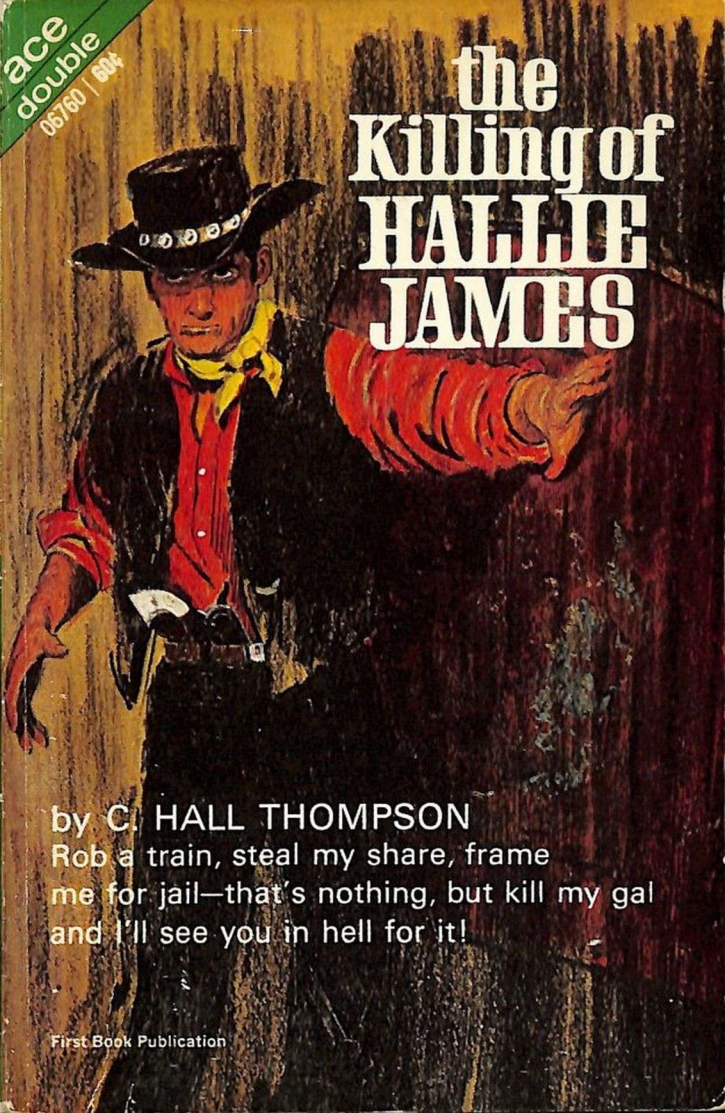
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by C. HALL THOMPSON
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Somebody'd left Cass Madigan behind to take the rap for a train robbery . . . and hadn't left Madigan any of his share in the payroll—only five years in the Yuma pen.

Somebody'd covered up his backtrail by the murder of Madigan's girl . . . and hadn't left Madigan anything to live for—except revenge.

Somebody had done a lot of dirty dealing—and he was sure going to pay.

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the Killing of HALLIE JAMES

C. Hall Thompson

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I

MADIGAN'S DREAM WAS CHANGELESS.

It was always that night five years gone, a mile east of the moonwashed clapboard station marked Dragoon Wells—the night that had led to Yuma Territorial Prison.

He could always feel the bunchgrass against his chest as he lay flat on the rise and see the ribbons of track gleam in the cut below. His bones had ached with waiting. Once, a horse had nickered and, farther along the rise, the Dutchman swore in German. Below, on the far side of the railroad bed, he could make out the shadows of Tucker Hays and Burke. Astride his calico, Pike Brewton had shifted and moonlight flickered on his Winchester. Silence. Waiting. Sweat turning cold with the night wind along his spine and finally the slow shudder of the rise, the thunder of wheels that made the rails sing and Pike Brewton lifted the Winchester.

They were mounted now, all of them, and the engine barreling down on the cut, the cab bright yellow with its bellyful of woodfire. The whistle shrilled and suddenly the signal flared up; the Dutchman was on the track, waving an oilsoaked torch. Madigan swung his roan down into the cut; the squeal of brakes deafened him, and then the clanging grind of couplings. Hays fired into the cab. The fireman made a wild dive and Burke clubbed him in midair; by then Pike Brewton had placed the dynamite and Madigan saw the doors of the

Adams Express Car buckle in the glare and the explosion rocked his roan under him. He spilled from the saddle. Smoke belched from the express car. On his hands and knees, Madigan saw the guard try to clamber down and Pike Brewton's Winchester draw deliberate bead. The guard jackknifed and hit the shale face first. Passengers were yelling all down the line and Hays and the Dutchman kept firing wildly to scare them off.

Madigan saw the strongbox tossed down and blasted wide open by the Dutchman's Colt; Brewton was stuffing the saddlebags, heeling the packmule alongside his calico. Far down from the caboose someone opened fire—not single shots but a steady blast of rifles. The Dutchman cursed. Hays bellowed, "Pinkertons!" Pike Brewton hauled the mule about, loaded, and yelled, "Scatter!" Four riders broke clear in as many directions. Madigan scrambled for the roan, caught its flying mane, and felt the slam of something hot against his right shoulder. His numb hand let go and he was in the shale, calling, "Pike, wait! I'm hit." Brewton wheeled the calico, stared down, and grinned. "Sorry, kid." Then Brewton waved to the Dutchman. "Finish him." Madigan saw the Dutchman's stolid, square face by torchlight, a trickle of spit at one thick mouth corner, the lift of the Colt and the flame that blinded him. . . .

Madigan woke sweating.

He didn't move. He waited for reality to return, the feel of bunkboards against his spine, the stink of the chamberpot in the corner, the dank touch of stone and mortar wall against careful fingers. It was always hard to come back. June, 1882—June, 1887. Five years hadn't changed the dream. But now he thought, *Time will,*

someday. Open range and a new life. Hallie will change everything. Soon.

He swung his feet down and shivered. He lit the stub of a cigarillo. Dawn came gray through the high, barred window.

"You were talking again."

Madigan squinted across at the other bunk. Damn Cassiday. You never knew when he was awake and listening.

Cassiday smiled; his harelip crawled back. "Some day you're gonna spill where the gold is stashed."

"Go to hell."

"A man with secrets shouldn't be a sleep-talker."

"The last I saw of that packmule, somebody else was holding the bridle."

"But you know the somebody's name."

Madigan didn't answer.

Cassiday sat up, sudden, spider-like. "And you still got your cut coming, boyo. Five years you served. You got a right to your slice. Now, I got me an idea. You get out today, right? I got another month. You and me together could ride down them double-dealing—"

"I ride nobody down," Madigan said.

Cassiday's eyes widened. "If you mean that, bucko, you're a damn fool."

"Maybe."

"Look, Madigan, they got more'n a hundred thousand that night. They say there ain't a plug nickle of it ever showed up. . . ."

Abruptly, the harelip shut down. Along the dim main cellblock passage, the rattle of wooden wheels echoed. Somebody belched. A Mexican who had knifed a woman in Sonora said, "Don't they ever bake tortillas in this Christ-forsaken hole?" A couple of cells down, the kid

with the guitar started and a voice yelled, "Shut up that caterwauling so early in the morning."

The chuck wagon stopped outside the grillwork. The guard shoved a tin porridge-bowl under the grating. "No coffee till supper. Cookie run out of it."

Cassiday swore.

Flat-nosed, with a bullet scar along one cheekbone, the guard eyed Madigan and grinned with broken teeth.

"No grub for you today. You had your last meal on the state."

"I'm all broke up," Madigan said.

"Don't get smart, train-robber. You ain't loose yet."

The guard pulled a dusty flour-sack from under the wagon-tray. His key ring rattled. "Step back."

The grating clanked open; the sack was flung at Madigan.

"Them was saved for you," the guard growled. "Get dressed. The warden wants to kiss you goodbye."

Wooden spoon in one fist, bowl in the other, Cassiday paused to watch. Gruel flecked his wet lips.

Madigan dumped the sack on his bunkplanks; faded levis, dusty, round-heeled boots, a black wool shirt, a Stetson crushed flat with a Mexican-silver band. Five years. The waiting over. The long nights of staring at the sweating walls, the anger dying, the hate easing off, the memory of Pike Brewton's grin dissolved until there was nothing left to hate. There was only hope that came in a letter from Dragoon Wells every month; it smelled of her mimosa sachet and the words were gentle and full of promise, if only he would forget the past, never try to run Brewton down. The letters always ended: *Love, Hallie.* Madigan frowned. In the last five months there had been no letter. . . .

"The warden ain't got all day, train-robber."

He got into the clothes. They fit. He was as lean and hard-muscled now at thirty as he had been that night outside Dragoon Wells. His face was made of rugged planes, still burned dark from working in the prison alfalfa fields. He had the kind of eyes that could stare unblinking into the sun. His finger touched the small hole in his shirt. Courtesy of the Dutchman. . . .

"Maybe you can get your girl friend to mend it, Madigan."

He wheeled and the guard quit grinning.

No letter in near six months, Madigan thought. But Hallie wouldn't change. She knew how he felt about her—his plans for a new beginning. He had told her often enough in his own letters. He'd take her out of Lafe Fenimore's Golden Eagle. She wouldn't be a dance-dollie ever again. Somehow, he would lay hold on a piece of land, up Montana way maybe, away from the past, and together—

"Move it," the guard said.

Madigan started for the door.

"Madigan," Cassiday said. "I'll be out in a month."

Madigan eyed him levelly. "I don't reckon I'll be seeing you."

The harelip twitched. "Can't tell. Might change your mind."

Madigan shook his head. "I won't."

Joshua Horn had been a brevetted colonel in the Army of the North. There was a daguerreotype of Ulysses S. Grant on the rough wall behind his yellow oak desk, and a bust of Lincoln served as a paperweight. He had retired after Appomatox but twenty odd years, a woolen suit and string tie could not mask the ramrod bearing of the soldier. He eased back now in his black

leather chair and opened a drawer. Above the grizzled beard and sharp cheekbones, his eyes stayed on Madigan.

"Mr. Madigan, I always look forward to saying goodbye."

"I've been anticipating it myself."

Warden Horn laid a five dollar goldpiece on the blotter.

"A dollar a year. It'll buy you a ticket somewhere."

"I had more when I came in."

From the drawer, Horn took out a calfskin pouch. "Forty-three dollars and a good luck piece." Then he laid the carved-leather holster and belt on the desktop. The .45 was still intact. "You'll need that in this country. Use it right this time."

"I will." Madigan pocketed the money and buckled on the belt. The weight of the gun felt strange.

In the far corner, a grandfather clock ticked loudly. Horn cleared his throat.

"You've done your hitch, Madigan. I can't order you now. Only warn you."

"No need."

"Perhaps not. Some men learn. A fresh start. That's the only way."

"Five years is long enough to study on it," Madigan said quietly.

"But not on revenge."

Madigan didn't answer.

Horn snipped the end of a cheroot with tiny silver scissors. A match flared. The eyes kept boring into Madigan. "You still won't tell us what became of that payroll?"

"I still don't know."

"But you know the men you worked with."

Madigan watched cheroot-smoke rise. "It's got nothing to do with loyalty," he said. "It's just that all that's done. Over."

"You're sure?"

"Sure."

Horn nodded slowly. "Where will you head?"

"Back to Dragoon Wells."

The warden's eyes narrowed. Madigan shook his head. "Not for your reason, Mr. Horn. For my own. I got a lady waiting for me there. . . ."

