

LINDSEY & PLUM BOOK TWO

*The  
Classic Car*

**KILLER**



RICHARD A. LUPOFF

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# **BORGO PRESS BOOKS BY RICHARD A. LUPOFF**

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## **THE LINDSEY & PLUM DETECTIVE SERIES**

1. *The Comic Book Killer*

2. *The Classic Car Killer*

3. *The Bessie Blue Killer*

4. *The Sepia Siren Killer*

5. *The Cover Girl Killer*

6. *The Silver Chariot Killer*

7. *The Radio Red Killer*

8. *The Emerald Cat Killer*

9. *One Murder at a Time: The Casebook of Lindsey & Plum*

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# DEDICATION

For  
*Ken*  
*Kathy*  
*Tommy*  
*Marla*  
*Sean*  
*Dylan*  
*Sarah*

# INTRODUCTION, by Donald E. Westlake

There's a step between a novel and a series, and it's a tricky one, over which more than one person has stumbled. It's known as the sequel. A novel can be anything from wonderful to horrific, and a series may contain highs and lows, but the sequel, the second book about the same characters in the same milieu, carries a heavy burden indeed: It must answer the question, "Can he do it again?"

I have been yoked to a few series, and it seems to me the best way to leap the second-book hurdle is not to do it on purpose. That is, not to start the *first* book with the idea that it's a series. That way, if a second book comes along it does so not because you've already committed yourself to producing the damn thing, but because a story or theme or some other element just seems too perfectly matched to the characters and setting from that previous book, so that you can come at them fresh, you can make it new.

Well, it works for me. If you'll forgive some personal history, that's the way I backed into a series I still seem to be doing, so naturally I give myself high marks for the brilliance of having devised the method. Or, as someone once said, if it weren't for hindsight I wouldn't have any sight at all.

On the other hand, if I'd known I was creating series characters, I probably wouldn't have named them Dortmund and Kelp. One of them after a German beer, the other after seaweed. (When he was doing the screenplay for the film adaptation of the first Dortmund novel, *The Hot Rock*, William Goldman kept shaking his head over those names, giving me pitying looks. After all, he names his characters things like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.)

In my defense, I have to point out that I'd written a lot of books over the years that *hadn't* mitosed, so there was no particular reason to suppose that I would ever have to go back and rehire Dortmund and Kelp after they'd finished stumbling and complaining their way through that first plot of mine. So what did it matter if I gave them absurd names, or saddled John Dortmund with a stripper ex-wife who, in seven books and five short stories, has never once put in an appearance?

But then.... Ah, well. Then I drove past a bank on Route 23 in northern New Jersey that was being torn down with a new bank to be built on the same foundation, and in the interim the bank was operating out of a mobile home next door. I drove past this bank, to tell the truth, twice a week for nearly a year—I never said I was a quick study—before it suddenly occurred to me that an enterprising fellow could back a truck up to that bank and *drive it away*. And that I had just the guys for the job. Not being goaded by necessity, or a long-range plan, or in fact any plan at all, I could get together with those guys and have just as much fun as the first time.

A totally different chain of events led to the very first series I was ever indentured to. I had written a few novels, published in hardcover by Random House, and it seemed to me it would be nice to have something published as a paperback original.

By Gold Medal, for preference. So I wrote a book about a professional thief, a revenge story full of tough stuff, and at the end the cops arrested the thief and that was that. I put a pen name on it—Richard, for Richard Widmark, whose performance in *Kiss of Death* encapsulated some of the flavor I was trying for, and Stark, because that's what I wanted the language to be—and the first thing that happened was that Gold Medal turned it down. Then an editor at Pocket Books named Bucklyn Moon called and said, "Is there any way you can let Parker escape and give me three books a year about him?" Turned out, there was.

Well, that second book was simple to write; all I had to do was spend fifty thousand words cleaning up the loose ends I'd left in the first book, when I hadn't known it was going to be a series. A lot of mean hard people were after Parker (not being a series character in the original conception, he hadn't needed a first name, and never did get one), I mean in addition to the police, so the first thing I had to do was give him plastic surgery so none of his old friends would recognize him. Then there was money left unaccounted for, characters who hadn't been fully resolved; general morning-after cleanup. In fact, books two through five of that series all come out of the same tidying process necessitated by the circumstances that book number one wasn't going to be a series.

Then there was Mitch Tobin, an ex-cop driven by a sense of guilt. I deliberately set out to do a series that time, using yet another pen name, Tucker Coe, and Mitch survived five books before running down. The character slowly consumed himself, like a lit cigar in an ashtray. That's what happens when you do it on purpose.

John D. MacDonald did the most clever series launch I know of, with Travis McGee. He wrote the first three books simultaneously, doing a chapter or two here, then a chapter or two over there, then a chapter or two down the hall, and then coming back. Which meant *none* of them was the sequel.

I don't know what Dick Lupoff's plan was when he first shook hands with Hobart Lindsey and said, "You're hired," and I have no intention of asking. In the first place, writers usually don't know why the hell they're doing what they're doing, and in the second place, if they do know, they're almost always wrong. And in the third place, regardless of how little they know about their own intentions, they will answer the question, and at length. So, like academics everywhere, I'll much prefer to study the Rosetta Stone at hand, without, if you don't mind, any pesky interference from the author.

