



CHESS BARBS

BY by Jude Acers, US Senior Master

The Lady Of The Knight

THE ROAD

Chapter 7

"If Celerio had known..."

If your mother dies in a plane crash when you are a child, if your father is crazy and drinks himself to death before dying, then you may need a little help to get by. Chess, like music, like love, has the power to make people happy, as Dr. Tarrasch of Germany has told us in his great chess writings. Chess can help you survive even when your father is beating you to a bloody pulp. Chess is that wonderful for the mind, a pure narcotic.

I have never known love, although many wonderful ladies have done their level best to beckon in recent years. I suppose I grew up in a huge vacuum cleaner with many noises, colors, violent happenings, but not real live people. Remembered most were hard-hitting Louisiana State University days on a campus with 25,000 people. Then came Christmas and I was alone in the dorm and had the whole campus to myself. I lived on popcorn, chess, cokes, candy bars, dreams. It was not a good life but I did my best to stay occupied and pretend everything was o.k.

I played the radio 24 hours a day and pretended that someday I would get an opportunity to play in the biggie chess tournaments, a dream that was shattered years later by the retirement of international chessmaster William Addison and his analysis of corruption, New York mania, stupidity and bureaucratic incompetence within the U.S. Chess Federation offices.

To pass the time in this loneliness, I took incredible chances to have a "good time." In lily-white Louisiana I went to an all black nightclub to see the late Otis Redding destroy the place three nights in a row. I walked along super highways at night in the humid, torching Baton Rouge with the hot rods flashing lights in my eyes and people throwing beer cans at me. Once three fraternity guys tried to run me over, but I dodged and their car stalled in the mud alongside the road. I grabbed a loose board, ripped it from a gate and advanced like Hannibal on the terrified occupants. Then I put out every window in their car as they watched incredulously, with me screaming "Ko-Wan-Ko! Ko-Wan-Ko!" a voodoo chant which I made up on the spot.

Afterward, I stepped back and bowed gracefully. "You may now leave or die," I said. While cursing insanely, the driver did manage to get the car going again and peeled off into the Louisiana night, leaving me, as before, alone. The Bee Gees were playing on their car radio while all this was going on...

...I do not want to be without my radio and cassette player on the road. I need continuous sound to forget, quite frankly, that I have no family, no roots, no real friends, save my manager, and to dance as Zorba in the hotel and motel rooms, where I expect to die. It is a simple fact that I can identify instantaneously, at sound's first half second, countless thousands of pop records from 1956 to this hour. I live by the radio and catch the touring groups in concert no matter how tight my schedule. I live for today and try to take delight in everything while yesterday or now plays, whether it is Vanilla Fudge, Bachman-Turner-Overdrive, The Impalas or Buddy Holly blasting from the past. And somehow my world works, keeping my head barely above water. Little by little, I am forgetting the bad breaks. I do not hate anymore.

In Baton Rouge for years I was the mysterious night-time sit-'em-on-coke-cases-telephone kid. When I was going crazy in my tiny skid-row room in a condemned, unoccupied building, I would skip over to a service station two blocks away. It was locked and deserted, but it had a groovy coin telephone and Coca-Cola cases to sit on. And there, at 1 a.m. in complete darkness save the traffic light that was changing for no purpose in sweltering heat, I phoned the beloved Mary Anne Jones, who was madly in love with her psychiatrist, who was madly in love with his wife.

I did not know why the lucious, atomic Mary Anne talked to her secret confidant, Jude, but it is a fact that we often had eight-hour phone conversations. That was a long time sitting on those Coca-Cola cases, and sometimes they were filled with empty bottles, which you noticed in spots during eight-hour phone conversations. Oh, heart throb! ...The number one record was the fabulous Ben E. King's "I, Who Have Nothing." With no money, no friends, no family, no future, and fired from jobs in three pizza parlors and four restaurants for too much chess play on the premises, Jude Acers could still not understand why he went crazy with delight when Ben E. came on the radio with "I, Who Have Nothing." Why did Mary Anne Jones keep people waiting in the LSU ladies dorm lobby for hours just to talk to that weird chessplayer creep, the sit-'em-on-coke-cases-telephone kid?

"Because she liked you a lot, you dummy!" her roommate told me eleven years later during a Little Rock Chess exhibition.

I never thought of that. Why didn't she tell me? (What could the lovely Mary Anne, see in an 18 year-old chess-master in the football kingdom of earth?)

