seat between us. She had great legs. She was beautiful everywhere.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Oh, here and there. You?"

"Knopf — at first, I think," I said, trying to remember.

"Oh, yeah. RCA."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Let's see," she said, putting a scarlet fingernail between her two front teeth — "Jane. How's that?"

"Okay," I said. "What do you do for a living?"

"Not much. You?"

"I'm the last of the hardboiled dicks," I said.

"The last?" she laughed. "What happened to the others?"

"Well," I said, as we took a long curve: "They died."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"You on a case?"

"Yeah." I told her about it.

"A birdwatcher turned sour, eh? What happened? Too many chippies spoil the roost?"

"Not quite," I said — "but close," and I told her all about it. There was, it seemed, a certain etc., "you get it," I finished.

"I get it," she said. "You married?"

"No," I said, "well, it depends. You?"

"In a way. I just left him. He was a bastard, but I liked him."

"Yeah?"

"Unh huh. Pull over here, would you? I want to get some cigarettes."

The clock on the dash said three twenty p.m.

I pulled into the truckstop and she got out. I watched her walk into the low small building. Then I waited. Big rigs pulled in and out while I waited, with a couple of slugs of Death for company, and when it got dark I began to worry, so I went inside and asked around. Nobody had seen her, or knew of her at all, she hadn't even come in, they said.

"What woman?" they asked, and all my description fell on deaf ears, like peanut butter in water, even Deaf Smith, it didn't work, so I went out in a darker color mood and got into my blue Jag and headed down 101 again, wondering — who was she? Was she a dream? And if so, a dream of who?

It began to rain, and the highway turned as slick and glossy as a deadly ivy, crawling on my nerves. There was something haunting, and yet familiar, about her — something . . . no, I couldn't get it.

I never saw her again.

I finished the case — the birdwatcher had gone stir-crazy and thought he was seeing his neighbors instead of — birds, and when I got back into town the next night I called Mom, to let her know I was back and that I was okay. She worries about me. Me and my acne. And my braces. You know how they are. I took off my gun, and lay down for a nap. I had a dream.

"Wow," I whispered, when I woke up. "*Boy!*" I thought, but I said, "I've got three, which one do you want?"

"The fourth," she said.

## THE LADY FROM SOUTH AFRICA BEREFT OF HER FORTUNE

Vancouver lay beyond English Bay like a child's block city at the foot of snow-capped mountains, which tilted east toward Calgary, under a long low dusty blue Canadian sky.

Helen and Brian were drinking white wine at the table by Helen's picture window. I was there too, drinking Russian vodka. Mark, Helen's son, was being more than patient with us. It was around eight p.m., and we were due at the party. In fact we were late.

But she was telling Brian and I of her childhood on the big South African farm. Of the Zulu servant who smoked dope, and served suppers awfully slowly, and of her parents who held hands at the table, of her Father who drank Scotch and loved it. She spoke with a warm, and most unusually friendly tone. I know no one like her, save a dear lifelong friend who spends her summers in New Hampshire, fortune intact.

And then there is me, who is broke.

Helen gave me a present.

It was a cardboard toiletpaper tube. Near one end a hole about the size of a nickel had been cut, and over it a small square of aluminum foil had been taped with that opaque scotch-tape the editors at Random House use. But in the middle of the untaped foil, there was a slight indentation, and I saw several pin punctures. This gift was because I had no pipe, where I was staying, downstairs in Rudy's studio apartment. She then gave me a small block of hash, the size of the eraser on a brand new pencil.

As I laughed, she smiled and winked, and you have it on my authority: we smoked. Thus we went to the party, and in spite of all her dough being locked up in South Africa, she had her ways of loving living and her ways were legion. You therefore have it on my authority: she owned that wink.