So here's what I think. I think Dick Lupoff had been around mystery writers so long that he simply couldn't hold out any longer and had to try his hand at one—like Charles Dickens hanging out with Wilkie Collins—but that he decided to surround himself, in this unknown territory, with a lot of familiar landscapes and artifacts. So the world his hero had to deal with was a world of fandom, nostalgia and pulp seriousness. (I don't mean pulp seriousness like Race Williams being seriously irritated at the very presence of a butler in front of him, I mean the seriousness *about* pulp collectors and fans and dealers.) This was a world Dick knew, so Dick could spend the whole book explaining to his hero facts and anecdotes that Dick already found of interest.

And which would improve the hero.

Now, that's pretty clever. *The Comic Book Killer* becomes a full-length recruiting pitch for Dick's own personal interests.

Hobart Lindsey is a dull person, more dead than alive, who comes to radiant life when exposed to things that interest Dick Lupoff. He's humanized, sensitized, and made more attractive to women. Step right up!

However, since Dick is also warmhearted, intelligent and a fine writer, in addition to the fiendish cleverness we've just winkled out. *The Comic Book Killer* is more than a recruiting poster, more than an animated essay about the world of collecting. The story is beautifully tricky and complex and satisfying, the characters are believable and interact wonderfully, and the coming to sensitive life of the hero is gently and sympathetically done.

So can he do it again?

Of course not. As I say, I have no idea whether or not Dick had it in mind to do a Hobart Lindsey series when he began, but he had to know that the most central element in the first book was unrepeatable. Unless he gave Hobart—Bart, I feel I can call him—a lobotomy between books, there was no way he could have the same hero wake up from his dull half-dead state and discover the beauties of the world around him *more than once*. Bart may have further adventures—I hope he does—but they will be happening to a very different character from the one who began the first book.

Quite sensibly, what Dick did instead was shift his attention to the other significant element of the first book, the characteristics of the collector. The 1928 Duesenberg whose theft initiates this new story is no longer an actual automobile—even though it's driven more than once in the course of the story—but is a memento, a relic of another time. Its purpose is not transportation but remembrance.

Nostalgia, remembrance, a movement into other times; that was the source of the cohesion of the first book, and it has become the subject of the second. From the introduction of a colored *Casablanca* on page one, *The Classic Car Killer* is an extended contemplation of the question of our proper relationship with memory.

And, although the novel is light and at times refreshingly funny, it is also true that any extended consideration of time must be tinged with sadness, a sadness Dick doesn't deny, and which is at its most poignant in the person of Bart's mother, who moves through time willy-nilly, unlike the others who *choose* to replace the present with some other era in which they believe they can feel more at home.

Because of print, and film, and tape, we *can* live at least part of our lives in other eras. More than anyone in any preceding century, we can move at will across time, and all time becomes now. "Is that a rerun?" somebody asks, peering at the TV screen, and finally the question doesn't matter. Nothing, or very little, disappears. If the currently popular is not popular with you, yesterday's big hits are still on tap. If you find this moment in history uncomfortable, a poor fit, try another.

It is this phenomenon, the way our culture has made temporal nomads of us all, that Dick Lupoff taps into with Hobart Lindsey. In the first Bart story, the theme was sounded, a clarion call that woke the hero from his non-existence and introduced him to the world of shifting time. Now, with earned assurance, Bart begins to get a handle on what this means, that the solution to a mystery can exist in another time entirely (not like Ross Macdonald's Archer novels, which weren't about time at all, really, but about the concept of family), that events echo through time, and that he can be the master, time the servant.

So he's done it. Dick Lupoff made the slight shift necessary to turn a novel into a novel with a sequel, and he brought it off. Good. Now I'm ready for the series.

# CHAPTER ONE

Somebody had gone to a lot of trouble to colorize *Casablanca*. It takes a lot of work, a lot of computer time, and a lot of money to turn an old black-and-white movie into a full-scale modern production with blue skies, red wine, skin-colored skin, and blood-colored blood.

But Mother insisted on watching it with the TV controls set to turn everything back into shades of gray.

Hobart Lindsey sighed as the ancient airliner lumbered into the North African night. He couldn't see much of the plane, but it was probably a DC-3. They don't build airliners the way they used to, Lindsey thought. The jetliners that all the airlines used nowadays were generic. No personalities like they had in the old days. Worse even than modern cars.

The screen faded to the familiar Warner Brothers end-logo as Rick Blaine and Louis Renault walked arm-in-arm into the fog while Victor Laszlo and his wife, Ilsa Lund, escaped the Javert-like pursuit of Major Heinrich Strasser. Bogart and Rains, Henreid and Bergman and Conrad Veidt. They didn't make actors like they used to, either.

Lindsey had sat through the picture twenty times. Or was it fifty? He recognized the greatness of the film, but it was Mother who insisted on watching it every time they showed it on cable, and if it didn't turn up for a few weeks she would

make him rent it on tape for her. He almost enjoyed the trips to Vid/Vid/Vid to look over the latest releases and the classics section.

