

FLEMMING. I'm going to tell you something about yourself. You said you needed a psychiatrist. Maybe you do and maybe you don't. But you're a perfect example of compensation. (*Pours more liquor in COLUMBO's glass.*)

COLUMBO. Of what, Doc?

FLEMMING. Compensation. Adaptability. You're an intelligent man, Columbo. But you hide it, you play the clown. Why? Because of your appearance. You think you'll never get by on looks or polish, so you make a defect into a virtue. You take people by surprise. They underestimate you and that's how you trip them up. Like coming here tonight.

COLUMBO. Boy, you really got me pegged. Gotta watch myself with you, Doc. You're pretty good at figuring people out.

FLEMMING. (*A smile.*) Now you're trying flattery.

COLUMBO. (*Protesting.*) No, I'm serious. Really. You've got a gift, Doc. Sure, I know it's your job and you've studied it for years, but it's still kinda amazing. A person sits in this chair for a couple hours and you know all about him.

FLEMMING. Not quite. Psychiatry isn't a parlor trick.

COLUMBO. Oh, I didn't mean that. I got a lotta respect for psychiatrists. I was just wondering— (*Thinks for a beat; then.*) No, I guess it isn't possible.

FLEMMING. What?

COLUMBO. Well, it's easy enough to figure out a patient. Or somebody like me who's hanging around all the time. But what about a stranger, a guy you've never met? Can you tell what makes him tick?

FLEMMING. (*Ahead of him.*) Anyone particular in mind?

COLUMBO. No, nobody special. Just a type.

FLEMMING. (*Smiling.*) Like a murderer, for instance?

COLUMBO. Well, yeah, now that you mention it. I guess we're on the same wave length.

FLEMMING. I guess we are. (*He refills their glasses.*) What about this hypothetical murderer?

COLUMBO. Well, I'm not talking about the average hot-

head. You know, the guy who pops somebody on the noggin with a bottle. I mean the kind of man who thinks the whole thing through, step by step. He sorta makes up a blueprint and follows it. What's he like, Doc?

FLEMMING. (*Amused.*) I should charge you for this. But since it's on a theoretical basis, let's just call it a free consultation. (*He picks up his glass, toys with it reflectively.*) All right, we're talking about a man who commits a crime—not the garden variety of barroom brawl—but an elaborate intellectual project. What do we know about this man? Well, you said he's working from a blueprint, so he's obviously not impulsive. He plans, he calculates, he minimizes risks. That shows the discipline of a damn fine brain. He's oriented by his mind, not his viscera. Probably well educated, too.

COLUMBO. Like, maybe, a professional man?

FLEMMING. (*Smiles.*) Perhaps. (*He is talking about himself and they both know it; but even though he is fencing with COLUMBO, the sheer force of his ego shows through.*) At any rate— (*He straightens something on his desk.*) an orderly man, a man with an eye for detail. And courage.

COLUMBO. Courage?

FLEMMING. Certainly. You can't go through something like this—whatever it may be, without a strong nervous system.

COLUMBO. Yeah, I guess. But one thing bothers me, Doc. This guy we're talking about, he's taken a human life. (*A pause.*) Wouldn't you say he's insane?

FLEMMING. Why? Because he's committed an immoral act? Morals are conditioned, Lieutenant. They're relative, like everything else these days. Our murderer can be as sane as you— (*Slight smile.*) or me. He's just a believer in the art of the possible. Let's say he has a limited range of choices in a given situation. If one of them is murder—well, murder may be repugnant to him, but if it's the only solution, he uses it. That's pragmatism, not insanity.

COLUMBO. Tell me something, Doc. How do you catch a man like that?