By Dennis Louis Dyer

Hollywood, 1950: Five years after the second World War, film-makers have revived Hollywood's golden age and an upscale stockbroker is murdered at the Chateau Chillon, an exclusive hotel. Private detective Mark Taylor is retained to investigate.

Prior to the murder, Mark had declined a request to find the estranged husband of Meredith Morgan. She is private secretary to wealthy industrialist Louis Schribner and resides at his estate. Schribner needs someone to search for some missing documents and Meredith suggested contacting Mark. Later, Mark and Meredith spend an evening out together, having planned to see a movie but instead went to a night-club owned by Hymie Hillman.

Mark narrates this action that begins when he is driving her home to Hollywood Hills. The story line strengthens romance ties between them and leads into a suspenseful situation and diversion.

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We watched the canyon road roll by. There was a lot to say but it wouldn't come out. We topped the summit at Mulholland and started downgrade. Again there was beauty in the serenity and solitude. Just being with her made it that way. I know there was no harm in thinking this way about her.

Suddenly the sweet strains of 'Clair de Lune' found a niche in my mind and I got to thinking the slow and then turbulent ripping spells of the rhythm were shadows of Meredith.

It was soft; she was soft. It was restless; she was restless. It was moody; she was moody. It was beautiful and she was beautiful too. Only I had noticed at Hymie Hillman's that a certain set hardness crept in every now and then as if she was mad as somebody or something. I thought maybe she had a stinger like a scorpion and could strike like a snake.

My thoughts were broken by headlights that were tailing me too close. I eased up on the throttle and the car behind slowed down too. I picked up speed down the grade, just enough to make the curves without squealing rubber, and the guy following raced his car along.

I couldn't tell what make car it was. I would tend to that when I got to the boulevard. I knew I couldn't get rid of him by scooting up one of the dead end streets off the canyon drive. He was a good wing man. He kept right on our tail. But I kept him right in my rear-view mirror.

I didn't tell Meredith we were being tailed. It wasn't any of her business. At least I didn't think so.

Most of the homes along the canyon were lit up and the lights twinkled in the blindness of the darkness. Glimmers from headlights, street lights and house lights

filtered through the trees to cause streaky bits of white to hit inside the car and upon our faces. A ray bounced off Meredith and I thought I saw her wince and fidget slightly. I was about to ask a question but she took the play away from me.

She said something that made me think maybe she was under the weather with a bug fluttering around in her stomach.

"If you're sick I'll rush you home," I said.

"No, not that. There's nothing but turmoil there..

I took a fast glance at her and noticed that her gaze was centered on the road in a sort of fixed look with her eyes glassy. I tried hard to be casual. "What is it? What's wrong?.

She looked as if she was going to pass out. I reached over to her window and rolled it down. The wind shot into the car and a slight odor, like oleander, rushed in. It seemed to revive her. I turned toward her and she returned my look with a piqued smile that told me she was all right.

We got to the bottom of the canyon where the glare of the street lights clashed with the swank neon writings on the shops and night clubs. The brightness almost turned the boulevard into daylight.

I looked in the mirror and Mr. Tail-job was doing a good job of flying number two spot in our formation. He had followed and was keeping about a half block back. I wondered whether I should try ditching him before I reached Schribner's house.

Just then I saw Meredith shiver and I stretched out my arm past her to roll the window up. She guided it back brushing her cheek with the back of my hand. Then she grabbed it and pressed it hard against her cheek. She said something that sounded like a sigh. I took my hand back and put it where it belonged -- on the wheel.

"Don't take me home..

"The Jimmy Stewart picture is over by now..

"What difference ---.

"I promised your boss I'd get you home early..

"It's too early now." she murmured.

I knew what she meant and I let what she said guide me. I wanted to park but thought better of it, especially with a guy tailing us. So I kept on driving and passed up the turnoff to Schribner's hillside place, then the last of the high-brow clip joints. The lights dimmed and seemed to turn off as we dropped over into Beverly Hills.

Out of the distant shadows I could make out the spectral estates and mansions. As we loafed along, my wing man kept pace with us. When we were near the Beverly Hotel, Meredith leaned her head back over along the car seat and sighed tightly but with a spasm of relief.