YES, believe me folks, Mary Anne was dynamite. She was five feet, four inches tall with geometric proportions that would have made evil men out of the Cisco Kid, Pancho, the Lone Ranger and Tonto. I once

saw Mary Anne cross the Highland Road-Chimes Street intersection in front of ye olde Maxwell Soda Fountain in Tigertown. Traffic halted in all four lanes. Then, as she moved down the parade grounds, the traffic merged in pursuit. Mary Anne had dark brown eyes and dresses that moved when she moved. She was innocently wicked. She lived in the ladies dorm for her own protection. The wolves were everywhere.

Once I talked with Mary Anne's boyfriend number 86. He told me that Mary Anne loved motorcycles and that Mary Anne helped his driving on the Honda.

"How so?" Jude asks. "Well, she's a safety factor. Usually people run over a motorbike, don't even realize that Honda's on the road. But when Mary Anne rides, believe me, everybody notices and nobody ever seems to pass us," boyfriend number 86 says.

"That's amazing. Are you serious?" queries Jude. "Oh yeah. Only drawback is cops. I've been stopped three times for a defective tail light by the cops when Mary Anne rode with me. But it never gets noticed when I ride by myself. Guess I'll have to get it fixed. I intend to take Mary Anne for a ride several hundred times this year," says boyfriend number 86 without the trace of a smile or humor.

While the Mary Anne-Jude all-night conversations on the state of the nation were in progress, the same policemen would pass me disbelievingly throughout the night. After several weeks one of the cops came up to the service station with a serious, alarming look on his face.

"Hi! Do you live by this phone?" said the cop. "Well, no, I don't. Any problem, sir?" asked Jude. The policeman looked unconvinced.

"We're taking up a collection at the police station to get you a nice comfortable chair so that when you talk to your lovely girlfriend you won't have to sit on those coke cases," he said, smiling now.

"She's not my girlfriend, sir. She's my top secret confidant," Jude said. And Mary Anne was dying of laughter on the other end, hearing every word.

The cop continued, "Seriously, we're bringing the chair over next week. We'll just store it in the service station men's room. You just pull it out when the cokes get uncomfortable, you know, about the sixth hour or so."

And the record must show that the next Monday night I went to phone the lovely Mary Anne in downtown Baton Rouge, where nothing moves but the cockroaches after 5 p.m. And there by the desolate gasoline station was a slightly used green cushion chair beneath the telephone, provided for the greatest by the Baton Rouge City Police Department. I still don't believe it. Support your local chessmaster. Give him a chair!

Sometimes Mary Anne Jones would get very angry when we telecommunicated. But never, never would she hang up. We would just sit there in the deep south and listen to each other breathe. I am not kidding. She could even hear the traffic light change hundreds of times on my end as I sat in total darkness amidst coke cases while breath listening in my emperor green cushion chair. Then one 3 a.m. I broke all the rules.

Knowing that I could never understand affection whether received or given, I hung up the telephone after listening to Mary Anne breathe for only one and a half hours. Mary was furious and didn't speak to me for a long time afterward.

The last straw came with a concert by Eric Burden and the Animals in big B.R. I did not even show up for the first and only date Mary Anne and I planned in six years of telephoning in the deep swamp country. Mary Anne could not understand what it was like to play and study a game which called for travel all over the world, sleeping on hotel floors and in telephone booths and men's rooms, with a healthy dose of starvation, isolation and Swiss system madhouse weekend chess tournaments, where all the bad guys are out to get Y-O-U. I explained to Mary Anne that this was really the life!

"No, thanks, Jude," she said. My mind was torn by the crumby weekend chess tournaments in crumby hotels with crumby tournament directors, creepy bigoted people, and absolute crumb-dam chess opponents, who did the worst things possible, like...ahh...defeating me, for insatnce. I did not believe affection or people could be real in my life. It was always somebody else in the movie who got the beautiful lady. But Mary Anne tried, really tried. She knew the sit-'em-on-coke-cases-telephone kid was a monster headed for the big time. She knew it before anybody else, eleven years before chess tours began and a man named Miller sank more than ten grand into my travel. Most importantly, she believed in me in a funny, indirectly expressed way. She is gone now, but not forgotten. You see...there was Paula.