Horn blinked, then looked away. "And when you find her?"

"I figure we'll make for Montana. I always wanted a piece of land, a few head of stock. . . ."

"Men have built a fortune on less."

"I know that, now. I didn't five years ago. I was eight when my pa died at Vicksburg. My mother didn't last but three years longer. The hardscrabble we called a farm was chewed up by Baggers. You live on town charity long enough and one day you figure to take what you want and to hell with the rules."

"And you fall in with a crowd of train-robbers," Horn said quietly.

Madigan said, "That was just the last leg of a long ride down."

"All right, son." Horn stood up. "You learned the lesson. Just don't forget it. Far as we know, that payroll money's never showed up—all these years. Pinkerton men are still nosing around, off and on. If, by chance, you got caught heading for your old friends, trying to collect your cut . . ."

Madigan wasn't smiling now. "Warden, one good thing came out of that time at Dragoon Wells. While I was holed up there, before the job, lining up the shipment

schedule for—" He stopped. "That was when I met Hallie James. Only a few weeks and both of us knew it was for life. If I hadn't already tied in with the bunch—if I could've backed out, even then . . ."

Warden Horn seemed not to hear. "How long since your last letter from Miss James?"

Something tightened in Madigan. "Near six months."

Horn nodded slowly. He looked at Madigan, started to speak, then turned away abruptly. He walked to the grated window and stared out.

"Don't go back to Dragoon Wells, Madigan."

"But I have to go. Hallie's waiting. I wrote her I'd be getting out. She didn't answer, but maybe she was just sick or the letter went astray. . . ."

Horn turned sharply. "She won't answer, son."

"Look, warden, what the hell are you . . . ?"

Horn was at the desk again. He slid an envelope from under the blotter.

"I got this two days ago from a sheriff named Frank Regan."

"In Dragoon Wells?"

"Yes."

Horn drew the sheet of paper from the envelope. Something was folded inside it. Madigan saw the wink of gold, then the locket swinging from its delicate chain. Hallie's locket.

"Miss James died a little less than six months ago," Horn said gently.

For a minute Madigan didn't move. Then he shook his head. The warden held out Regan's letter. The paper crackled as Madigan read. His eyes came up slowly.

"He doesn't say how she died."

Horn drew a deep breath. "Look, son, people . . . get sick. It's been a bad year for diphtheria . . ."

"He doesn't say diphtheria."

"Madigan, there's no reason to suppose her death was anything but normal. Regan must have known you two were close. He figured you'd want this."

Madigan took the locket slowly, stared down at it, then folded it between his palms. Like a man praying.

Why would anybody kill Hallie? No. Easy. No one said she was killed. Yet, if Pike Brewton had known about her and Madigan; if Brewton thought she knew too much, could give evidence to the Government, name names in order to get Madigan's term commuted . . . But, why wait nearly five years? No. Sickness. Diphtheria. Horn must be right. But . . .

Carefully, he folded the locket inside the letter and put it in his shirt pocket.

Horn said, "There'll be no need to head for Dragoon Wells now."

"I have to know how she died. And why."

"But a new start," the warden said. "A clean start, Madigan. She would have wanted that for you."

Madigan didn't answer.

II

HE DIDN'T HAVE to look back. He knew the granite bluff that all but blocked the muddy Colorado, Prison Hill surrounded by endless reaches of desert; the sunbaked adobe walls of the Pen and, carved in the hillside rock, the dungeon block with leg-manacles staked to the floor;

and over all, the guard tower by the gate with mounted Gatling gun trained and ready.

All that was behind him and, under his boots, Yuma's dusty main drag, wide enough for lumbering twenty-mule transports to swing full circle. He turned onto a covered sidewalk, out of the yellow sunblaze. A Papago squaw sat crosslegged against a wall, nursing her young. A knot of drovers came hooting with laughter from the cool shade of the Althee Modesti Store.

At a bar, Madigan downed a shot of rye. It didn't help. He had waited for the feel of freedom and now it lay dead inside him. Like the leaden weight of Hallie's locket. He headed for the Old Adobe; some troopers looked up from a crap game as he passed. There was a barracks smell and the clean stench of horseflesh.

The dun cost him twenty dollars. Ten more went on a blanketroll and grub. He walked the length of Gila Street to the parched shell of a Southern Pacific depot. The stationmaster had a green eyeshade and one gold tooth.

"You said Dragoon Wells, mister?"

Madigan nodded.

"Horse'll ride free." The gold tooth flickered. "Jest get out?"

Madigan only stared at him. The smile faded.

"No offense, mister. Most boys jest out are on the prod for a little quick dinero. I might aim you in the right direction. Happen to know a couple of cattle dealers jest come to town that ain't too shy about skirting the law a mite. . . ."

Madigan walked away.

The platform was narrow and the oiled black belly of the engine loomed close; four dust-caked coaches strung out behind to the brick-red caboose. He saw the

dun settled in the slatted stock car. The platform bench was crowded: a drifter with white gambler's hands; two Indians in serapes and black Stetsons with a single loon feather; a bonneted woman nagging her towhead boy. Down the boards, a man in town suit and derby leaned against a post and smoked. Absently, Madigan thought: *Whiskey drummer? Cattle buyer?* The man's face was pale under the hard hat; his tawny moustache drooped. But he wore heeled boots and a gunbelt. . . .

The engine hissed suddenly. The shrill of its whistle split dead dry heat. Passengers climbed aboard and a trainman came down the platform. "Points east, ladies and gentlemen, Sentinel, Dragoon, Casa Grande, Tucson! 'Board!"

Madigan dropped his cigarette and ground it into the blistered boards. The man in the hard hat didn't move.

"You goin' or not, mister?" The trainman was swinging up.

Madigan climbed the metal steps and turned into a coach. The seat was gritty red mohair and dried mud spattered the window. Madigan eased back as the cars jolted and couplings clashed; the thundering cough of the engine sent back a billow of soot and sparks. Madigan watched the depot roll past. The man in the hard hat had disappeared.

Forget it. Just another passenger.

You're jumpy, Madigan. You're empty inside and every nerve like barbwire singing in a big blow. It's a long ride to Dragoon Wells. To a grave and the answers to questions. Frank Regan would have them. And with the answers maybe peace. In time, maybe a beginning again.

The thought made him feel guilty. There had been only one beginning. Hallie. All that had gone before could

have been wiped clean with Hallie. The drifting years, the tie-in with saddlebums, the rustling, the running irons, and finally Pike Brewton. He remembered a saloon in the Mexican quarter of a border town and the Dutchman's mouth rimmed with beerfoam.

"I don't be sure. He's young, Pike. He got no experience."

And Tucker Hays rubbing his pocked jaw. "Dutchy's right. I say no greenhorns."

Burke shuffled a dog-eared poker deck, his one walleye fixed on Madigan.

Pike Brewton had looked too clean, shirtfront gleaming white above a flowered vest, his boots blacked. Slim fingers toyed with a gold elk's tooth fob.

"He's what we need. You, Tucker—your ugly pan's on wanted posters from here to hell and back. We're all known in the Territory. But a new waddy in the Wells won't stir up dust. The kid'll watch the timetables; he'll tout us exactly when that mining payroll's due. A hundred thousand, maybe more. We'll be over the border into Mexico before they know what hit. Wealth, gentlemen, the good life!"

All as simple as a McGuffey Reader. Brewton had figured Dragoon Wells right—once a tag-end cowtown, it boomed now with placer mining and the coming of rails in '78. Madigan had been one more drifter with the price of a room at Parkington House. It hadn't been hard to follow talk at the depot, jaw about shipping schedules with the stationmaster. Just a job, a matter of timing. And when the right shipment rolled through the East Cut one night, from there on it would be high, wide and handsome for Cass Madigan.

But there had been time to kill and Lafe Fenimore's Golden Eagle jangling with its pianola, faro tables and

restless batwings; the smell of bodies crowded at a bar, the crystal chandelier tinkling when men and dance-dollies pounded to a skip-to-my-lou and, once or twice, a girl in one of the red-draped upstairs rooms.

And then, Hallie, one night, up there on the stage, timid by the light of hissing arc lamps and a voice like some songbird in the night desert. "I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls. . . ." Madigan hadn't been able to take his eyes from her face.

Three nights later, he had bought a bottle of champagne and asked her to his table, knowing it could never be a red-draped room with Hallie. She smelled of mimosa. She spoke softly and smiled and all the while, from his faro table, Lafe Fenimore watching them. It had just happened. The quiet talks about her home back in Philadelphia and how she had come west with a kid brother who died of galloping consumption and had ended here, hating it, but grateful to Lafe because he never expected her to be like the other girls. Still, someday she would be free, she would find a good clean life, the pretty clothes and a man who loved her. They had taken carriage rides on Sundays; they had picnicked along the Gila in cottonwood shade. And when Lafe objected, Hallie said it didn't matter. . . .

Madigan was twenty-five; the notion of settling down had never occurred to him. Till then. But there was the job. There was Pike Brewton and the bunch, holed up in the Maricopa foothills, waiting for his word. He hadn't meant to drag Hallie into it, but nothing could build on a lie between them. The night he told her, she stared and shook her head. He mustn't. He had to break with the bunch. "But, think of it, Hallie. One job. And we could go clear north. We could have a decent life. We've

been pushed to the wall since we can remember. We got a right to one clear chance. . . ."

"Sentinel! Five minutes!"

Madigan started up. The trainman went on down the aisle, echoing himself, rocking like a sailor to the sway of the coach. Beyond the window, desert slid by, dust-deviled and dotted with gnarled joshuas and yucca and the suden white flashes of saguaro blossoms. Far to the north and east, the ragged humps of the Big Horn Range hung suspended between sand and sky.

Madigan lit a cigarette. *I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls.* Now the dream was ended. But no . . . not yet. Not till he knew the dying was easy and placed a primrose nosegay on a grave. Or, if it had been hard, if somehow the Brewton bunch had got to Hallie—

A door clanged shut. A figure brushed by his seat. Town suit, hard hat, a glimpse of tawny moustache wings. The holster was thigh-thonged, he saw now. The man went on through the coach, but turned at the far door. His eyes wandered, caught Madigan's stare for a long instant; then he was gone.

Something crawled at the nape of Madigan's neck. Prison hadn't blotted out the instinct of the hunted. No drummer, he thought. No ordinary traveler. Had word reached Brewton that Cass Madigan was free and on his way to even an old score? That payroll money'd never showed, Warden Horn had said. If Pike had gotten to Hallie, he knew Madigan had to be stopped. And he would hire a gun Madigan didn't know. . . .

The Southern Pacific shrieked a greeting and, beyond the bend of track, a clanging bell answered. Madigan could see the parched squat station of Sentinel and sprawling clapboard falsefronts beyond. He didn't move.

I could face him down. But he would be fast with that Colt and I haven't palmed a gun in five years. And if I did live through it, how long before I was back in Yuma, a killer, never knowing the truth about Hallie?

A straggle of outlying lean-tos crawled by. Slowly, stretching, Madigan rose. Two coaches back, he found the stock car. The hostler was bent over a pinto's shaved hoof.

"The dun," Madigan said. "Off at Sentinel."

"You be there to claim her?"

"No."

The hostler frowned. Madigan held out a silver coin. "Just get her off."

He went back to his coach seat. The hard hat was nowhere.

The station now and a mail-sack tossed off, a master checking his turnip watch; one or two waddies idling in the hard angle of awning-shade. The street noises of Sentinel came in at open windows. Then Madigan's eyes narrowed. On the platform the man in the hard hat turned and lit his pipe. Waiting for him to get off. Madigan smiled thinly.

