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## CHAPTER ONE

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### Too Many Dames

**I**T was dark.

Black dark, except about two feet in front of my head-lamps where the brilliant white light was reflected back off the solid rain just like off a mirror. I guess fifty times in the last five miles I'd cursed them out and switched down to just parking lights and then cursed again and switched back up again.

There just wasn't any other traffic on the road. At first I figured I was the only guy with little enough sense to be out driving on a night like that, anyway, and then after a while I began to get a little worried about this complete absence of traffic. It just shouldn't happen on a main trunk road. Not in any weather. I hauled in to where I reckoned the side of the road ought to be if it hadn't been washed clean away, stopped the motor, and switched on the interior light and reached for my tourist map.

I guess it was my own fault, anyway. I should have stayed on the home range, good old New York, where I knew the geography, instead of hankering for foreign travel and driving clear away down south into the lands where they say you-all and crowd the stove-lids off the sidewalk if they don't step lively and get the hell out of the way.

It was all because winter in New York is no time to be there. I got around to thinking about sunny southern skies and southern draws and maybe New Orleans. I'd always heard New Orleans