The telephone's intrusive burbling brought Hobart Lindsey back into the present. He left Mother sitting on the dark blue sofa. Let her stay in the past, he thought. She was happier there than in the present, better able to handle her widowhood. She wandered in time. Most often she thought that Dwight Eisenhower was just starting his presidency and Josef Stalin was menacing the Free World and that her husband—Hobart's father—was alive and was serving on the destroyer *Lewiston* off the coast of North Korea and was going to come back to her someday. Hobart moved past the table still littered with the empty containers that had held their Saturday dinner of egg rolls and chow mein and shrimp in lobster sauce and moved to answer the call.

The voice that came over the telephone line was unpleasantly familiar. "Lindsey, I'm glad you're home. You'd better hustle down to Oakland and handle this. Now!"

Lindsey moaned inwardly. There was no mistaking the voice and manner of Harden at Regional. Lindsey had spoken with him often enough, but always from the office. And he'd even met him a couple of times. But Harden's phoning Lindsey at home was unprecedented. And on Saturday night, just when he was starting to feel happy and relaxed, halfway through a pleasant weekend!

"What happened in Oakland, Mr. Harden?"

"You'd know if you put in a few more hours, Lindsey. What time is it out there in fruits-and-nuts land?"

Lindsey looked at his Seiko. He'd moved up from a Timex, and every time he checked his watch he experienced a mixed

rush of pride and guilt. Pride in the gleaming timepiece, and guilt for adding needlessly to the balance of payments deficit.

“It’s ten minutes before twelve.”

“Yes. I don’t suppose you’ve checked the incoming claims tape lately, have you?”

“I check it every morning, Mr. Harden. Ms. Wilbur or I take every call that comes in during business hours, personally.”

“You understand the International Surety KlameNet Program, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir.” Lindsey had been briefed when the KlameNet system went in. Every International Surety office in the world was hooked into a regional computer center, and those were all linked to the company’s worldwide data-exchange system. KlameNet logged every incoming claim, whether it came through the branches’ own computers or off the overnight message tapes that the smaller offices used.

“You can access your office from your home, Lindsey. Isn’t that right?”

Lindsey nodded unconsciously, then said, “Yes, sure.”

“Then why haven’t you done anything about this claim? It came in more than an hour ago!”

“It’s nighttime, Mr. Harden. It’s Saturday night, for heaven’s sake. I’m at home. I would have got the claim off the tape first thing Monday morning. In the meanwhile, I’m sure the proper authorities know about it. What is it, a life claim? An auto accident? I have my mother to look after. And I have a life outside the office, you know.” Lindsey wiped his brow with a handkerchief. It was a chilly night, but talking with Harden made him perspire.

“Look, Lindsey, I’m not going to fight with you. I’m just telling you to get yourself in gear. You have a pencil handy?”

Write this down. This is a motor vehicle theft claim.” He read the account and policy numbers, claim-log number, time-stamp of the claim, estimated time of the theft.

Lindsey wrote, trying to keep up with Harden’s dictation. Why all the fuss over a stolen car? They were among the commonest of all claims that he handled for International Surety, the amounts tended to be fairly low, and the recovery rate was the highest of any class of stolen goods. Cars all had engine numbers, they all had to be registered with the state, they were bulky and highly visible and had to be used in public to be used at all. It was easy to steal a car, but it was very hard to keep it and not get caught.

So why such an uproar over a claim that would probably amount to \$10,000 or less?

“You get that amount, did you, Lindsey? Didn’t misplace a decimal?”

“Uh—would you repeat that, Mr. Harden? You’re going a little fast for me.”

Harden exhaled angrily into the receiver. “The amount is \$425,000, Lindsey. That’s four, two, five, comma, zero, zero, zero, dollars, Lindsey. Did you get that?”

Lindsey gulped. “Four hundred twenty five thousand?”

Harden growled. “That’s right. I know you’re dumb but you’re not deaf, anyway.”

“But—what kind of car could that be? Even a Rolls—”

“It was a 1928 fucking SJ Duesenberg Convertible Phaeton, Lindsey. Stolen from in front of something called the Kleiner Mansion in Oakland. You familiar with the Kleiner Mansion?”

“I’m not sure. It sounds familiar.” He thought for a moment, searching for an errant memory. “Got it! They used it on

the cover of the Oakland phone book a few years ago. I must have seen it at the office.”

“Yeah. Well, you hightail it out there, cowboy, and see what the fuck is going on.”

“It’s my weekend, Mr. Harden.”

“It’s \$425,000, Lindsey. You’re a professional. We don’t pay you to be a clockwatcher.”

Harden didn’t have to go on with the implied threat. Lindsey knew what it was, he’d heard it often enough.

“I—I’ll get right out there, Mr. Harden.”

Harden was still on the line, grumbling loudly.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Harden. I didn’t get the name of the owner.”

“Yeah, well you ought to pay more attention. I told you, this is another one of those fruit-and-nut cases you seem to specialize in, Lindsey. The car is owned by something called the New California Smart Set, whatever the hell that means. Probably a nancy social club. They were having some kind of shindig at this Kleiner Mansion. They only roll the Dusie a couple of times a year, for super-special occasions. And now it’s gone!”