"All aboard!"

Couplings creaked aridly. Coaches started passing the hard hat; he paused, uncertain, then caught a handrail and swung up, two cars down. In the same moment, Madigan was on his feet. The train was well beyond the depot and gathering speed when he dropped off and sprinted back. The dun was waiting.

The rail line made a wide swing north and east before it bent south again for Dragoon Wells. The trail he took made a third side to the ragged triangle, an arid trace of jumping cholla that could cripple a horse with sharp

spines, but barrel cactus that could be crushed to pulp and yield water.

He didn't push the dun but rode steadily, the land rising in slow, baked cuts and sudden deep arroyos where streams had once run. Time and again, hipshot in the saddle, he glanced back. The train was still pounding its way, trailing its toy streamer of smoke.

Madigan shrugged. He could have been wrong about the hard hat. In any case, better like this. Ahead, in middle distance, rose purple foothills. He would camp for the night and reach Dragoon Wells in the late morning. . . .

Abruptly, he reined in and stood in the stirrups. The train had stopped. Why? To let off a passenger—a hunter who had suddenly missed his quarry? A long minute passed before the Southern Pacific ground into motion again. In its wake, Madigan saw the figure of a lone rider.

He swore.

If it was the hard hat, he had an edge—a fresh mount and a beeline south from the rails. Maybe he would figure wrong, take the wrong track. Madigan couldn't risk it. He spurred the dun.

Sun was a dead, scalding weight on his back; the dun's withers were frothed and gleaming and the laboring rise of desert didn't help. When he glanced back again, there was no more doubt. Clear in the afternoon, the rider was coming on, closing the gap. Madigan loosened his gun in the holster and metal burned his fingers.

Ride now; reach the next sudden bleached cut of land where an arroyo straggled aimlessly, deep enough to hide a man.

The dun's chest was pumping; its nostrils lifted to trumpet against the dust and, abruptly, at a sharp bend,

Madigan pulled up and wheeled. Sweat streamed down his hard-angled face. He dismounted. The weight of the .45 was reassuring in his grip. He waited.

Before long, he heard the pound of hooves; the hard hat was beating trail fast, intent on the trace. The pounding built and then crashed by and Madigan leveled his gun at the dark shadow against sunglare.

"All right, mister. Pull in."

The rider hauled rein and his strawberry roan reared and pawed dusty air. The hard hat sat motionless.

"Climb down," Madigan ordered.

"If this is a holdup . . ."

"Climb down."

The hard hat obeyed. He had soft doe eyes and a whisper of a voice. "I assure you, sir, I'll make real poor pickings."

"Who are you?" Madigan said flatly.

"Does my name matter? There's only ten dollars in my billfold."

"We'll drop the games. Who sent you?"

The hard hat smoothed his drooping blond moustache and ambled closer. "Sent me, sir? I assure—"

"Now, look, mister . . ."

That was when the hard hat dove; he came in under the .45, driving at Madigan's chest, forcing him back in a tangle of boots; they rolled wildly and Madigan swore and dodged a flailing right. He brought a knee up hard, jolting a cry from the hard hat, then brought gunbutt down brutally on the other's shoulder.

Madigan was on his feet, the .45 steady. Breathing was an effort

The man came to one knee, nursing his shoulder; but he smiled "You can't fault me for trying."

"Don't try again." Madigan spat in the dust.

The hard hat stood slowly, watching the .45.

"You were tailing me," Madigan said.

There was no answer.

"You're going to talk. Did Pike . . . ?"

Abruptly the smile faded. "Pike?"

Madigan shut up. Then, deliberately, he thumbed back the hammer. "I want answers."

The hard hat looked less sure, but his tone was even. "It appears Warden Horn was wrong. He told me you were finished with guns."

Madigan stared.

"You meaning to graduate from robbery to murder?" the man asked softly.

Finally, Madigan eased off the hammer but he didn't holster the gun.

"What do you know about Horn?"

The man went to his roan, unlooped a canteen and drank. He wiped the mouthpiece on a sleeve and offered the canteen.

Madigan drank.

"The name is Sam Wister," the man said. "I'm interested in a payroll that disappeared five years ago."

Madigan's eyes narrowed.

"That's right, Mr. Madigan. Pinkerton. We don't give up easy."

"So Horn said."

"I figure you just might lead me to that money."

"You figured wrong."

"Or to the men holding your cut in escrow."

"Look, mister. I told the warden. I was crossed. That's over. Whoever got that payroll can buy his way into hell with it." Madigan handed back the canteen. "I been through my own hell and that was enough."

Wister's doe-eyes were steady. "You really mean that."

"You learn slow but you learn."

Madigan holstered the .45 and mounted. "I'm riding on, Wister. Take my advice. Turn back to Sentinel and keep going."

"You're headed for Dragoon Wells."

Madigan's lips thinned. "On a personal matter."

"That might tie you in with the bunch that—"

"I said ride, Wister. I catch you on my trace again, I might just risk Yuma."

Their eyes held. Finally, Wister shrugged and swung up on the roan.

"All right, Mr. Madigan. For now. But one thing: if we rode together and uncovered that payroll, there's a reward outstanding . . ."

"Not interested."

Behind the tawny moustache, a smile came and went. "Then think on this. Back there in Yuma, I spotted a couple of strangers; they boarded just before you—almost like they saw you coming."

Madigan thought, *That stationmaster mentioned a couple of cattle dealers. . . .*

"Could be they're still on the train," Wister said. "Or—who knows? Once or twice, I heard a rumor that more than you got euchred out of a cut of that payroll. Now, if they figured you could lead them—"

"You think too much," Madigan said. "It could get you hurt."

"A man like you ought to have someone to side him. Just in case . . ."

"I'll manage."

Wister stared a moment longer. "Like I said—we quit hard, Madigan."

He spurred the roan and wheeled back through the arroyo, headed north and west.

Two strangers. Cheated out of their share.

Madigan shook his head. To hell with that. Unless it tied in with Hallie . . . He turned the dun toward Dragoon Wells.

III

SLEEP WAS A TRAP.

Madigan sat with his back to the green bark of a palo verde tree; a blanket eased the Sonora desert's sudden night chill. His sheltered mesquite fire was an eye in the vast dark; he could hear the run of creek water where the dun was staked out and somewhere in the black foothills a coyote cried to the low moon. He finished the sweet, juicy pulp of saguaro and lit a cigarette. A cloud crossed the moon. The air smelled of rain.

Stay awake. Madigan touched the cool Colt-barrel at his side. Two men, Wister had said. Maybe two of the bunch. Tucker Hays and the Dutchman? Burke and Pike Brewton? Who else had been swindled that night five years ago?

His back ached; he could feel the lead of sleep in his legs. *Don't get caught again, dragged down in the whirlpool. You're clean, you've paid the price. Keep going now and you could end in the web again and all of them like black widows, crawling, crawling.* The fire wavered and the coyote cried and he could hear the shattering boom and see the doors of the express car buckle and then Pike Brewton with the pack mule and saddlebags

and the Dutchman in his wake; Tucker Hays wheeling north and away and Burke cutting south across the tracks. But there had been a plan; they were all supposed to meet, somewhere . . .

Madigan jolted awake. Thunder rolled down the barren hills and heat lightning pulsed across the sky and then, beyond the crooked shadow of a joshua, another shadow, and a voice said, "Stand up, Madigan."

His hand moved.

"Don't touch the gun, just stand."

Madigan did; his legs were cramped. The shadow inched forward, but the swagger was there, the black slouch hat and chink of Spanish rowels. Tucker Hays's pocked face leered across the firelight.

"It's been a long spell, kid."

"Not long enough," Madigan said.

"Don't get snotty. Be good and we'll talk a bit and part company."

Hays held a Winchester at hip-level. "All I want is a little information—"

Madigan dove sideways, clawing for the Colt, waiting for the rifle blast. It didn't come. Instead, metal caught him over the ear and he buckled on hands and knees. The night wheeled. A boot toe dug into his ribs, rolled him over, and he stared up into Burke's dead wall-eye.

"Now, that wasn't nice," Burke said. "After we tailed you clear from Yuma prison just for a powwow."

Madigan swayed to his feet; blood ran from his scalp along one cheek.

Tucker Hays said, "Where is it, Madigan?"

"I don't know what you're—"

"You know," Burke growled. "Money, kid. Gold. Payroll."

Madigan straightened. "I told you. I don't know."

Burke's leather-gloved backhand slashed across his mouth. "You were headed back to Dragoon Wells."

"For my own reasons."

"To find Pike? To run down the Dutchman?" Hays said harshly. "To collect your share?"

"You're both loco."

Burke's wall-eye rolled. "Five years of hunting makes a man touchy. It was you, kid. You and Pike and the Dutchman. In cahoots."

"So Pike ordered me killed," Madigan shouted. "That makes a hell of a lot of sense."

"Maybe. If you knew too much. If he saw a chance to split it halves with the Dutchman."

"You're wrong. Okay, you were crossed. It wasn't my doing. Find the Dutchman. Find Pike. Let me out of it."

"It ain't that easy," Hays said. "Nobody just walks away. Find them? What you think we been trying to do for five years? Me and Burke, like a couple of damn fools—we met at the hideout the day after. Just like it was planned. A storm set in, so we holed up and waited. Twice that damn posse from the Wells passed not a mile from us. But no Pike. No Dutchman. So we figured they were run down, maybe. Caught. Till we wised up. Suckered, that was us. Hided and hung out to dry and the Dutchman and Pike somewhere living off the fat, laughing at us. . . ."

There was spit at the corners of Hays's slack mouth.

"Oh, we waited," Burke said thickly. "Didn't dare show till it all cooled off. Then we headed out the way they might've gone. Far from the hideout, maybe east, up Maricopa way. We found one thing—out in the desert by the Gila range—what the buzzards left of Pike's horse and saddle. So maybe they had a falling out.

Maybe the Dutchman got greedy and back-shot Brewton. We kept riding."

Hays grabbed Madigan's shirtfront. "You see how it is, kid. Five damn long years, hunting, and it's like the earth opened up and swallowed them. The two of us, working for a stake, hunting a spell, working again . . . and we run low on patience, kid. Real low. We're in Yuma and we hear that Cass Madigan's being let loose. We get ideas. . . ."

"Wrong ideas," Madigan said.

Thunderheads blocked the moon and a wind troubled the clawed skeleton fingers of the joshua.

Burke said, "You ain't explained. You were headed for the Wells."

"To find out how Hallie James died," Madigan said.

Burke looked like a man hit. "Died?"

Hays scowled and shook his head. Burke shut up.

Madigan felt anger close over his insides like a clenched fist. "What do you know about Hallie?"

"Nothing," Hays snapped.

"If it was you did it . . ."

"You're crazy, Madigan."

"If I find out it was you—"

The riflebutt dug into his middle and he jackknifed forward; the barrel came down on his shoulder; his knees hit the ground hard.

"Finish him," Burke growled. "He can't lead us nowhere."

Madigan swore, fighting to see clearly against pain.

"You can't tell . . ."

"Finish him," Burke hissed.

Madigan saw Hays's boots step back. He tried to roll to one side, dodge the rifle blast.