"I know a place," she whispered. Her voice was strained, taut.

"No more drinking," I cautioned.

"It's not a drinking spot," she protested. There was a challenging overtone in the way she said it.

"No motels either," I said, using my better judgment.

"And it's not a motel," she sputtered.

I just drove for a few moments and she seemed to accept my silence as a defiant challenge. "Let me out," she hissed. "I'll take a cab." She had a glint and blaze in her look that made me think of fire reflecting off a tiger's eyes.

"Put away your guns, Angel face. I'm just trying to protect you..

"Better take care of yourself first..

"Okay, so you don't need protection." It was half comment, half question.

I braked the car to a stop in a quiet neighborhood. I'd had about enough and decided to call her bluff. "Get out," I said.

She opened the door and started to get out. I barely caught a glimpse of her in the dark as she furrowed her brow, relaxed a bit and then sat over on the edge of the seat and clung to the door handle.

"You're a nice bushel of peaches, Angel face, but your temper gets to me..

"I could say the same about you..

She was lost in her mind for a few moments that seemed like hours. Then suddenly she pulled her legs in, set back on the seat and slammed the door shut. She reminded me of a badly fused firecracker that sizzles when it should pop then explodes with a loud bang when you don't expect it.

"Fine! You win! Take me home," she said.

"Okay..

My wing man was flashing a lighter at a street sign a block behind. I started the car going and headed east. Mr. Tail-job was on the job again. A block later I saw him turn the corner and tag along again. I didn't want him to track us all the way to Schribner's house so I came up with a plan and turned south on Highway One.

"Would it be asking too much to ask where you're taking me?" Meredith nestled into the far corner of the seat and turned half-way around so she could see me.

"Go ahead and ask..

"I'm asking -- where?.

"To a show..

"To a show?.

"Yeah, a movie..

"What for? I thought we nixed that idea..

"You'd be surprised..

I drove on as fast as red lights would let me and slowed down when we got to the drive-in theater that I was aiming for. I cornered into the driveway and stopped near a

white-smocked attendant. He was a callow-faced kid with a long nose, black curly hair and a chin-full of pimples.

He leaned toward the car and I asked what time the next show started. He said the main feature was about over. I looked back then and saw Mr. Tail-job across the street, double-parked. He looked as if he couldn't make up his mind what to do next. He was in a light-blue Buick with a lot of chrome around it, one of the late models.

I rolled on to the ticket booth and paid for two and smiled at the uniformed brunette when she smiled at me. Then I flicked my dim lights on and took my blind chances easing along in the dark as attendants guided me with their flashlights.

There was a parking slot near the front and I nosed the car in and braked. I reached out and hooked the window speaker on the door. John Wayne was in a wild dash with a bunch of Indians, then the chase was settled and he made torrid love to a pretty blonde who looked familiar.

Meredith moved around a bit trying to get comfortable. She sat straight up on the edge of the seat and stared at the screen. I settled back and looked at her for a long moment. Then I rested an arm on the back of the seat my hand behind her. She eased into my arms, smooth and graceful, like a gentle-moving swan on a mirrored pond.

My arms went around her and the scent of her perfume lingered with me. Her head came close to my face and her hair felt like folds of satin on my cheek. I let a hand wander about and I fooled around with the lacy inside edge of her low-cut gown -- only I wasn't fooling.

Her lips found mine and I kissed her hard. Her lips parted and she speared me with a hot lance that sent quivering tremors through my body like a hot knife ripping me to shreds. She pushed hard into me and breathed in short and fast gasps.

"Hold me tight, you brute," she said hoarsely.

I felt her shake in a jerky spasm and her trembling started me shaking. Her eyelids flickered faintly, and then stopped and closed. Her arms tightened around me.

"I want you, darling," she said softly.

I drew back from her. She opened her large round eyes. She looked more beautiful than a rose at sunrise and was making every word count.

"Take me someplace private." She raised her head and kissed me again. It was a long, lingering kiss, the kind that lifts you up and knocks you down, takes your breath away and leaves you all worn out.