You'll understand that I drifted endlessly after Mary Anne. Little Rock, Fayetteville, Chicago, Salt Lake City, Denver, Marysville (Wash.), Seattle and San Francisco in 1968 alone. Then Aspen, Colorado and then came Paula. She was the main event of my life and by far the most dangerous, though I never really knew her. The fact remains that for no reason whatsoever I put my life on the line for another person in a game with a man named Celerio. I still do not know why.

Celerio was deadly, a cobra. He managed an apartment house and was nicknamed "Sell" because that's

what he did. He was quite proud of his salesmanship and sold other things like hot television sets, electronic gadgets and 16 women who lived in his apartment building. I met Celerio because I was looking for a little room in which to study chess. As we walked about the place, Celerio offered me a hot radio, hot camera or hot lady for a fee properly paid in advance. He also informed me that he wasn't much of an intellectual, having quit school at grade four and "the only book I've ever read cover-to-cover was the Godfather."

I swallowed hard at my accidental trip into Celerio's world, said my goodbyes courteously and got out of there. During Christmas I was on the street, sleeping on hotel floors and hustling people for 25 cents a game at Specs and Vesuvius. Hundreds of people played me and received the shock of their lives. My playing strength varied from strong class "C" to grandmaster level, depending on how much I needed for living expenses and egg salad sandwiches at a nearby Chinese grocery store.

Then came a real break, as an exotic dancer named Gloria played chess with me in a coffee house and let me stay at her beautiful penthouse apartment for awhile. "You don't have to be a millionaire to live like one!" Karl Bach had told me once. (True.)

At Gloria's penthouse all sorts of interesting people were in and out 24 hours a day. I kept my ears closed and my eyes fastened on rooks, bishops and pawns, grateful for shelter from North Beach rain and cold. I tried to remember Fritzing's maxim "Don't ever bother the host." And Cary DeBessonnet, Baton Rouge playboy and lady-killer, had advised, "Remember when you are being fed you must take everything!" Wherever the party was in the huge apartment I was not.

I decided to study Botvinnik's 1951 world title chess match with Bronstein and that's what I was doing on New Year's Eve when the big party began with dozens of gangster heavies, dope dealers, dancing ladies, derelicts and North Beach characters flooding in the front rooms.

I was in a corner bedroom with a pile of coats as company. I was wondering how Botvinnik could be a whole rook up against Bronstein and not win as I felt a soft hand touch the back of my neck. I turned around and saw a stunning woman in a see-through dress.

"Hi, I'm Paula. Are you Jude, the chessplayer?" she asked.

I practically fainted and was almost unable to say a few hundreds words. I settled for "Yes, ma'am. I am indeed the great Jude."

Then Paula informs me that "Gloria told Celerio and me to come to her party so we could play chess with you, Jude."

Jude sits there and thinks about it. Celerio had been a regular topic of conversation at Gloria's apartment. The question everybody was asking was whether Celerio had personally committed several murders or simply arranged them. And, too, there was this gentleman friend of Paula's who had visited her without paying his one-hundred dollar membership to the Paula fan club to Celerio first. It seems that two people had dragged him outside Celerio's building where a third party broke his elbow and knee joints with a baseball bat. Then they put him in a garbage can and half closed the lid over him. Would Jude play a few games with Celerio?

Jude Acers looked down at his quivering kneecaps, rubbed his left elbow joint thoughtfully and said, "Well, gosh, just show the guy right in, Paula. No charge. We'll just play a few friendly chess games. I hope he isn't one of those sore losers you hear about all the time."


"Oh, no, Jude. Don't worry. He only beats up people who beat him at cards," says Paula. Ha, ha.

"Well, gee, that's nice to know," Jude is thinking as Paula gets Celerio to come to the back room. We recognize each other instantly and begin to play a few skittles, games. Celerio says, "if I don't at least tie a game I'm gonna do something drastic like throw you out of the window without your trousers on."

Jude Acers thinks that over for one one-thousandth of a second and remembers that Gloria's apartment is six stories in the sky. Celerio's play immediately begins to improve tremendously and he draws the next two games in a row. This is amazing, as he was drinking whiskey by the tumbler. And all the while Paula just sat there purring and rubbing Jude's neck and asking if she can play when Celerio gets through. Not noticing her dazzling see-through dress more than 500 times, Jude agrees to play a game with Paula. And suddenly it is morning and all tomorrow's parties are over. Jude is the only sober person and steps over 20 entangled bodies to go over to the Coffee Gallery and think about it all. Ten hours later they are all gone.