Then he heard the horse, the pound of hooves, and

Burke swore. Madigan scuttled to one side and the Winchester slammed once, digging a dust hole at his elbow, before the other gun began to snap. Hays and Burke were running now, up the rise beyond the joshua, turning and firing blind, and Madigan could see Sam Wister high on his roan, wheeling, hooves scattering fire embers. Wister kept firing. Burke was over the cut and a horse whinnied. On the crest, Tucker Hays whirled, the rifle blazing. Madigan had his own Colt lifted and fanned the hammer, but Wister had jolted in the saddle, swayed backward. Then, Hays too was gone and there was only the jumbled beat of hooves making distance and, finally, the thunder rolling heavier.

Madigan was on his feet. He broke Wister's fall and lowered him gently.

The Pinkerton man groaned. It made a bubbling sound in his throat. There was a gaping red hole where his shirtfront should have been. His hand moved across his mouth and left a bloodstain on the drooping moustache.

"Easy," Madigan said.

Wister grinned. "Told you a man needed siding . . ."

"Shut up. I got to get you to a doctor."

"One thing. I always figured on a decent burial."

Madigan swallowed dryly. "You're going to make it."

A wet hand caught his wrist. Pain killed the grin but it struggled back. "Stubborn bastards, weren't they?"

"I won't forget what you did."

"I didn't figure you would. I'm stubborn myself. Only case I couldn't clean up. Five damn years." The doe-eyes held Madigan's. "I figure you got the same streak. I figure you'll even things out."

"I mean to know about Hallie. . . ."

"And the payroll." Wister's eyes were hard to meet.

"Don't talk so much. If you can ride . . ."

Wister gave a long sigh and Madigan felt the bony shoulders sag. The eyes were still open. He closed them.

He lit a cigarette. Hallie. And the payroll. He swore. Twenty odd miles to the Wells. He had meant to rest the dun till sunup, but now . . . If Burke and Hays had run Hallie down, if she had been part of the long hunt . . .

He wrapped Wister in the Papago blanket and trussed him belly-flat across the roan's saddle. He took Wister's rifle from the boot and mounted the dun. Let Hays and Burke try again. Let them get in his way now.

Slowly, under swaying dead weight, the roan followed its lead.

Thunder came down from the foothills and it began to rain.

Dragoon Wells stretched and yawned. Somewhere, a sunrise cock crowed and a swamper shuffled out of the Miner's Rest to empty his wash-pail and blink up at the watery sun. Northward on its barren knoll, the Baptist Church gleamed white, its steeple tolling morning prayers. A late drunk stumbled along the boardwalk toward cribtown. Gutters of last night's rain eddied along the main drag.

Stiff in the saddle, Madigan straightened, scanning the passage of low adobe buildings—the BonTon Ladies' Shop, the open door of Seth Tomkin's saddlery, the damp fodder smell of stables, and winking goldleaf letters on the Dragoon *Gazette* window. A couple of women stopped by greengrocer bins, watching Madigan and the burdened roan in his wake. A drover thumbed back his Stetson and stared.

Soon the word would be out. You recollect Cass Madigan? The one as got caught in the Southern Pacific holdup? Back in town. With a body in tow. . . .

Madigan reined the dun sharply before a gray clapboard false-front with its curlicue painted sign: GOLDEN EAGLE, *Lafe Fenimore, Prop.* He glanced back at the waterlogged blanket. That could wait. Hallie came first.

The barkeep's name was Ward. He had changed little in five years. His blunt hams stopped polishing a mug. Pouched eyes watched Madigan weave between the tables stacked with up-turned chairs. Ward set the mug down and one fist went below the bar. *Where he keeps the shotgun,* Madigan thought.

"You've got your nerve," Ward said. "Showing your face—"

Madigan said, "I want to talk to Fenimore."

Pouched eyes slitted. "He ain't here."

"When will he be back?"

"He won't. He don't own the Eagle no more. I bought him out."

Madigan felt his stomach tighten. "When?"

"I don't reckon that's your concern."

"I could make it."

"Look, Madigan. . . ."

A voice said, "Never mind, Ward."

Madigan turned. The man stood just inside the batwings, a tall, whiplash figure with a narrow jaw and a sweat-stained hat. A tin star winked on his rawhide vest.

"I'm Frank Regan."

"I've heard of you," Madigan said.

"It's mutual. I figured we'd be meeting again one day."

"Again?"

"I was old Pat Leslie's deputy when he arrested you.

Pat caught one from a Mexican down Nogales way. I inherited the job three years ago."

Madigan nodded. "Then you know about Hallie James."

"And you. That's why I sent the locket."

"I want the whole story."

Regan glanced over his shoulder, beyond the batwings to where the roan stood at the hitchrack. "So do I. But not here."

They went out and down the street, Regan leading the roan. A paunchy man in a swallowtail coat and beaver hat came out of the Elite Funeral Parlor, smelling business. Regan handed the reins over to him.

"Hold on," Madigan said. He handed the mortician a billfold. "That was on the body. Bury him decent."

"I'll need a name."

"He called himself Sam Wister."

Madigan and Regan walked on. The jail was adobe with a plank door and iron-grilled windows. Inside, there was a rolltop desk and an agate coffeepot on the Franklin stove.

The sheriff filled two cups.

Madigan let the strong black liquid clear his head.

"Who was he?" Regan said finally.

"A Pinkerton agent. He figured I'd lead him to the Southern Pacific payroll."

"And?"

"I told him to hightail. The payroll didn't interest me. Then."

"And now?"

Madigan didn't answer.

The sheriff set down his cup. "Did you kill him?"

"Sure. And then I brought the body in so I could swing for it."

Their eyes held. At last, Regan nodded. "All right then. Who did?"

"You ask a lot of questions."

"I'm a curious man."

"I was bushwhacked in camp last night. Wister about saved my hide. But he got hit in the process."

"I asked who."

Madigan said, "Any more coffee?"

The sheriff refilled his cup. "Why would anyone bushwhack you? Unless it was somebody from way back. . . ."

Madigan said, "I came for one reason. Hallie James."

It got quiet. Regan got a cigar from his desk drawer and set fire to it.

Softly, he said, "She's buried out at the Baptist Cemetery."

"And?"

"Look, Madigan. Five years is a long spell. You paid your debt. Why get hooked in again?"

"You got your answer. I want mine."

Regan stared, then shook his head. "Don't be a damn fool."

"How did Hallie die?"

"All right. It happened six months ago. Everybody in town knew about you and her, I guess. Especially, Lafe Fenimore."

"You mean Fenimore . . . ?"

The sheriff blinked. "Killed her? Hell, he worshiped the ground she walked on. She could do anything with him. I reckon, if it wasn't for her feeling about you . . ." He drew a ragged sigh. "Such a fine, decent girl. But that last week she was sort of edgy. Once a couple of saddlebums rode in and tried to talk to her, but Lafe ran them off."

"Two of them?" Madigan asked.

Regan's eyes flicked up. "That's right."

"What did they look like?"

"Just tramps. One of them had a wall-eye. . . ."

Madigan's throat went dry.

"Look," Regan said. "If you know them . . ."

"That's my business."

The cigar had gone out; Regan relit it. "It happened one night after the Golden Eagle was closed. I was here in the office when I heard the shots—big, heavy. Not a pistol. More like a sawed-off job. I hightailed for the Eagle. It was a bedlam, the girls screaming and Ward cursing a blue streak and Lafe kneeling beside Hallie in her room. She was sort of sprawled half out of bed and there was blood . . ."

Madigan didn't move. A white line edged his lips. "Go on."

"At first I wasn't sure, but there was the locket around her neck and Lafe kept moaning her name. I never saw a man cry before. . . ."

"Not sure?"

Regan jammed out the cigar. "The shots caught her full in the face."

"God Almighty."

"Take it easy, kid. You forced me to tell you."

Madigan drew a deep breath.

The sheriff said, "We combed the Wells. I had a posse out for near a week. Nothing. In the end, we just . . . buried her. A month later, Lafe Fenimore sold the Eagle to Ward and rode out. Said there was nothing left here for him."

Hays. Burke and Hays. Questioning Hallie? Figuring she knew about the double cross because she knew me. And then, to shut her up, once and for all . . .

Madigan turned slowly for the door.

"Where are you going?" Regan said flatly.

"I don't know yet."

"You figure it was the two saddletramps?"

"I didn't say that."

"But you'll waste your life trying to run them down."

"It's not your worry," Madigan said.

"Maybe not. But I had a letter from Warden Horn. He said you'd gone straight."

Madigan didn't answer.

"Suppose you find them?" Regan asked. "Suppose you live through it? Where do you end? In Yuma again? On a gallows?"

"You're real concerned," Madigan said. "Why?"

The sheriff looked away. "Say I liked Hallie."

"All right, then, help."

"How?"

"Deputize me."

Regan eyed him steadily. "So you can do your killing all legal and proper?"

"So I can bring them in," Madigan said. "And maybe recover that payroll. Wister wanted that. I reckon you do too."

The sheriff wavered, then shook his head. "Not that much. You'd never bring them in alive."

"I told you—"

"They wouldn't let you," Regan snapped; then, more gently: "All my life, I dealt in hate and guns. I know what they add up to."

Madigan strode to the door.

"Think about it," the sheriff said. "If you even the score, will it bring back Hallie? Would Hallie want it this way? You're in the clear, Madigan. Get on that dun and ride as far as you can. Forget. Build a life. . . ."

Madigan was out the door and gone.

IV

IT WAS NIGHT, and, without knowing why, he had come back. A watery moon washed white the clapboards of the Baptist Church. The cemetery beyond was choked with rye grass and weeds and the wooden markers stood awry, except here and there where somebody cared enough. Someone had left a jar of yucca blossoms on one grave.

Hallie was buried on the small, barren knoll at the far south end. The new wooden cross bore only her name. Madigan stared at it, motionless. Beyond, down the main drag, lights flickered; a buckwagon rattled up and halted by Tomkin's saddlery. He could hear the pianola jangling at the Golden Eagle and he thought: *She won't sing any more.*

You made too many plans. You looked into her eyes and saw the dream of a spread of land and a log house and children and all of you riding to church on Sunday morning. A light went on in the church now, and the choirmaster began rehearsing at the organ. "Throw out the life line, throw out the life line, someone is sinking today-ay. . . ."

Slowly, Madigan turned away. It was no good. You couldn't say goodbye to a marker.

At the wicket gate, he lit a cigarette and started down toward town. He couldn't remember her face. Trying, he could only picture what was left after a shot-

gun blast, and cold fury was a weight on his chest. Hays and Burke. But would it bring Hallie back? Regan had asked. Would Hallie want it that way?

He passed the red-curtained glow of crib windows and stepped onto the sidewalk. A knot of cowhands jostled by, laughing with whiskey. The smell soured Madigan's mouth. He wouldn't stop at the Golden Eagle. He would go to his room at the Arizona House and lay on the unmade iron bed and try to sleep. And tomorrow?

He crossed Buttonwood Lane and a girl smiled from the shadows. He smiled back but kept going. Could he forget with her? Tomorrow, could he ride out and let it all go? He could still hear the distant sigh of the organ. "For He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. . . ."

The marker had been so bare and dead. And there was the memory of her face. Somebody had to pay for that. Somehow . . .

He was crossing an alley and, for an instant, he paused. Something caught his ear—a small, twin click. He swung to the right and saw the darker shadow in the dark by the building wall; a streetlight glinted on metal and then there was a blaze of orange and the rifle's roar.

Madigan slid to one side, but pain ripped along his temple and he went to his knees. He had the Colt clear but his eyes wouldn't focus; a warm wetness trickled down his cheekbone. The shadow was moving now, wheeling back and down the alley. Madigan fired blindly and then was running. The figure moved clumsily on thick legs; he dove for it but the man swung and a riflebarrel crashed across Madigan's shoulder. He caved in, clawing at a boottop; the boot kicked hard at his midriff.