“Okay, Mr. Harden. I’m on my way.” He started to lower the receiver, then stopped. “Uh—Mr. Harden. Who phoned in the report? Not the whole club, did they?”

“I thought you’d never ask, Lindsey. You might have a future with this corporation after all. Claim came in from the president of the outfit. Guy named Oliver van Arndt. He’s waiting at the mansion.”

Harden hung up without another word. That was in character for him. He’d never been exactly Mr. Charm, and Lindsey knew that Harden was both feared and disliked throughout International Surety. But he seemed to take special pleasure in

harassing Hobart Lindsey, especially since the incident of the million-dollar comic books.

Actually, they were only a quarter-million dollars' worth of comics. They'd been burgled from a shop in Berkeley, and Lindsey had recovered them for the company, saving International Surety a bundle. Harden had tried to call Lindsey off the case near its end, but Lindsey had persisted, putting his job on the line.

Some job!

And then he'd persisted further, and with the help of Berkeley Police Officer Marvia Plum had not only regained all the stolen goods, but solved three bizarrely interconnected murders.

That was now in the past. Lindsey had enjoyed his proverbial fifteen minutes of fame. He'd enjoyed a brief, intense relationship with Marvia, and that alone had been a miracle in his drab life.

Lindsey was a pudgy, unathletic, undistinguished office worker who lived in a lower-middle-class section of a medium sized bedroom community a few miles east of San Francisco Bay. His life was a study in dullness. Until suddenly he was engaged in car-chases and shoot-outs, hopping on and off airliners, and—most remarkable of all—bedding an amazing woman. Him, drab whitebread Hobart Lindsey, sleeping with a spectacular-figured black policewoman.

But it had ended. He'd won the praise of his employer's national office and the seething jealousy of his immediate superior, Harden at Regional. He'd gone back to his routine life of processing claims by day, keeping an eye on his mentally unstable mother by night.

He blinked. A recorded voice on the telephone was telling him to hang up and try again. How long had he been sitting there, holding the dead instrument in his hand, reliving the one brief time in his thirty-six years that he'd really been alive.

\* \* \* \*

Lindsey got Mother off to bed, then jumped in his Hyundai and headed for the freeway. He liked to avoid Oakland. It was as bad, in its own way, as Berkeley or San Francisco, or those ridiculous communities up in Marin County. There must be something about living too close to all that water that brought out the aberrant in people. Mankind had climbed out of the primal swamp in order to live on land a long time ago, and on land was where he belonged!

He found Lake Merritt easily enough and drove around it until the Kleiner Mansion loomed up, easily recognizable from its depiction on the old telephone directory. It looked like something out of a Charles Addams cartoon. He expected to see Mortitia and Gomez cavorting on the lawn. The Alameda County Courthouse rose nearby, and East Fourteenth Street, the main arterial that ran all the way from mostly black west Oakland through the city's struggling downtown and out to suburban San Leandro, carried light traffic past the lake.

Could be he was getting another chance. A stolen car, a routine claim—or maybe not. A sixty-year-old Duesenberg worth nearly half a million dollars was far from routine. Was it time for Lamont Cranston to put on his slouch hat and cloak and turn into the Shadow? Was it time for Bruce Wayne to draw down his cowl and his cape while Alfred the butler warmed up the Batmobile for a midnight prowling?

A white Oakland police cruiser stood in front of the Kleiner Mansion, its roof lights flashing.

Lindsey parked his Hyundai beside the cruiser and scampered up the front steps of the mansion, patting his pockets to make sure that he had his notebook and pencil with him.

The Kleiner Mansion had a broad Victorian veranda. A uniformed Oakland police officer was talking with a man and two women, asking them questions and jotting down their responses.

When Lindsey approached, the cop turned. "Who are you?"

Lindsey introduced himself, handed each of the others his business card.

The cop studied the card, then Lindsey, then the card once more. Lindsey was wearing a heavy sweater over a cotton shirt and slacks. He hadn't changed before leaving Walnut Creek. Maybe he should have, he thought, but it was too late to do anything about that now.

"Okay, Mr. Lindsey. Your company carries the policy on the Duesenberg?"

Lindsey nodded. The cop had a tan, Hispanic face with high cheekbones, dark liquid eyes, heavy black eyebrows and a thick handlebar moustache. His speech was unaccented.

"You can get a copy of the police report sometime Monday, but I don't suppose you want to wait that long to get involved, do you?"

Lindsey shook his head.

"Okay. This is Ms. Smith. She's the resident manager of the Kleiner Mansion. And Mr. and Mrs. van Arndt, of the New California Smart Set. I'm headed out of here. And you might as well have one of mine." He handed Lindsey a business card.

It read, Oscar Gutiérrez, Oakland Police Department, and it had a phone number on it.

Lindsey slid the card into his pocket organizer and looked up to see the police cruiser pull out of the Kleiner Mansion driveway. Gutiérrez was gone.

“Mr. van Arndt, Mrs. van Arndt, Ms. Smith—maybe we should step inside and you can give me some facts.”