It was January 13th. I was packing my things for the road when the buzzer rang in Gloria's apartment. I answered the door and Paula was standing there, badly beaten up. Her face had been blackened on one side by a terrific pounding from Celerio. Without a word she stepped inside, grabbed my arm and led me to a small bedroom and locked the door from the inside.

Paula told me that she had been in the hospital five days. She described being kicked in the stomach "fifty times" when she told him she was going to have a baby.



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from page 14

I already knew that Gloria had found Paula in the hall unconscious with blood pouring down her legs and several stairsteps. Only a fast cab ride to the hospital had saved Paula.

What Paula asked me to do was simple. She wanted me to risk a terrifying beating or even death to help her leave San Francisco and Celerio forever. There were a "few problems", she explained, such as (A.) She needed to siphon off "about ten thousand" dollars from Celerio's gentleman entertainment business, (B.) get it out of the building secretly (C.) store the money with you-know-who, (D.) make a complete escape, arranged by you-know-who, and (E.) possibly you-know-who could get killed.

"Why me? Why me? Oh, God, why me?" Jude is thinking and trembling all over. Then Paula says the magic words. "Jude, please be my secret confidant, my secret friend. Make a play for me, Jude. Please. Please."

In a flash, Jude's mind goes back to Louisiana State University days, to the phone, the service station, Mary Anne, the green cushion chair. He is saying to the cops, "She is my top secret confidant." It is a blast from the past and just like that Jude is on the hook. She has said those words and.....

I hear myself telling Paula to meet me on her grocery trip at noon tomorrow in a small Chinese restaurant where Fritzingler took me for tea and noodles many times. I already saw a baseball bat going through the air, hitting me again and again, as Paula smiled gratefully and was leaving. I am falling in blood, dying.

It was going to be tough, a problem too strong to die. Paula lived in Celerio's apartment (one) and was watched day and night. He let her go out for groceries at noon for an hour or so. There was no room for amateurs or lemons in the plan. It had to be simple and ruthless. Chess grandmaster Larry Evans tells us that he is always suspicious of complex winning variations when simple ones will do just as well. I needed an idea and none came.

I was quaking, scared to death long after Paula closed the door. But you should go into anything you are interested in doing all the way. If I was going to play this madhouse game and take Celerio's \$75,000-a-year baby away from him, then I was going to spring her out of that place with her ten grand, clean as a whistle.

I cared enough to give Celerio my very best. If it was going to be him or me, it sure as hell was going to be him. It was all or nothing. My world class was at stake. He had to lose. It was his body that would be nailed into the box....

That night I took four walks around Celerio's block to get the lay of the land, just as I learned in the Boy Scouts. Celerio's building was locked up tight. It was going to be a tricky business to get inside a locked building dozens of times, meet Paula without being seen, and walk out of there with portions of ten thousand dollars on my body. It was, in fact, absolutely impossible, and I now realized the tremendous problem. I might get to walk around once or twice in the hallways without being noticed, but never with all that money changing hands and 15 other lady employees of Celerio living there.

Not the shred of an idea, plan, hope. Believe me, I had given up. Paula would have to do it by herself and a miracle. And I fully intended to tell her this at noon. And, also, I hadn't the faintest idea where in the hell I was going to store even half of ten thousand dollars which she desperately needed to leave. But I decided to have a look inside the building before quitting. I did not want to die.

The next day Paula arrived at the Chinese place. Our conversation was a minute flat: "Paula, listen and do exactly as I tell you. When he is asleep in the morning, pull your kitchen window shade down. (If he's up, the shade goes up.) I'll give a quick ring on the buzzer and you drop the front door key to me. I'll leave it on top of the hall telephone in a few minutes. I'm going to have a look inside. See you tomorrow, here, same time."

I already knew that it would be useless to have duplicate keys made, as I would never be able to enter the building 20 times without seeing a baseball bat. My mind was burning with questions and no answers. I would take one lightening walk down the halls as if I was a renter who had just moved in. And if I couldn't come up with a plan, that would just be too bad. But at least I wasn't scared anymore. I would take the risk to play. Also, only I could decide that I was playing or that there was a game at all. Celerio didn't know.

The next day Paula was on the money. I was up three stairways, down three halls. I opened a little empty doorway that looked like a closet on one floor. There was nothing in there, not even a mop or broom. There were no windows or doors to check. You have to leave beside Celerio's apartment or set off an alarm on the fire exits. In five minutes flat I had Celerio's key on top of the phone and was outside the building in the bright sunlight and was pumping my feet to leave as fast as possible.