He was sick. The building walls closed in above him and then opened wide and he could see the haze-ring around the moon and hear the shuttle and tattoo of hooves beating a retreat. Then he couldn't see or hear anything.

"An inch to the right and he'd have a hole through his head."

The doctor was bending over him; he had steel-rimmed glasses and a greasy black vest with a gold watch-chain swaying across it. He smelled of assafoetida.

Madigan tried to sit up. Pain drove through his skull. The doctor's hand pushed him down.

"Lay a while, mister. You had a near miss."

Madigan stared at the plank ceiling, the wanted posters on the adobe walls, a corner of the rolltop desk.

"He going to make it?" the sheriff said.

The doctor nodded. "He ran in luck this time." And, squinting down at Madigan. "Stop by my office in the morning. I'll change the dressing."

The door slammed. Regan lit a cigarette and handed it over. The acrid sting of smoke helped. Madigan sat up.

"You want some coffee?"

Madigan nodded. The sheriff brought an agate cup.

"All right," he said. "How'd it happen?"

Madigan told him.

Regan took a fresh cigar from the desk drawer and rolled it between his lips. The match flared and pulsed.

"Did you recognize him?"

Madigan frowned. Burke? Hays? But the man had seemed heavier, awkward. There were others who might want him dead. Silenced. Pike Brewton. The Dutchman.

"No," Madigan said.

"Was it one of those two waddies?"

"I'm not sure."

"But you mean to find out."

Their eyes held. Madigan managed a grin. "You still figure I can just ride away from it?"

The sheriff puffed his cigar and scowled.

"Incidentally," Madigan said, "where the hell were you?"

"Over on Toughnut, making my rounds. I heard the shots."

"But you didn't see him?"

"When I got there, it was only you."

"Nobody saw him?"

"Not clear. We combed town. No strangers around. One of the crib girls saw a rider head out about that time."

Madigan's eyes lifted. "Which way?"

"East and north, she said."

Madigan nodded. Whoever it was, wanted matters settled. Fine.

The swivelchair creaked and swayed empty. Regan walked to the barred window. His back to Madigan, he blew a smoke ring. "All right, they won't let you quit."

"I never intended to."

"And you think you might locate that payroll."

"Maybe."

Regan turned, his narrow lantern jaw hard. "Suppose I deputize you."

Madigan smiled.

"A man's got a right to save his own hide," the sheriff said. "But I want them alive."

"It can be done that way."

"The law will see that they pay for Hallie James. I promise you that."

Madigan stared at him for a moment, then nodded.

Regan walked back to the desk. The rolltop grated. Out of a pigeonhole, he took a badge. It winked in the lamplight.

Finally, Regan said, "Who are they?"

Madigan looked at the star. "Not yet, Sheriff. If you knew, you could queer it. No lawman will get a smell of them."

"You'll be the law."

Madigan rose. His legs were watery. He took the badge, fastened the pin and slipped it into a hip pocket. "Not so they can see."

Regan drew on his cigar. "I want to ride with you."

"Not now."

"Then I have to trust you."

"I reckon so. When I've got it lined up, I'll call you in."

The sheriff kept looking at him.

"That's a promise too," Madigan said.

After a minute, Regan crossed to the stove. "More coffee?"

Madigan didn't answer. He moved to the window. Beyond, the main drag was going dark. One by one, lighted windows blinked out, but the pianola at the Golden Eagle was still wrangling. You couldn't say goodbye to a marker. You had to remember and make it right. Then, maybe, you could live out the rest of your life.

Behind him, Regan said, "Where will you start?"

Madigan watched a cowpoke stumble along the boardwalk toward the Arizona House.

Out there. North and east. Pike? Hays? Burke or the Dutchman?

"Yuma," he said.

Rain had not come to the town below the dungeon block.

The platform planks of the Southern Pacific depot creaked under Madigan's boots. A hot wind blew dust and steam from the throbbing, sweating engine. Even in awning shade, sweat did not cool.

Madigan waited for the dun to be unloaded and hitched it at the rail outside the station. He wouldn't be staying long.

The wicket of the window was half-closed. Madigan rapped on it.

Inside, an irritated voice yelled, "Out to lunch."

"You're due back," Madigan said.

His tone was flat and hard. After a moment, the wicket inched up. Under the green eyeshade, the stationmaster squinted. It pulled his upper lip awry and the gold tooth gleamed.

"I want to talk," Madigan said.

Recognition came into the gimlet eyes. The stationmaster bit off a chunk of tamale and grinned as he chewed.

"You didn't buy no round-trip."

"I been where I wanted to go. I'm back."

The long head nodded. "Usually works like that. Ain't much room in the world for an ex-con."

"You talk a lot."

"You said you wanted to talk." The eyes squinted again. "Come round the side door."

The wicket slammed shut.

There was a stink of liniment and whiskey. The office hadn't been swept and a layer of red dust coated the file cabinet. The stationmaster drank from a tin cup and planted his Congress gaiters on a desk drawer.

"Sit you down."

Madigan didn't.

"A man wanting a favor ought to be sociable."

"You told me you had connections," Madigan said.

The mouth stopped chewing. "Might. Might not."

"You said there were a couple of cattle-dealers in town."

"I say a lot of things."

"They were scaring up saddle-help."

The stationmaster looked at him steadily.

"You sure what you want now?"

Madigan nodded. "Like you said. An ex-con ain't got a prayer. About those two . . ."

"They shipped out. Same train as you."

"And they didn't come back?"

The Congress gaiters came down on the floor. "You interested in a job, mister? Or them?"

Easy, Madigan thought. *He's smarter than he looks.* "You said they did the hiring."

"Sometimes. But they ain't the big cheese."

"Who is?"

There was no reply. The stationmaster lit a black, foul stogie. "What's your background?"

"That's my business."

Pigeon-shoulders shrugged. "If you want work . . ."

"All right," Madigan said flatly. "I been around; Tombstone way. Down the border, when I was younger. I can handle a running iron."

The small eyes had widened and slitted again. "References?"

"Curly Bill, for about a year. Pete Stringer . . ."

The stationmaster whistled softly. "And you been across into Mexico?"

"Not legally."

The eyes blinked. The skeletal head reared back. It was the laugh of a big man.

"All right, mister. You know Sierra Pinta country?"

"Some."

"There's a town called Chuka Flats."

"I'll find it."

"You'll report to a place four miles out. In the foothills."

"Who do I ask for?"

A last shadow of doubt hardened the stationmaster's face. Then: "The boss is Alec Quintos." He got up and went to the file cabinet. He took out a canceled ticket, scribbled *Whistler* on the back, and handed it over. "That'll be your passport."

Madigan nodded.

"You better be good, mister. My product ain't good, I don't get paid."

"You'll get paid," Madigan said.

The stationmaster refilled his tin cup from a dusty tequilla bottle.

Madigan didn't move. He wanted to ask if *they* would be there, the two dealers. And if they were called Burke and Hays. But that was a chance he had to take blind.

The stationmaster lifted his cup; his gold tooth blinked. "Keep the iron hot, mister."

Madigan left.

The Western Union office was four buildings down Gila Street. All he wrote on the yellow paper was: *Frank Regan, Dragoon Wells, Arizona. Camp west of Chuka Flats.*

When he came back, the wicket was still closed.

He wanted a drink. He didn't stop for one.

He mounted the dun and rode.

V

THERE HAD BEEN nothing but blazing desert waste and, here and there, the gutted ghost of a settler's soddy. He had given wide berth to a stage waystation and bedded the first night at a creek edged by ironwoods. He had shot and roasted an antelope-jack and filled his canteen from the lopped-off head of a barrel cactus. He had seen no one.

Past noon on the second day the purple-misted crook-backs of the Sierra Pintas came down closer and then, over a rise of blue gramma, the town lay like an oasis gone dry.

Chuka Flats was one street. There was a dusty spur and a boxcar station and a double row of slab shanties, built of dry-goods boxes and tented roofs. In between, an occasional mud hut gleamed palely in the sun. Over the doorway of one a sign said CANTINA.

Inside, it was cooler, but the walls sweated. Garlands of dried peppers festooned the crossbeams and the place smelled of frijoles. A couple of drifters played eucre at a corner table. The Mexican behind the bar had hair curling down to his eyebrows and the teeth of a mule. He didn't move.

"Whiskey," Madigan said.

"No whiskey," the Mexican said. "Beer or wine."

"Beer."

It was warm and flavored by the Mexican's thumb.

The Mexican sucked on a lemon peel and sipped tequilla.

"There's a ranch four miles southeast," Madigan said.

"Sí," the Mexican said.

The drifters stopped talking.

"I got friends staying there."

The Mexican didn't answer.

Madigan said, "Maybe they stop in here. Hays and Burke."

The drifters were playing again but they weren't talking.

"One of them has a wall-eye," Madigan said.

The Mexican scowled. "The crazy-eye."

"You know them?"

"I know nothing . . ."

"Look, if they're working on this place—"

"Who are you, mister?"

The Mexican had not spoken. Madigan turned, his spine pressed to the bar-edge.

The drifter got out of his chair slowly. He wore a red shirt and black leather chaps and breathed with his mouth open. His gun was slung low and thigh-thonged.

"What's your business with Burke and Hays?"

Madigan's stomach tightened. It wasn't a cold trail. He grinned.

"I figure we'll be working together again."

The drifter said, "Working where?"

"For Mr. Quintos."

The cantina was very quiet. Somewhere, out on the street, a horse nickered.

The drifter crossed to the bar. "What do you know about Quintos?"

"That he needs riders."

"Who told you?" His breath came loud and sour.

"I'll talk to Mr. Quintos."

"You'll talk to me."

Madigan grinned and started to turn away. A fist caught his sleeve. When he spun back, the Colt was level in his hand. The drifter decided to smile.

"The name is Turner. Nace Turner."

"All I know is Quintos," Madigan said.

"I'm his foreman."

Slowly, Madigan holstered the gun. Then he took the ticket from his shirt pocket. Turner read it.

"So old Whistler's been working again."

Madigan didn't answer.

"He better be right about you," Turner said.

"That's what he said."

"What's your name?"

"Frank Cooper."

"You'll answer some questions first."

"I'll answer Mr. Quintos," Madigan said.

Abruptly, Turner laughed. "I'll say this—you got gall."

Madigan laid a coin on the bar.

"Where you going, Cooper?"

"To see Quintos."

Finally, Turner nodded. "I'll take you there."

The main building had adobe walls two feet thick; a poleroof covered with dirt kept it cool. The office had Apache blankets on the wall and rough-hewn chairs with hide seats. Alec Quintos sat behind a carved desk all the way from San Francisco. Even seated, he was tall, the mixture of Scotch and Spanish blood clear in his dark, planed face and pale blue eyes. He wore a town suit and his boots were Spanish tooled. At last, he eased back and pared his nails with a hunting knife.

"What do you think, Nace?"

Madigan felt Turner's gaze.

"He knows the country," Turner said.

Madigan said, "Look, I don't ask no favors."

Quintos showed white, even teeth. "Relax, Mr. Cooper."

"Whistler said—"

"And I respect Whistler's judgment—most of the time."

"I'll earn my keep."

"No doubt. You say you've worked across the border."

"Enough."

"With Curly Bill?"

"And Stringer."

"Fast company," Quintos said.

"I kept pace."

Quintos laid down the knife and went to a cabinet by the wall. He poured himself a drink. Without turning, he said, "How many men have you killed?"