“Don’t you want to look at the scene first?” van Arndt spoke. He was a tall man, taller than Lindsey by several inches. He wore an old-fashioned tuxedo with silken lapels and a wing-collar shirt and a bow tie that looked as if he’d tied it himself. His hair was parted just off center, slicked back with a glossy substance that shimmered in the lights that surrounded Lake Merritt. His upper lip bore a pencil-thin moustache. He looked a little bit like Mandrake the Magician.

“Look at the scene?”

“The scene of the crime! Come on, man, don’t you realize what’s happened?”

Lindsey was taken aback. “Of course I realize what’s happened. Your car was stolen.”

“Not exactly my car. I drive a 1946 Ford Sportsman. But yes, the Dusie was stolen from right there. Wasn’t it, Wally m’dear?” He pointed to a spot near Lindsey’s Hyundai, managing to turn his head simultaneously toward the woman who stood beside him.

She was several inches shorter than her husband, even in heels. She wore her light brown hair short, a band circling her forehead and a feather rising from behind her head. Her dress was clasped at both shoulders and was draped in champagne colored folds—at least as far as Lindsey could tell by the lights on the mansion’s veranda.

“We’ve been over the ground, Ollie darling.”

Lindsey noticed that she was swaying slightly, and held a half-empty martini glass in one hand. She wore rings on several fingers, and they did not have the look of costume jewelry.

Still, it might be a good idea, and it couldn’t hurt. “Would you show me, Mrs. van Arndt?”

The woman giggled and took Lindsey’s hand. She swayed against him, making her way down the steps of the mansion. She led him to a spot on the gravelled driveway. It swung in a U-shaped loop off Lakeside Drive. There wasn’t much traffic on the drive, this time of night, but a pair of headlights swept past every so often, glaring like the eyes of a great supernatural beast.

The air was chilly and moist. Lindsey’s breath—and Mrs. van Arndt’s—clouded before them. Beyond the mansion, a low bank of fog hung just above the surface of the lake.

“I don’t see anything,” Lindsey said. The driveway was covered with a thick layer of gravel. It would show tire tracks, to a certain extent, but it would hold little if any detail. “Do you know what time the car was taken?”

“What time is it now?” Can you see my little watch, Mr. Lincoln?”

“Lindsey.”

“Can you?” She stood close to him, her shoulders pulled back and chest pushed forward so he could see the old-fashioned timepiece pinned to her bodice. Her hands hung at her sides, one of them holding the martini glass. A few drops splashed on the gravel.

“Wally? Yoo-hoo, Wallis!”

“That’s me,” Mrs. van Arndt giggled. “Ollie must be getting anxious. Have you seen enough, Mr. Lipton?”

“Not much to see here. Let’s go back.”

She took his hand and pulled him along toward the mansion. “Ollie isn’t really so jealous, he just likes to keep an eye on me. We have the same birthday, you know. That’s how we met. I mean, we met at Antibes, have you ever been to Antibes?”

Lindsey hadn’t.

“Well, don’t bother, it’s ruined now. But it used to be wonderful. Ollie and I were both there on vacation and we discovered that we had the same birthday, even the same year. It seemed we were fated for each other. Our parents even named us for famous people. He’s named for Oliver Wendell Holmes. My name was Wallis Warfield Simpson Stanley. Now we’re Ollie and Wally van Arndt.”

She swayed up the steps, still dragging Lindsey by the hand. He was happy to transfer custody back to her husband. They went inside the mansion. The entrance featured a cloak room the size of Lindsey’s house. They passed through it into a huge, high-ceilinged room lighted by electrified chandeliers. The furnishings looked more Victorian than Art Deco. A handful of men and women stood around in period costumes, looking like refugees from a stage production of *The Great Gatsby*. One exception to the tuxedo-and-gown set was a black man in a World War II era uniform. He sat slouched in a period chair, the sleeves of his olive drab Ike jacket marked with a tech sergeant’s chevrons. A row of service ribbons were pinned above the jacket pocket. He appeared to be dozing.

A white-covered table bearing the decimated remains of a buffet meal stood at one end of the of the room; a deserted bandstand, at the other.

“This was our annual 1929 gala,” van Arndt said.

“Where did everybody go?”

“When the Dusie was stolen—well, a few wanted to keep the party rolling, but it just put such a damper on, it fizzled.”

“Did anyone see the car taken?”

“Joe Roberts did.”

“He still here?”

“No. He was too upset to stay. He’s our youngest member, too. The club baby. Thirty-three years old. Some of the members didn’t want to let him join, but he convinced them. He’s a scholar, at that. A great researcher. In fact, that’s why he joined the Smart Set.”

Lindsey had his pocket organizer in his left hand, his gold-plated International Surety pencil in the right. Anybody could get a wooden International Surety pencil, or a plastic company pen, but only top performers got the gold-plated models.

“Did you want to talk to Joe?” van Arndt asked.

“He actually saw the car stolen? Saw the thief get in and drive off in it? How did he start the car? Were the keys left in it? Or did he tow it away?”

“I didn’t see. Wally and I were dancing. The orchestra was playing *Star Dust*. Roberts must have gone outside for a breath of air. I’m afraid he’d had a few sips more than he should have and he wanted to clear his head. At least, that’s what I think.”

“Yes, yes.” Lindsey kept his patience.

“Well, you tell it, Wally, m’dear.”