I felt a little chill as I saw Paula pulling up her kitchen shade over my shoulder. It was close and was going to be Celerio's last chance. But he didn't know it, and he had a big breakfast of Wheaties "Breakfast of Champions", Paula told me later.

I had no ideas, no plan, no hope. On Tuesday afternoon I faked it and told Paula that I wanted to think about it for two more days. I had now given up and felt Paula would have to go it alone. Paula looked cooked. I had to tell her this the next time we met.

Like so many things in my lifetime, the solution came due to happenings that did not concern me at all. I was crossing Grant Avenue in Chinatown at dawn and suddenly Celerio's \$75,000 baby was going to be sprung clean

as a whistle. What I stared at was a trance, an idea, an old bald man fishing in a garbage can for food to eat. He was looking up at me with shame and a trickle of white milk was streaming down his face. Because of that pathetic, helpless man the race was on for keeps. He must have been really surprised when a mop-haired character rushed up and gave him a few dollars without a word and an ape smile from ear to ear as well. I saw it all now. Do you? Would Celerio?

All puzzle parts passed go when I crossed Broadway to an all night hamburger stand and asked, "what days do I put out the trash for garbage pickup at my new apartment here?"

The man replied, "Tuesdays-Thursdays-Sundays they come." And ten thousand bucks were on their way down Celerio's garbage disposal shaft in the hallway during the next 30 days.

Even before I checked it with Paula I knew the little closet had to be a garbage disposal shaft. There wasn't a trash can in the place. And all I had to do is be damn sure that I beat the garbage-men to the cash.

She explained,
"Just like you give
simultaneous chess
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myself, Jude!"

You have to understand the reason we were able to get away with it. Paula was a "volume dealer", as she put it in one of her almost daily meetings with me in the Chinese restaurant. She explained, "Just like you give simultaneous chess exhibitions, I can do this with men myself, Jude!"

I didn't want to pursue the subject further, but suffice it to say that she was able to bring in a huge amount of cash in one evening. Also, she was given the night cash for Celerio by several other ladies in the building. It would all wind up in apartment one. Unless, of course, something went wrong.

If a few thousand dollars were missing, Celerio would never know the difference, but he had better not ever find money stashed in Paula's apartment, clothes, or anywhere in the building. The janitor had better not find it. Or any one of 15 ladies. The night, had a thousand eyes, and if a twenty dollar bill was found Paula would pay in blood.

The plan was like magic. Paula would dump cash down the garbage disposal shaft by using small green bags that were taped with a strip of red fluorescent tape. She would drop them only on Tuesday-Thursday-Sunday nights and I would have 24 hours to find the gold. Much garbage might bury it if I waited too long. The other consideration was that if I got caught I was a goner. But these were small risks. It was a great plan and it worked. On January 27th I was collecting.

By now I had to move to the Swiss-American Hotel, a fleabag establishment at the time. A guest died there once and they didn't find the body for almost a week. But this skid-row hotel and my filthy room were very close to the action and the last place anyone would dream of looking for five thousand dollars beneath about fifty chess books, a chess set, a chess clock and loads of dirty socks. It was all in a green dufflebag, which I lived with as much as possible.

The once-a-week changing of bed sheets and towels was a risk I would have to take. I did not think it likely that a maid would tear my dufflebag apart if I happened to be absent. And I brought the green bags into the place with grocery bags that I had stashed in a bush outside.

Let's be honest. I did think about heading for the border when the money climbed over six thousand dollars in less than four weeks. But you can never imagine the TREMENDOUS thrill of all those scary visits to the garbage bin to get Paula's next delivery, the excitement of such a simple plan was intoxicating beyond all greed. Besides, a lady trusted me, needed my help! Besides, who else but Super Jude could have cracked the forbidden vault, stolen the golden goose and captured the flag?

Pride was at stake. What was a paltry six thousand, seven thousand dollars to the best? Just because things were a little tough right now is no reason to take a lady's money and run. But, I admit, I considered it.

If readers could only have seen me in that garbage bin at six in the morning with a pen flashlight searching furiously for the next golden easter egg! It was dynamite. For goodness sakes, try it next time the opportunity presents itself.

The reason Celerio had no chance to catch me? I hit the garbage always when he was inside the building

and Paula could keep track of him with her delightful kitchen shade. Celerio wanted nothing to do with her as he slept, and this was received with joy by our side. Paula lived in that apartment around the clock in order to signal whenever possible when he slept. And I really moved fast. That was a factor, of course. Only Walter Browne could have kept up!