Madigan tightened. Turner leered with his gaping mouth.

Quintos said, "You ask us to trust you. It cuts two ways."

"You want a hold over me," Madigan said.

"I want insurance."

Finally, Madigan said, "Two."

"Only two?"

"Mexicans don't count."

Quintos smiled again. "Mexicans?"

"Once or twice we had trouble with rurales."

Quintos sat down and rocked the chair. He stared at the whiskey in his glass. "What about Burke and Tucker Hays?"

Careful. "Whistler gave me the idea they worked for you."

"So?"

"So nothing. I rode with them once before."

The pale eyes lifted. "Where?"

"North of the Gila. We did a little iron work. A little whiskey to the Indians. They paid us with rustled stock."

Quintos nodded slowly.

How much did he know about Hays and Burke? About the train job? Nothing, if they ran to pattern. They wouldn't cut him in on a possible five-year-old payoff.

But Madigan could feel sweat along his spine.

"I didn't see them when we rode in," he said.

"They ain't here. They're—" Turner shut up. Quintos' glance ordered him to.

"All right, Cooper. Say you know below the border. Say we're interested in moving a little Mex beef up this way. Where would you hit first?"

Make it good. You can't tell how much Quintos knows already.

"You move south from Nogales. There's a trace through the Santa Ritas. About thirty miles in, you hit two rancheros. One belongs to Miguel Villa; the other one's called San Cosma. They got so much land to police, it's like candy from a baby. Once, Stringer brought up near a thousand head . . ."

The pallid blue eyes glittered.

"We send out scouts," Quintos said. "Right now, your boys Hays and Burke are down that way. You think you could lead them to those spots?"

"I know the trail."

Quintos nodded. "You get the lay of the land. When you're ready, you wire us."

"How do I find Hays and Burke?"

"In the south foothills of the Pintas. There's a line shack. They use it as headquarters. You can start in the morning."

Madigan could feel his own heart beating. But he couldn't appear too eager. "One more thing—how much?"

Quintos grinned whitely. "Fifty a month and found."

"Go to hell."

"Plus a share of the profit—when it comes."

"That's better."

"Anything else, Mr. Cooper?"

"I could use a square meal."

Quintos nodded to Turner. "Show him around. Tell Cookie to feed him."

Madigan stood up.

"And, Nace," Quintos said, "ride with him tomorrow."

Something fell inside Madigan but his face showed nothing.

"You don't mind, Mr. Cooper?"

"Why should I mind?"

"Good," Quintos said. "I'm trustful—but not foolish."

It couldn't wait.

Madigan lay in his bunk and stared at the night-darkened window. He swore silently.

It had to be now, and that was bad. If he had been able to ride out alone in the morning, he'd have had all the time he needed with Burke and Hays, with Frank Regan to side him. But not with Turner along. Now he would have to hightail tonight and hope he wasn't missed till sunup. Once Quintos found him gone . . .

But there was no help for it.

He waited. He wanted a cigarette, but he was supposed to be asleep. From the black well of the bunkhouse came grumblings and snores. The man in the next bunk flopped over and blew out his whiskey breath. Down by the pole-corral, a night guard was mouthing his harmonica. Gradually, voices died away. Two last

stragglers came in and somebody growled, "Shut the damn door!" Boots dropped on the rough boards. One of the stragglers lit a smoke; its red eye burned endlessly. Madigan waited.

The lights in the main house still burned when he squeezed out of the bunkhouse door. He had left the dun by the barn. He didn't mount. Skirting the buildings, he once flattened against a wall. The main house door opened and for a minute Alec Quintos came out and stared at the sky, then went back in. The night guard was playing "Genevive" as if he wanted to cry.

In a grove of alders beyond the clearing, Madigan mounted, but kept the dun to a walk. He didn't spur until he was over the westward comb of land.

It was a safe, wide loop he made with the firefly lights of Chuka Flats far on his left. The riding was level and easy with a cold night desert wind making the dun blow and, finally, in a hollow by a cottonwood stand, he saw the glow of campfire.

He slowed the dun and came in at a walk.

The figure by the fire stood abruptly and swung around with a Winchester leveled hip-high.

Madigan dismounted. "How long you been here?"

"Since sundown," Frank Regan said.

"I was worried you mightn't make it."

"Thanks for the wire."

Madigan had lifted the coffeepot from the fire. "It wasn't I didn't trust myself."

"I didn't say it was."

"I want Hays and Burke alive. I want them talking. I'll need help."

"The two waddies that questioned Hallie?"

"The same."

"Where are they?"

Madigan swallowed steaming coffee and grinned. "Hooked up with a cattle bunch. The boss is Alec Quintos."

The sheriff's eyes narrowed. "I got a poster on him."

The grin widened. "Maybe you'll make a bonus."

"Maybe. But this Burke and Hays . . ."

"Quintos is planning a hit over the border. He's got them out scouting for prospects. He thinks I can head them for pay dirt."

"So, in the morning—"

"Not in the morning," Madigan said. "Now."

He gave Regan the whole story. "Soon as Quintos knows I skipped, he's bound to head for that line shack."

"How long a ride we got?" Regan said.

"We might make it before sunup."

Regan poured a last coffee and poured the rest in the fire.

"All right," he said. "Now."

VI

THE FIRST GRAY of a false dawn brought the song of a mockingbird across the sandy bottoms. They forded a creek and started a covey of grouse, and a blacktailed jack skittered from a patch of dropseed, making Regan's pony shy. Ahead, the land rose slowly to a hummock and Madigan reined in.

"That must be it."

Regan squinted. "You sure?"

"We'll find out."

The shack was weathered board with a roof that slanted down to make a lean-to on one side. Sacking blinded its one window and the door was closed. Under the shed, two horses stood sleeping, heads hung low. No smoke came from the narrow stovepipe chimney.

The sheriff nodded. Madigan loosened his Colt in the leather.

"Remember," Regan said, "alive."

Madigan gave him a look but said nothing.

They took the grade slowly, the dun shuttling at an angle. Madigan's eyes didn't leave the shack. The sheriff had his Winchester clear of the boot. The mockingbird started again and one of the horses in the lean-to tossed its mane and pawed the earth.

"Hold it," Madigan said.

The shack door had opened. A man edged out sideways, crablike, hefting a limp gunnysack on one shoulder. He started for the shed, then swung suddenly and froze, staring down the rise.

"He sees us," Regan said.

In the same moment, the figure wheeled and shouldered back inside the shack, stumbling under the weight of sacking. The door slammed.

"Damn!" Madigan's gaze darted from left to right. There was no cover save a clot of jumping cholla far to the right.

"You know him?" Regan asked.

"It was Burke."

"What about Hays?"

"Must be inside."

"We're hobble turkeys at a shoot. Do we go in?"

Madigan nodded. Their horses answered the spur, shambling forward.

"Boss?" The yell came from the shack.

Madigan signaled another halt. "That's Burke."

The window-sacking stirred. A face peered out.

Burke's voice carried. "That you, Boss? Turner? We had a little ruckus up here. . . ."

"He's having trouble with that wall-eye," Madigan said. "He thinks we're Quintos and Turner. Let's go. If we get close enough . . ."

The ponies climbed, sidling.

Where the hell was Tucker Hays? Madigan wondered. Somewhere outside? Or waiting in there with Burke?

The whine of a shell came first, chased by the rifle-blast, and Regan's pony reared. The rifle hammered out again and then both of them were out of the saddle, belly-flat in the sand, slithering to the cover of a fallen joshua. The sheriff coughed and spit out sand.

"He sure as hell knows we ain't Quintos now."

The rifle barked again.

"That's one gun," Madigan said. "What's holding Hays down?"

"Maybe he's already out on the range."

"With two horses still in the shed?" Madigan studied the land on both sides. "If I can make that cholla brush, I can circle and come in behind the shack."

"If."

"You just keep him busy."

"You mean draw his fire."

Madigan grinned. "You want them alive, don't you?"

Regan jacked a shell and fired.

The cholla break looked miles away. Madigan bent low and ran. Down from the rise Burke's rifle started

again and then Regan was in the open, letting go steadily with the Winchester. A tinkle of glass echoed and the window-sacking ripped clear. Burke swung for the new target and Regan went to his elbows, still firing.

The circle only seemed wide. Madigan made it in loping strides and then he was climbing, the shack to his left, so that he came in behind the lean-to. One of the horses shied and nickered. Madigan back-slid along the wall. He could see the blue-black rifle barrel jutting from the window and Regan below, up and darting from side to side, using the Winchester. The rifle slammed twice before Madigan crashed through the door.

Burke swore and stumbled back from the window. He tried to bring the rifle muzzle-first but Madigan was in under it. An arm jammed the barrel upward and the shot tore through roof-planking. Madigan twisted brutally and the rifle was in his grip and Burke slammed back flat on a tabletop, the rifle like a bar forcing up under his chin, crushing the windpipe, and the wall-eye went crooked and all Madigan could see was Hallie's face, the way it must have been after—

"Madigan!" Regan stood in the doorway. "Let him go."

Madigan eased back, breathing thickly. Burke rolled off the table and went on both knees, hands clutched to his bruised throat. Madigan looked at the sheriff, then at Burke.

"Get up," Madigan said.

The head lolled and the wild eye blinked. "Jesus, you near killed me."

Burke stumbled to his feet and got a canteen from the grimy cot in one corner. He choked on the water.

"You tried it twice on me," Madigan said.

Burke stared. "Twice? You're loco."

"The second time was in Dragoon Wells."

Burke sank on the edge of the cot. "Not me."

"Hays, then."

"Neither one of us." Burke swallowed and winced but tried a grin. "Seems like a lot of people want you dead."

A lot of people. Brewton? The Dutchman? Burke and—

"Where's Hays?" Madigan said flatly.

Burke's face came up from between his hands too quickly. "He's out. He headed for the border. . . ."

"His horse is still—"

"Madigan," the sheriff said.

He turned and saw Regan bent over the gunnysack Burke had been carrying. The sack was pulled back now and a pair of boots stuck out at odd angles.

"Take it off," Madigan said.

Burke sat white-faced, watching.

It took time. Finally, Hays's head lolled free and there wasn't much left of it.

Like Hallie. Madigan's mouth was dry. "What happened?"

Burke's face twisted, the wall-eye darting on its own. "It wasn't my fault. We was playing monte. Tucker was drunk. He got sore when he lost and he threw down on me."

Madigan's backhand caught him across the mouth. Burke slid sidewise and gaped.

"It was more than that," Madigan said.

"No, I swear . . ." A sullen look came into his good eye. "Listen, you got no right here. You got nothing on me. Quintos'll settle you . . ."

"Or we'll settle him," Regan said.

For the first time, Burke noticed the sheriff's star. He swung on Madigan.

"You turned law. You yellow-bellied—"

"A Pinkerton man was killed a few nights back," Regan cut in. "We know you did it."

Burke spat on the dirt floor. "Prove it."

"Madigan was there. He's my witness."

"Witness, hell. An ex-con, lying to save his own skin." Burke laughed. "Quintos'll get me off."

Slowly Madigan shook his head. "No more getting off, friend. No more killing. Nothing now but the whole truth."

"Go to hell."

The last word jolted out as Madigan's fist closed on shirtfront and hauled him to his feet.

"The easy way or the hard, Burke?"

The wall-eye rolled. "You're law, now. You can't beat up on—"

"Sheriff?" Madigan said.

"I reckon I won't remember a thing I see," Regan said.