“He came in shouting,” Wallis furnished. “Waving his arms and shouting, ‘It’s gone, they stole the Dusie!’ And then he fell down.”

“What?”

“Right on the dance floor.”

Van Arndt said, “He was dizzy. Poor chap passed out. He’d had a bit too much, I mentioned that, didn’t I? I’m afraid the

excitement and the sudden change did it. You know, it was pretty stuffy in here. Roberts had just gone outside a few minutes before for some fresh air, when he saw the car taken and came running back in.”

“And you say he left? He took a cab? I hope he didn’t try to drive.”

“No. He gave his statement to Officer Gutiérrez. Did the best he could, anyway.” Van Arndt looked up. Lindsey followed his gaze. Mrs. van Arndt had tipped her glass up and emptied the last drop from it onto the tip of her tongue. She swayed to her feet and made her way from the room.

“Roberts,” Lindsey prompted.

“Dr. Bernstein took him home.”

“Dr. Bernstein?”

“Martha Bernstein.”

“M.D.?”

“Ph.D.”

Lindsey put on his best listening-with-eagerness expression, his gold-plated pencil poised to jot notes.

“Dr. Bernstein is in the Sociology Department at Cal.”

“She an Art Deco enthusiast?”

“I don’t think so.”

“But she’s a member of the club? Or was she here as guest?”

“Oh, she’s a member all right. I was against her, too. Like young Roberts. But she insisted on joining.”

“You couldn’t stop her? Don’t you have a membership committee, or a screening, what do you call it? A blackball?”

“The Kleiner Mansion is municipal property. We have to let anyone join who wants, if we want to meet here. I’d be all for moving to private property, myself. The Kleiner Mansion is a wonderful meeting place, but we could get another clubhouse

where we could run our own affairs. But the board of directors voted to stay, so we have to deal with these bureaucrats and their pettifogging. Oh!"

He raised his eyebrows and grinned, got to his feet. Mrs. van Arndt had returned, her martini glass filled again with sparkling clear fluid, an olive floating in it like a red-irised, green eyeball harpooned on a sliver of pine. Van Arndt took his wife's free hand and raised it to his lips. "So good to see you again, m'dear."

"I couldn't stay away," Mrs. van Arndt said. "Have you boys been entertaining yourselves? Haven't you offered Mr. Lincoln a drink, Ollie? Where are your manners?"

"Lindsey," Lindsey said.

"Mr. Lindsey, please forgive me. Would you care...?"

"No, thank you. What about Dr. Bernstein?"

"Yes."

Mrs. van Arndt made a sour face.

"You don't like her either?" Lindsey asked.

"Don't like her looks, don't like her manners, don't like her clothes, don't like her attitude."

"I can see you don't like her. But—could you be more specific than that? Did she do or say something in particular?"

"I don't think she loves 1929."

Lindsey felt his eyes go out of focus. Wasn't anyone willing to cope with the present? He had enough trouble, constantly dragging his mother back from 1953, her favorite year, or from whatever other era she happened to wander into.

In Mother's case there was a reason if not an excuse. She'd been a pregnant young wife, little more than a teenaged bride, when Lindsey's father was killed aboard ship in the Korean war. Mother had never got over the shock. She was forever ex-

pecting her husband to come home, forever waiting to resume her life. Her doctors had urged Lindsey to institutionalize her, but he'd never been able to bring himself to do it.

But now this—what kind of craziness was this about 1929?

“She lives now,” Mrs. van Arndt amplified.

“Don't we all?”

“I mean,” she paused and sipped at her glass, swaying slightly and rubbing her cheek against her husband's tuxedo shoulder. “I mean, we all formed our club because we all love Art Deco and the era it symbolizes. That's what the New California Smart Set is all about. We all know that things used to be better than they are now. Some of our older members actually recall the old days. They were here, they lived through the Crash of '29.”

“We almost called it the HarCooHoo Club,” van Arndt interrupted. “In honor of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover. Those were the days, Mr. Lindsey.”

Mrs. van Arndt said, “After the Crash, everything went to hell in a handbasket, Mr. Lindsey.”

He noted that she got his name right that time. “But not Dr. Bernstein?”

“Tweedy mannish woman.” Her eyes flashed, not so tipsily. “She studies us. Studies us, can you imagine that? Like specimens under her microscope.”

The van Arndts had sat down facing Lindsey. Van Arndt took his wife's free hand between his two and massaged it. To Lindsey he said, “She gets agitated now and then. But it has become a sordid, ugly world, Lindsey. You wouldn't live in a slum if you could move to a decent neighborhood, would you? As far as I'm concerned, the whole world has turned into a giant slum.”

Lindsey said, “What do you mean, studies you, Mrs. van Arndt?”

She had lifted her martini glass to her lips and looked at Lindsey, apparently baffled by the challenge of trying to sip and speak simultaneously.

Her husband answered for her. “Dr. Bernstein wants to publish a paper about us. Publish or perish, she’s said a thousand times. She comes to meetings and sits and watches and writes.”

Lindsey looked at his own hands, holding golden pencil and pocket organizer.

“That’s all right, old man,” van Arndt said generously. “You’re here on business. Dr. Bernstein even told me the name of the paper she’s planning. *Anachronistic Mimesis and Temporal Alienation: Violent and Nonviolent Acting-Out Strategies of Compensation*. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t know what it means.”

