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AVENUE



PUBLISHED BY POCKET BOOKS NEW YORK



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020

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For information address Simon and Schuster, 1230
Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020

ISBN: 0-671-44593-6

First Pocket Books printing July, 1956

80 79 78 77 76 75 74 73

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Printed in the U.S.A.

0-677-44593-6

Cover:
Dress — Jackie Rogers
Jewelry — Ylang Ylang

79 PARK AVENUE

HAROLD ROBBINS

The voluptuous tale of a gorgeous New York call girl who really liked her work.

She had known more men than she could remember . . . and a few she would never forget—the stepfather who had started her on her way . . . the racketeer who had been willing to pay any price for her . . . and the cop who prosecuted her in court and was the only man she'd ever really loved.

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AND they began to go out one by one, beginning with the eldest, till Jesus was left alone with the woman, still standing in full view. Then Jesus looked up and asked her, Woman, where are thy accusers? Has no one condemned thee? No one, Lord, she said. And Jesus said to her, I will not condemn thee either.

THE GOSPEL According to St. John, CHAPTER 8

CONTENTS

The State vs. Maryann Flood	1
Book One: Marja	25
The State vs. Maryann Flood	175
Book Two: Mary	191
The State vs. Maryann Flood	273
Book Three: Maryann	285
The State vs. Maryann Flood	391

The State vs. Maryann Flood

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

I PULLED the car into the parking-lot across the street from Criminal Courts. Before I had a chance to cut the engine, the attendant was holding the door for me. I eased out slowly, picking up my briefcase from the seat beside me. I had never rated this kind of service before.

"Nice day, Mr. Keyes," he said, falling into step with me as I walked toward the exit.

I looked up at the sky. It was—if you liked gray December days. I nodded. "Yes, Jerry."

I stopped and looked at him. There was a grin on his face. He didn't have to tell me that he already knew. I could see it. That was why I rated today.

"Thanks," I said and cut across the street to the courthouse. It had been only twenty minutes since I myself found out. Eight miles and twenty minutes ago, in a hospital room in the Harkness Pavilion. Yet they knew it down here already.

The Old Man's face had been gray with pain against his

pillow. I was standing at the foot of his bed. "You're gonna have to take it, Mike," he whispered.

I shook my head. "No, John. I can't."

"Why?" His whisper had an almost eerie quality.

"You know why," I answered. I hesitated a moment. "Give it to one of the others. You have enough assistants. Why pick on me?"

His whisper exploded into a sharp sound. "Because they're all political hacks, that's why. You're the only one I can trust, you're the only one I hired for myself. All the others were shoved down my throat, and you know it!"

I didn't answer even though I knew he wasn't speaking the truth. Ever since Tom Dewey had been D.A., the office had been free of political persuasion. The only thing political about the office was John DeWitt Jackson's ambitions.

His eyes were fixed on mine. I couldn't turn away from them now. "Remember when you first came to me? You were a cop then, and the soles of your shoes were almost an inch thick. You had your law diploma in your hand. You even called yourself by your fancy real name, Millard Keyes. There were marbles in your mouth when you asked me for a job. I asked you: 'Why my office?' Do you remember your answer?"

I remembered, all right. That was the only time I didn't use the name people called me by, Mike. I didn't speak.

"I'll tell you what you said." He raised his head on the pillow. "You said, 'I'm a cop, Mr. Jackson, and there's only one side to the law for me.'"

"I gave you the job because I believed what you told me." His head sank back against the pillow wearily and his voice returned to a whisper again. "Now you want to run out on me."

"I'm not running out on you, John," I said quickly. "I

just can't take this case. It's not fair to me, and I'm afraid I wouldn't be fair to you. I told you that when it first started."

"I wasn't worried about you then and I'm not worried now," he whispered vehemently. He turned his face away for a second. "Damn this appendix! Why couldn't it keep another few weeks?"

In spite of myself, I smiled. The Old Man didn't miss a trick. He pulled out all the stops. "You know what the doctor said. This was one time he couldn't freeze it for you," I answered with a proper show of sympathy.

He nodded sorrowfully. "That's doctors for you. On the eve of the most important trial of my career."

I knew what he meant. A few months from now the boys would be sitting down in the back rooms all over the state. By the time they got around to opening the windows to air out the smoke and whisky fumes, the next Governor would have been picked out.

The Old Man had timed it very cleverly. Not so early they would forget, not so late they would have decided. But now he was scared. What would serve for him would serve for the others. And he didn't want to take any chances.