Burke swore and brought a left up hard below the belt. Madigan's hold broke but his free hand chopped down hatchet-like; Burke reeled against a wall and the shack shuddered as Madigan closed in. He felt bone crunch against his knuckles and Burke was bleeding at the mouth. He threw another right and the wall-eye spun and Burke doubled with a knee in his groin. He hit the dirt hard and lifted both arms over his face to break the impact of Madigan's kick. Madigan grabbed the bloody shirt; it ripped as he yanked upward, but Burke was a dead weight, screaming, "No—no more. No more . . ."

Madigan let go and the weight sank, head down, coughing for air.

"The truth," Madigan said. "All of it or, so help me God, I'll kill you like you killed Hallie."

Burke's surprise looked real. "Oh, no, Madigan. You're wrong."

"You saw her the night before she was shot," Regan said.

"All right. Me and Hays. We wanted to ask a few questions . . ."

"What questions?" Madigan said.

Burke glanced at the sheriff.

"He knows the whole story," Madigan said. "Talk."

Staggering to the cot, Burke wet his neckerchief from the canteen and held it to the split lip.

"We figured the girl was close to you. If it was you crossed us, she might know where the payroll was stashed." The white of the wall-eye gleamed. "Questions, that's all. We never killed no woman."

"But you know who did," Madigan said.

"No, goddamn it. But it ain't hard to guess. If the Dutchman and Pike figured she knew too much. If it was them that hightailed with the take . . ."

"You said you figured Pike was dead."

"Maybe not. All we found was his horse."

"And you never saw him again?"

"No."

"Or the Dutchman?"

"No." But it didn't come as fast this time.

Madigan looked at the sheriff. Burke's gaze was on the gunnysack and Hays.

Quietly, Madigan said, "And you don't know where they are?"

"No." Burke started to take a drink.

Madigan swung and the canteen ripped from Burke's fist.

"You figure you could forget some more, Sheriff?" Madigan's hand closed and lifted.

"Come on, Madigan . . ." Burke staggered backward. "I told you all I know."

"Mister, I wouldn't mind finishing you right now."

"All right!" Burke screamed.

"Why did you gun Hays?"

"He was holding out on me."

"Explain."

"Couple weeks ago, he made a trip—north, around the Gila Reservation. Just a ride. . . . We never quit hoping we'd run across somebody, something . . ."

"And Hays did?"

Burke stared at the body and spat. "I don't know."

"But, you got a notion."

"He come back. He said it was a goose chase. But he was kind of quiet, for Hays. Then, the other night, before we left the Quintos place, I see him reading a letter. Well, who the hell does he know that can write? Then I see him throw it on the cookfire and walk away. I tried to get it out of the fire. All I got was a piece of envelope. It was posted at Maricopa. . . ."

"And?"

"That's all." Burke shrugged furiously. "Till we come up here. And last night I faced the bastard with it. He got sore as hell. I said he was crossing me, he knew something. He hit me and pulled that damn skinning knife of his, and I got my hands on the rifle."

"You don't know who sent the letter?"

"Hell, no. But it must be Pike or the Dutchman." He looked at the body and cursed. "He'd of cut his mother's throat for a slice of money. I figure him and whoever he run down made a deal. Get rid of me and he'd get his share." The good eye narrowed and Burke made a grin. "What about it, Madigan? Still on the law's side?"

Nobody answered.

Burke wet his split lip. "Look. The two of you. Madigan's got a right to his cut. And you, Sheriff, how much a month you get for risking your neck? Say the three of us threw in together, ran down this lead . . ."

Madigan turned to the body. "You'll bury him before you go."

"Go where?"

"Back to the Wells," Madigan said. "To stand trial."

Burke stared and then flung the canteen against a wall.

"You won't make it stick. Quintos'll have me out of your two-bit jail by tomorrow night."

"You got a grave to dig," Madigan said.

It was shallow but covered with rocks against buzzards and bobcats.

Burke threw the shovel aside.

"Tie his hands," Regan said.

Madigan used rawhide thongs, then helped Burke into the saddle.

Daylight was blinding across the parched land. Madigan unhitched Hays's pony and slapped its hindquarters. The horse lifted a fine head, sniffed at freedom and cantered off.

Madigan mounted the dun. "I'll ride as far as the Wells with you."

"And then?" Regan asked.

"Maricopa."

"You're sure?"

Madigan stared at Burke. Burke grinned.

"I'm not sure of anything." Madigan swung the dun down the rise.

They had reached the jumping cholla break when Regan said, "Look."

Madigan swung his gaze to follow the sheriff's.

The three horsemen were coming on slow and careful, breasting a hummock.

"Nace Turner," Madigan said.

In the same instant, Burke let out a yell and dug in his heels. The pony spun, Burke's thonged hands clutching the horn, and broke into a gallop. Madigan wheeled the dun but Regan was already in the lead and Burke was bellowing.

"Nace! Get them! They killed Hays!"

The three riders halted and a rifle barrel glinted.

"Get them!" Burke yelled. "They mean to nail Quintos! They—"

Regan was on Burke's heels when Turner fired and Burke jolted upright in the saddle, his mount rearing under him, then slid back and down in a cloud of dust.

The sheriff's Winchester was clear; he passed Burke and Madigan called, "Frank, look out!" It was too late. Another rifle smashed echoes from the flat and Regan went down with the horse. He didn't get up.

Madigan drove the dun, bending low, firing blind, but the three riders had turned now and were up the rise, Turner, hipshot in the leather, blasting steadily with the repeater. Then they were over the hummock and the crest was bare and in the sudden dead silence, Madigan reined back.

Regan was sitting up, his feet sprawled out, his good hand clamped on the right shoulder.

"I'm all right. See about him."

Madigan walked back to where Burke lay, facedown in a clump of needlegrass. He toed the body and it rolled over. The good eye was shut but the wall-eye stared blindly into the sun. A red blotch was spreading across Burke's chest.

Madigan went back to Regan.

The shell had drilled cleanly through the right shoulder.

"You won't use that gunhand for a while," Madigan said.

The sheriff swore. "What about Burke?"

"Dead."

"Quintos plays careful."

Madigan nodded. "He wasn't letting Burke give away his setup."

Regan stood, wincing. "It'll take time, but we'll get him."

Without answering, Madigan went and slung the body across Burke's saddle, lashed arms and legs and led the horse back.

"Can you ride, Frank?"

"I'll make it. You still bent on Maricopa?"

"It's the only lead left."

"What if Burke was lying?"

"I don't know. But I know one thing . . . somebody's going to tell me the truth about Hallie."

VII

IT WAS a faded daguerreotype of any other fag-end town. There were parched cottonwoods along the single cross street and two or three adobe houses pretended to have dooryard gardens, but the rest of it was bleached like cattle-bones in the sun-scorched desert. It had a

Presbyterian church, a town hall with a peeling sign that said: MARICOPA, JEWEL OF THE GILA VALLEY, one hotel and three saloons.

Madigan had started at the hotel.

"I'm looking for Brewton and the Dutchman."

The desk clerk hadn't blinked an eye.

"I heard they were in town."

The clerk smoothed a wisp of hair over his shining pate. "A lot of folks pass through."

"You don't know them?"

Watery eyes took in Madigan's dusty boots, the low-slung Colt, the way his right hand hung free and ready.

"I mind my own p's and q's, mister."

That was all, but Madigan felt he had gotten through.

In the late afternoon, he had left his room and started again in the Olive Branch Saloon. He had drunk steadily and talked. When he moved on to the second bar, his step wasn't regular and he kept touching the Colt handle. People had begun to watch. A deputy stood in awning shade outside the marshal's office, staring. The word was out.

Now, in the dim, sawdust-smelling bar of the Casino, he downed another whiskey and wiped his mouth with a sleeve.

"So nobody knows Pike and the Dutchman."

His voice was too loud and slurred.

One of the saloon girls giggled. "Take it easy, handsome."

"You shut up," Madigan yelled.

The bartender had handlebars and biceps that looked like they might burst his sleeve-garters. "You heard the lady, mister."

Madigan spun to face the room, leaning back on the mahogany. Townsmen at one table had stopped their

poker game. The piano-player got off his stool, like he wanted to run.

"You're all liars," Madigan said. "I know they were in town. I got word they hang here."

"Look," the barkeep said, "you start any trouble and—"

"No trouble, buddy." Madigan's grin was stiff. "Not for your nice, friendly little town." The grin faded. He refilled his glass. "Just for the Dutchman. Just for the great Pike Brewton."

"Take my advice, mister. Move on with your trouble."

"Like hell I will. I been tailing them ever since I got out. And it ends here, buddy." Madigan swallowed more whiskey. "Think they can cross me? Cut me out of my share? Think they can gun my girl down . . ."

"Don't you think you had enough for one night?"

The deputy spoke from the batwinged doorway.

Madigan laughed. "Well, if it ain't the law."

"Why don't you go to your room and sleep it off."

"Stay out of this, Law. Just stand clear."

The deputy drew his gun. "Sleep it off, mister."

Madigan stared, then laughed again. "Hard case. Real hard case. All right. But you—all of you—when you see Pike, when you reach the Dutchman . . . tell them Cass Madigan's in town. Tell them I'm going to blow their guts all over your nice main street. You hear? Tell them!"

Along the main drag, lights had come on; somewhere a dog yelped at the early moon. Madigan could feel the deputy's stare at his back. He stumbled twice and jostled a woman and tipped his hat elaborately. The desk clerk gave him an uneasy look when he fell up the first step.

In the room with its iron bed and flowered-paper walls, he poured water into a china basin and doused his head. He could hold his share, but tonight he had come close to the edge. When he crossed to the bed,

his step was steady. He lit a cigarette and laid the two pillows lengthwise, covering them with the blanket. He drew the old rocker into a corner. It creaked when he sat down and shifted to free his gun. The cigarette-tip pulsed evenly in the dark.

Now it was a matter of waiting.

It got late. Somewhere in the hotel a window slammed and on the stairs a woman laughed invitingly. Footsteps passed the door. In one of the downstairs rooms, somebody plunked a tinny banjo. The dog was still baying at the moon and fiddle-music came from the Olive Branch. Twice, from his window, Madigan saw the deputy pass on the far boardwalk. The rocker made his back ache.

You were wrong, Madigan. Burke must have been lying. Or else the bait wasn't good enough. . . .

He tensed and stood up when the rocker creaked.

The tread on the stair was heavier this time. It came to the landing and paused. Madigan flattened against the wall. Nothing. Then a soft shuffling on the carpet outside. He saw the doorlatch lift with barely a click. A slice of hall-light fell across the floor next to the bed, then a shadow. It was broad and topped by a hard hat. The figure stood a moment, then moved toward the bed. Madigan stopped breathing.

The broad shadow lunged, an arm uplifted, and hall-glare caught on the scalping knife blade as it drove down into the blanketed pillows. There was a hoarse curse and, as the figure wheeled, Madigan brought the Colt-barrel down hard from left to right. The man stumbled back, the china basin smashed to the floor, then the figure slowly slid down the wall and sat there.

Madigan struck a match. The lampwick flared.

Without his hard hat, the Dutchman looked naked. An old bullet-scar creased his shaven head. His eyes were like marbles and his mouth hung open and damp. He watched Madigan come close, a thumb easing back the hammer. He cringed when the muzzle dug up under his chin.

"So you figured a knife would be quieter this time."

"The word was out. It was me or you."

"And the last time?"

"There was no last—"

The muzzle dug harder. "The time in Dragoon Wells. You remember that."

"I never . . ."