“Me neither, me buck-o, me neither.”

Lindsey scratched his head with the top of his International Surety pencil. “I’m afraid I’m losing the thread here. You told me this fellow Joseph Roberts actually saw the Duesenberg stolen.”

“Caught a glimpse of it, I’d say.”

“Came running back into the mansion shouting and then passed out.”

“Precisely.”

“But he was able to give a statement to Officer Gutiérrez?”

“I think so.”

“And then Dr. Bernstein did—what?”

“She loaded him into her Land Rover and took him home.”

“His or hers?”

“Oh, hers. He was much too drunk to drive. They had to go in her Rover.”

“Yes, but where did they go home to? His home or hers?”

“Please, Mr. Lyons,” Wally van Arndt said, “that is not a polite question at all.” She plucked the olive from her glass and used her teeth to pull it from its toothpick. She chewed carefully on the olive, dropping the toothpick onto the polished hardwood floor. “Besides, they didn’t say.”

## CHAPTER TWO

In the morning Lindsey phoned Oakland Police Headquarters and asked for Officer Gutiérrez. Gutiérrez wasn't in so Lindsey asked if he could get a copy of the theft report on the Duesenberg. Gutiérrez had said Monday, but it couldn't hurt to try. The operator said she'd transfer the call, but after a dozen rings Lindsey decided that nobody worked at headquarters on Sunday.

He didn't like working on weekends himself, but Harden had really come down on him about this claim, and it looked like another of those make-or-break opportunities. International Surety could stall for a while, hoping that the Duesenberg would be recovered. But eventually, if the car didn't turn up, they'd have to pay. Unless they could find an out, like proving contributory negligence. Leaving a car like this one out-of-doors and unguarded, especially in a city with a crime rate like that of Oakland....

Any Duesenberg, especially a 1928 Phaeton, must be a prize plum for collectors—and consequently for thieves. And if they'd left the keys in the ignition, the company could make a strong case against the owners.

Whoever had parked the car and left it standing in the driveway.... Lindsey hit himself on the forehead. He realized that he didn't know who had driven the car last night, who had

left it parked in front of the mansion. Ms. Smith had disappeared somewhere in the mansion while he was talking with the van Arndts, and that couple had practically drowned him in their own boozy bonhomie but they hadn't given him nearly the amount of information he needed.

He was going to recover that Duesenberg, or give it a hell of a shot, anyway. It wasn't the first time he'd set out to save International Surety a bundle on a theft claim, and if he could recover the Phaeton, he'd add to his record. But it was more than a matter of saving the company dollars, more than a matter of winning another gold pencil from International Surety.

It was his chance to be alive again!

Mother was settled contentedly in front of the TV, and while she remained absorbed in a rerun of *The Donna Reed Show*, he phoned their neighbor Joanie Schorr and asked her to come over for a few hours.

Leaving his mother in Joanie's care, Lindsey drove to his office. He called up the New California Smart Set's policy on the computer and studied it. Who had sold the policy? A broker located in Oakland. East Bay Quality Insurance Limited. Huh. He'd dealt with them before, with a stuffy individual named Elmer Mueller. Not much chance they'd be open on Sunday either, but it was worth a phone call. No luck, but at least they had an answering machine and he left his name and a request to call back.

He hadn't wanted to deal with the Mr. Coffee at International Surety. That would have got Ms. Wilbur all out of joint when she came in Monday morning. So he had stopped and bought a styrofoam cup of coffee and a roll at a fast food stand on his way in.

He spread the wrapper on his desk, took a bite of the roll and a sip of the coffee. It wasn't good but it was hot, and that was welcome on a gray winter's morning.

He slipped his pocket organizer out of his jacket and studied the notes he'd made in Oakland the previous night. Mr. and Mrs. van Arndt looked like a pair of lightweights, although they might still be helpful in tracking the stolen Phaeton. But Joe Roberts was the one he needed to talk to first.

There were half a dozen Joseph Roberts in the Oakland directory. Lindsey started the laborious work of phoning them. Three were at home. None of them had ever heard of the New California Smart Set. Two of the numbers rang until he gave up on them. He got one answering machine, left his name and number and asked that Joseph Roberts to call him back.

There was an M. R. Bernstein, Ph.D., in the book. He dialed the number. A man answered. Lindsey asked if Dr. Bernstein was home. The man asked him to hold.

He took another bite of his roll and sipped coffee.

"Dr. Bernstein here."

Lindsey swallowed coffee and roll. "Martha Bernstein?"

"Yes."

He told her who he was, asked if Joseph Roberts was at her house.

She said he was. She said she'd summon him, sounding gleeful at the prospect.

Roberts sounded bleary. Probably he was hung over. If the van Arndts' description was anywhere near accurate, he had good cause to be.

Lindsey said, "I represent the International Surety Corporation, and I'm processing the insurance claim on the Duesen-

berg Phaeton that was stolen last night. I'd like to come out there and have a chat with you, Mr. Roberts."

Roberts didn't reply for a while, but Lindsey waited patiently. Finally, "I don't know—Mr.—what did you say your name was?"