He looked down the bed at me. His eyes filled with an inexpressible sorrow. "Mike," he whispered, "you've never been like the others. You've been almost—well, almost like a son to me. You were my one hope, the only thing in the whole damn office that I was proud of. You were my boy.

"I'm not a young man any more. I've made my plans, and if they miss, I accept it. It's God's will." He shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly in the white cotton hospital nightshirt. He was silent a moment; then his voice grew

hard. "But I don't want any slimy, son-of-a-bitchin' opportunists climbing up my ladder!"

We stared at each other silently for a few moments, and then he spoke again. "Go into court for me, Mike," he pleaded. "You got a free hand. You're the boss. You can do anything you like. You can even ask the court to dismiss the charge on the grounds that we haven't been able to make a case. You can make a monkey out of me if you like. I don't care. Just don't let any of the others climb on my body."

I took a deep breath. I was licked and I knew it. I didn't believe he meant a word of what he had said, but it made no difference. He was mean and crafty and gave away ice in the winter, but there were tears in my eyes and I loved every lying bone in his body.

He knew it, too, for he began to smile. "You'll do it, Mike?"

I nodded. "Yes, John."

He reached under the pillow and pulled out some typewritten notes. "About the jurors," he said, his voice stronger now. "Look out for number three—"

I interrupted him. "I know about the jurors. I've been reading the minutes." I headed for the door. I opened it and looked back at him. "Besides, you promised me a free hand—remember?"

The reporters hit me almost before I set foot on the courthouse steps. I smiled grimly to myself as I tried to push my way through them. The Old Man must have been on the phone the minute I left the room.

"We hear you're taking over for the D.A., Mr. Keyes. Is that true?"

He wouldn't have gotten an answer even if I had been so minded. I hated people who made it sound like *keys*. The name was Keyes, rhyming with *eyes*. I kept walking.

They followed me with a barrage of questions.

I stopped on the steps and held up my hands. "Give me a break, fellers," I pleaded. "You know I just came back from my vacation this morning."

"Is it true that the D.A. sent you a telegram before he went into the hospital the day before yesterday? That the adjournment was only to give you time to return?"

I pushed my way through the revolving doors, turned right, and headed past the press room for the elevators. A couple of flashbulbs exploded, sending crazy purple spots flashing across my eyes. At the elevator door I turned and faced them.

"We'll have a statement for you at the noon recess, gentlemen. From then on I'll try to answer every question I can. All I want now is a few minutes alone before I have to be in court."

I ducked through the door, and the operator shut it in their faces. I got out on the seventh floor and went to my office at the end of the hall.

Joel Rader was waiting there for me. He came toward me, his hand outstretched. "Good luck, Mike."

I took his hand. "Thanks, Joel," I said. "I'll need it." Joel was one of the men the Old Man meant. He was bright, tough, and ambitious, just a few years older than I.

"How's the Old Man?" he asked.

"You know him," I said, grinning. "Bitchin'." I walked toward my desk.

"Man, you should've heard him the other day when the doctor gave him the sad news," he said, following me. "Practically tore the doctor's head off."

"I can imagine," I said, tossing my hat and coat on the small wooden bench opposite my desk. I sat down and

looked up at him. "I didn't mean to cut in on your deal, Joel," I said.

He smiled insincerely. "You're not cutting in, Mike," he answered quickly. "After all, you worked with the Old Man on the investigation. I understand."

I understood, too. He was clearing himself in advance in case anything went wrong. That didn't mean he wouldn't have wanted it for himself. He was headline-happy, but he wasn't taking any chances. "Is Alec around?" I asked. Alec Carter was the other attorney who assisted the Old Man in court with Joel.

"You know Alec." Joel deadpanned. "But he left the Old Man's notes on your desk for you."

I knew Alec. He had nervous kidneys and spent most of his time in the can before going into court. He was all right once he was in the courtroom. I looked down at the desk. The neatly typed notes were in front of me.

I turned back to Joel. He beat me to the punch. He was five years my senior in the office and wasn't going to give me a chance to dismiss him.

"I'll be in my office if you need anything, Mike," he said.

"Thanks, Joel," I answered, watching the door close behind him. I fished a pack of butts out of my pocket and lit one before I looked down at the papers on my desk.

The indictment was right on the top of the pile. I picked it up and stared at it. I turned my chair so that the light from the window behind me would fall directly on the paper. The heavy black type flashed up at me.

People of the State of New York against

Maryann Flood, Defendant