Then, naturally, something went wrong. Paula was dropping bags from the third floor, as far away from apartment one as possible. But the long drop created a nightmare at dawn. Here is what happened:

We were up to about seven thousand dollars, mostly in twenties and hundreds. Paula decided to go for payday with a three thousand dollar shot in one drop. My plan to get her out of there was already worked out to the last detail and would take place four days later.

I arrived at five in the morning and couldn't find the green bag under tons of junk. I searched everywhere and suddenly I saw a green plastic bag on the ground beside the bin. At the same instant I felt a bill in my hand as I was moving a bottle. There was money all over the bin! The bag had burst and sprayed the whole container. I now realized with horror the mess we were in. I searched frantically for all the bills I could stuff into my jeans, but there were always more, more, more. Sweat poured into my clothing. I slaved, but it was no use. Hundreds of dollars would spill into view before incredulous sanitation men tomorrow, and what would happen to Paula is not printable.

I could now see the sun shooting light through several cracks in the roof of the garbage shed. I turned at last toward the door and froze when a dog began barking outside. There was no choice. I went to the door and looked at the mongrel as I stepped outside. "Easy, doggie. I'm a good guy! See, I am a good guy!" There was nobody else around.

Unbelievably, the dog was the only witness in all my trips to the shed. Now I stepped past him carefully and ran with all of the power I had down the alley to the Swiss-American Hotel. Once in my room, I grabbed my dufflebag and flew down the hall to the hotel shower room, locked it from the inside and knelt on the floor. Then, very carefully, I counted out seven piles of one thousand dollars and wrapped each with toilet paper. There was no more time; I knew Paula had to go NOW!

Frantically, I raced to Montgomery Street with the cash in my green dufflebag, trying to look as calm as possible. I went to four banks and bought five thousand dollars in traveler's checks. Have you ever tried to sign "Payable to cash" and your name on five thousand and traveler's checks in two hours with another two thousand just sitting in your dufflebag like Wheaties cereal? Try it sometime. It'll do something to your mind.

Now the last touch. I phoned a limousine service to have a car ready to go for three hours by the Chinese restaurant. I rushed over and laid fifty dollars of Paula's money on the driver to make a true believer out of him. He believed and was circling the block ten times while I bounced down Grant with my dufflebag to buy Paula a suitcase. It was, of course, green with red trimming. I went to the men's room in a Chinese grocery and jammed all Paula's loot into the case. I had forgotten nothing under the most scary circumstances and was suddenly calm and coldly reviewing my plan. There would be no second chance this time... If I missed, Paula had to die.

Jude Acers stepped out of the Chinese restaurant and walked toward a Chronicle newsbox. He was putting the coins in when Paula came rushing down Grant Avenue, her face flooded with tears. As she approached she screamed out, "Jude, the bag split! I could hear it break. All that money! He'll find it! He'll kill me, Jude! Oh, God! Oh, God! There is money all over down there!"

It was a bright sunshiny day and Jude stood alone at the curb as she threw her arms around him. He whispered, "Yes, I know. But don't worry. You don't seriously think he has a chance, do you? He could never beat me, Paula. He is not in my class. Just listen. Everything is perfectly all right."

The limousine pulled up beside them. Jude opened the door halfway, put the suitcase inside. Paula looked at Jude in amazement.

"Jude, darling, where am I going to? Where?" "To Miami," Jude said, reaching into his jeans for soggy bills he had not managed to stuff into her case. Paula kissed Jude on the cheek, the supreme compliment from a lady of the night, a volume dealer. Jude shoved the last of the money into Paula's purse.

She was climbing into the car when suddenly she bolted upright and whispered, "Jude! Did you make me a reservation? Oh, God, what if there is no room on the plane? He'll find me, YOU KNOW HE WILL!"

Her eyes were questioning and showed no confidence, as Jude Acers smiled slightly, nodded. "Get in," he whispered.

Through the open window Jude passed Paula a card with an airline flight number on it and a name.

Then the greatest of them all spoke softly, "By the way, your reservation is in the name Fischer. You're Roberta J. Fischer. Remember, you're Roberta J. Fischer."

Paula was still saying the name as the car pulled out smoothly and became a dot on Kearney Street.

She sent me a postcard once. You already know how she signed it. Celerio died in 1972. If Celerio had known...