"Lindsey. Hobart Lindsey. International Surety."

"Yeah. Got it."

"Well, may I?"

"May you what?"

"Come and see you about the theft of the Duesenberg."

Another lengthy pause. Lindsey could hear an off-phone conversation, but he couldn't make out what was said. Then he heard Roberts clear his throat. "Ah, I don't think that would be such a good idea, Mr. Lindsey."

"You want to collect on this claim, don't you?"

"It's not my claim. It wasn't my car."

"You're a member of the New California Smart Set, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then it's your car. It's registered in the name of the society."

"Then I guess it is mine. Look, I don't know who took the damned car. I told that cop everything I saw. I think. Actually I don't remember too much about last night. I got kind of stinkeroonie. If you know what I mean."

"Yes."

Another silence.

Then, "So why don't you just get the police report?"

"I intend to, Mr. Roberts. But I'd still like to talk with you. You might have seen something, maybe something useful."

"Wait a minute. You're not a cop, are you?"

"I'm an insurance adjuster."

“Then do your job. Get out of my face. I’m hung over, pal, my head feels like a hot air balloon. Bug off.”

Lindsey heard the phone slam down.

Roberts was probably right. It was unlikely he had seen anything useful, or if he had, it would be in the police report, and Lindsey should have that in another twenty-four hours. But Lindsey hadn’t been kidding about some little detail. People sometimes saw more than they realized. The first report of an incident was usually the most complete and accurate; the human memory started losing track of information within minutes of the event. But there was an odd, opposite effect, as well. People spotted details and tucked them away in some obscure memory bank. And they re-emerged to astonish everyone, anywhere from days to decades later.

Lindsey wanted to question Roberts, as well as all the other members of the society, for another reason. Most car thefts were stranger crimes. The criminal and victim didn’t know each other. The car thief might be anyone from a thrill-seeking delinquent hitting a target of opportunity with nothing more in mind than a joy ride, to an operative of a thoroughly professional ring, stealing cars to order for chop shops or for customers who wouldn’t mind buying merchandise of dubious origin for the sake of a bargain price.

But not all such thefts were committed by strangers. Not all. And the theft of the Duesenberg might be an inside job. Some member of the Smart Set who coveted the club’s collective property for his personal use. Or who thought he might be able to sell the Dusie for a sweet price.

Or maybe the theft had been engineered for the specific purpose of collecting on the insurance claim. What would happen to the \$425,000 if and when International Surety paid off?

Would the club use it to buy another classic car? Or would it go into the general fund? Or would an officer of the club find a way to convert the payment for his personal use?

Lindsey jotted a note to pursue that line. Was there a member of the club in financial hot water? The New California Smart Set had all the earmarks of a cozy bunch of millionaires, but there might be a scattering of ordinary citizens in the club as well.

For instance: was Dr. Bernstein independently wealthy, or did she have to work for a living? The van Arndts had said that she was on the faculty at the University of California. If she was sitting on a nice fat trust fund, she might be teaching just because she liked it. But if that was not the case, if she had to live on a professor's salary, well, Lindsey knew that academics nowadays earned a living wage, but they were hardly up there with movie stars or professional athletes. Dr. Bernstein might be happy to get her mitts on almost half a million simoleons. Who wouldn't?

And Lindsey didn't know what Joe Roberts did for a living. And as for the van Arndts, they might reek of dollars, but there was many an old fortune that had shrunk with the years. They might be keeping up a facade of wealth and leisure and behind it be teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

Wait a minute! Van Arndt had said that the club was forced to take in members it didn't really want, because the Kleiner Mansion was a public facility. Ollie had spoken of moving the society to a clubhouse of its own, so it could become the kind of snooty, exclusive outfit he apparently preferred. They could buy a very nice clubhouse for just under half a million smackers!

What to do? Wait for the police report? That wasn't the way Hobart Lindsey conducted himself!

Joseph Roberts' voice on the phone from Dr. Bernstein's house had sounded husky and his pronunciation had been slurred, but it sounded a lot like the voice on the message tape at one of the Joseph Roberts' homes. Lindsey found a map of Oakland, searched for Roberts' street in the index, and found it near the Oakland Estuary. He made up his mind.

He dialed home. Joanie Schorr assured him that Mother was all right and that she was willing to stay for the rest of the day. She handed the receiver to Mother and Lindsey assured her that he had not deserted her.

She sounded calm.

He drove to Oakland—twice in two days, now!—and found the Embarcadero. Roberts' address was in a block of modernistic condos opposite a railroad track and an industrial slum. But the condos themselves looked expensive, and with the estuary on the other side, it seemed a safe bet that the occupants wiped the sight of the factories and warehouses from their minds when they got home at night.

He parked and found Roberts' apartment, and settled in to wait for the man to come home. Of course Roberts might be staying at Dr. Bernstein's house for the rest of the day, but Lindsey didn't want to tackle him there. Better to beard the lion in his den.

Roberts had a reserved parking spot with his name on a little wooden marker. It was one of a long row. It reminded Lindsey of a simple cross marking a grave in a national cemetery. Mother loved to page through copies of *Life* and *Look* magazines from the 1940s and '50s and '60s, and Lindsey had seen