"Dutchman, you want the top of your head on the ceiling?"

"So, all right. I tried before. It was not my idea, Madigan."

"And Hallie James wasn't your idea."

The marble eyes rolled. "If I tell you, they kill me. . . ."

"Take your pick. Them or me."

Finally the Dutchman nodded. Sweat streamed down his jowls.

Madigan backed off, but the Colt kept bead.

"I don't be smart one. I just take orders," the Dutchman said thickly.

"Who are they?"

"Brewton. And two new boys."

"Then it was you and him cleared out with the take?"

"His plan, Madigan."

"And Hallie?"

"Pike knew you was getting out. The others maybe—Hays and Burke—he could dodge. But you . . ."

"That's no answer."

"The girl . . ." Huge shoulders shrugged. "He thought she knew too much and with you loose—they said you were starting clean—she might talk you into going with Regan. She might name names."

"So you blew her face off."

"Not me." The flabby jowls shook. "Pike said, 'No bungling. This time, I do it myself.' "

It got quiet. Out on the street, somebody whistled on his way home.

Madigan came near enough to ram the Colt barrel into vest-front. "If I find out you're lying . . ."

"Why should I lie? I got my cut. What the hell I care for Pike? He sell me out same way, if he could." The sweat made little gleaming rivers along the Dutchman's jowls. "One thing, Madigan. I do you favor—you do me."

"What favor?"

"Pike finds out I talk, my life don't be worth plug nickel. You give me time to ride . . ."

"We're not done yet."

The marble eyes blinked. "Look, Madigan—"

"Where is he?"

The Dutchman wet his lips.

"I could gun you here and now," Madigan said. "That hole in the pillow makes it self-defense."

"All right, all right."

"Where?"

"Pike's up in Gila country. Indian Territory. He paid good for hideout . . ."

"Exactly."

"A mile south of the Salt Fork."

Their eyes held. In the end, Madigan nodded.

"If you lied, I'll be back."

"Look, what about me? I can't stay here now."

"You're not going to."

"*Gut.*" The Dutchman made a wet grin. "One hand washes the other, *ja*?"

Madigan stood clear of the door, the Colt level.

"Move."

The desk clerk put down his ledger and stood up.

"Just stay put," Madigan said.

The street was empty. Ahead of him, the Dutchman walked sidewise, glancing back.

"My horse at stable. I go now."

"Never mind."

"Madigan, you said—"

A swamper came through the Casino batwings and stared.

They were opposite the marshal's office.

"Hold it," Madigan said.

"Hey, what the hell you . . . ?"

"Shut up." Then Madigan called: "Deputy?"

The Dutchman's mouth went slack.

A shadow darkened the office threshold. "You want me?"

"I got a prisoner for you."

"Look, you make a promise . . ."

"I made one, Dutchman. To myself. About Hallie."

The deputy had his rifle crooked in one arm. "Who is he?"

"They call him the Dutchman. He's wanted for train robbery."

"Who says so?"

Madigan reached into his hip pocket and the badge winked in his palm.

"Send a wire to Frank Regan at Dragoon Wells. He'll fill you in."

The Dutchman's face twisted. "You dirty . . ."

Madigan smiled.

The deputy's rifle lifted. "You got your pick of cells, mister." He glanced at Madigan. "There's another one you were after—Brewton?"

Madigan nodded.

VIII

HIPSHOT in the saddle, he gazed down from the spine of a low ridge. Dusk hung like a heat-haze in the flatland. Soon it would be night and nothing but black expanse. No town, no traces of wagonruts; only the lonesome stretch of gramma and here and there a stand of parched cottonwood. Beyond the bottoms, the bend and joint of the Gila curled sluggishly. The fork of the Salt lay northeast about a mile and, past that, a darker haze, the foothills of South Mountain.

But there's life, Madigan thought. Near the Fork, a cluster of wickiups huddled together and a corral had been built for wild horses. It was Maricopa country, but the camp looked Apache. An Indian village and, to the north of it, on a hummock, the low shell of an adobe house.

Madigan shook his head. What had he expected? A ranch, maybe. A bunkhouse. The kind of setup Alec Quintos had. Pike Brewton hiding out like a coyote among renegade Apaches? With a new string of riders and that payroll burning a hole in his pocket? Enough to build a fort and tell them all to go to hell? No.

The Dutchman was lying. He sent you chasing a cold trail, hoping he could reach Brewton, warn him.

Madigan swore and caught the reins, then sat very still.

The faint click behind him wasn't repeated, but he knew the sound. A rifle had been cocked.

"Turn, White Eyes."

He wheeled the dun. Carefully.

The horseman was Apache. He wore the shoulder-length hair and bright headband and the beadwork on his shirt told about Vittorio's raids. The rifle was an old Sharps, but well cared-for.

"What do you want here?" the Indian said.

"I'm looking for a friend."

"There are no white men in Villamanos' country."

"Villamanos?"

"The leader of my people."

Madigan met the stare, then shrugged. "Somebody steered me wrong, I reckon."

The Apache was silent. Madigan nodded and heeled the dun.

"Wait."

Madigan halted.

The Sharps made a slight motion; it was an order. "Villamanos will say if you can go."

Madigan led the way.

All down the gentle fall of bottoms, he felt the rifle trained on his back.

Maybe the Dutchman figured it this way. Men rode into Apache country and disappeared. Nobody went looking for them.

The village was not large. Most of the bucks, cross-legged under tentflies, looked old and worn. But the corral was full; a big gray rumped the poles as they passed and Madigan's eyes narrowed. The gray was branded, but not Indian style.

The main wickiup was elk-hide painted with warpath signs. The Apache signaled a halt.

A few youngsters leaned on the poles and watched. Some squaws beside the tent stopped tanning.

"Villamanos," the Apache said.

The man who pushed aside the hide flap was tall and eagle-beaked, with a saber-scar across his chest. Gray streaked his black hair. Villamanos was not young any more, but his eyes were young. And hard. He listened to the Apache's story. Then he said,

"Why do you come?"

"I told that," Madigan said. "To find an old friend."

"One of your kind?"

"His name is Brewton. We rode together."

Nothing showed in the sloe-black eyes.

"Once, long ago, a White Eyes came to our village. He had been wounded."

"And?"

"He died," Villamanos said flatly.

Madigan stared. The leader's expression did not change.

He's lying, Madigan thought, but did not say it.

He felt the others now, a circle behind him.

"It couldn't be the same man. I know Brewton's alive."

"There has been no other since."

Finally, Madigan nodded. He turned slowly and scanned the reach of land northward. There was the dark shadow of the adobe house on the hummock.

"Maybe there's a ranch in the territory . . ."

"None," Villamanos said.

"That place on the hill . . ."

"A family of White Eyes lived there. They left. It is empty now."

The village was very quiet.

"This is the country of the *tinde*, my people," Villamanos said. "Twenty seasons now, we have stayed. Since we broke with Geronimo when he surrendered to the General, Crook. We live in peace."

Twenty seasons, Madigan thought. *Five years. In peace. Or raiding at night. No killing. Just horses cut out of white men's remudas; brands changed and resold to dealers like Alec Quintos.*

"You will go the way you came," Villamanos said. "You will not return. Nor any of your people."

Maybe they weren't lying.

The dun had left behind the low rise and cut into the black depths of a cottonwood band and now, in the night an owl screeched. Madigan kept riding.

Maybe it was all the Dutchman's trick. If it had been Pike and the Dutchman from the start, he knew where Pike was really holed up. *So you head back for Maricopa. You make him talk. Straight, this time.* But there had been the house on the hummock, the Apaches, building their wall of silence, and the stolen horses, scorched with a running iron, he was dead sure. . . .

Madigan reined in. The dun's head lifted and one ear flickered. On either side of the matted trace, trees closed in and joined above, shutting out the moonlight. A wind was rising and the owl screamed again and Madigan thought: *You're on edge. You need sleep.* Gently, he heeled the dun, and then the click came again. Instinct rolled Madigan to the left, out of leather, and too near on the right, the rifle snapped. Orange flame stabbed out. The dun whinnied and bolted. Madigan lay absolutely still.

A cholla-spine had scratched his cheek. His gun arm was twisted under him. The wind stirred branches and

momentary moonglow came and went. He heard the pawing of a horse, then padded steps. Moccasin-tread. He heard brush crackle. A foot was near his head. He could smell bear-grease; the sound of breathing bent over him. . . .

Madigan rolled backward and threw one boot in a mulekick. The Apache grunted, doubled over his groin, and Madigan's arm tangled the buckskinned legs. The Indian pitched forward and wrenched to one side, kicking wildly. The Sharps rifle swung for a bead but Madigan slammed it aside. He felt the Apache's free arm twist back and up and grabbed with both hands, his knee in sinewed gut, and then his own weight was driving downward, the Indian's scalping knife in his own hand, the point plunging deep just under the hinge of jaw.

The Apache stiffened and there was a wet bubbling in his throat. He lurched once, then again, and was still.

Madigan struck a match. The eyes were wide open. It was the scout who had first trapped him.

The executioner. Madigan swore. Villamanos hadn't been satisfied with sending him off. Cass Madigan had to die. Or had somebody else issued the death warrant? Just because he had strayed into Villamanos' country?

No. It was more than that. It was something bigger they had to hide.

New riders, the Dutchman had said. What better riders for a Pike Brewton than a band of renegades?

Madigan pulled brush over the body and tethered the Apache's pony to a cottonwood. The dun hadn't gone far. When he swung up, Madigan pulled the horse's head north. He could see Villamanos again, the stoic, final stare. *You will not come back.*

Through set teeth, Madigan smiled. "The hell I won't."

He never lost sight of the house.

He rode slowly, holding to any cover that lay handy—the cottonwoods, an overhanging copse, a rise of land—and made the wide arc that left Villamanos' camp to the south and east. If there were outriders, he was ready. The Apache's Sharps rested across the horn; his own Colt was free in the holster.

His back and legs ached. The scratch on his cheek had dried stiff. From a saddlebag, he took hardtack and a chunk of jerky, chewing as he rode. He wanted hot coffee. He wanted sleep. He didn't stop.

The dun had swung slowly now so that the Gila was on his left and the land lifted gently underhoof. Southward, Apache fires burned holes in the dark. A coyote worried the moon and he could smell the river on a shifting wind. The adobe house stood out, low and black. No lights. It might still be a false trail. He might end with nothing but a burnt-out shell.

Then he saw the horse stir in the small corral next to the house, and a figure detach itself from the porch's shadow and come across the clearing. Madigan slid from the dun. The figure moved without sound; moonlight gleamed on naked shoulders. Another Indian. Living in the house? Or guarding it? But in the night a house needed lamplight . . .

Madigan edged along the corral poles till adobe wall grazed his back. The Indian had walked to the rim of the hummock and stood gazing for a moment down toward the village. Slowly, he turned back, carrying the rifle at the end of one careless, swinging arm.

The gun mustn't be fired. Any shot would bring Villamanos like a buzzard to the stink of carcass.

Waiting, Madigan's legs tightened. The Apache paused on the porch and once more scanned the clearing. *Take*

him now. In the open. Madigan's fingers caught up a pebble, tossed it toward the hummock-edge. The Indian wheeled to the sound of its fall and, in the same instant, Madigan moved. The Colt's barrel came down once, hard, behind the ear, and Madigan caught dead weight as it crumpled. It was quiet enough to hear the sawing of a katydid.

The house could have been dead. Except that Apaches did not guard the dead.

Madigan was sweating. His boots made the porch-boards groan.

The latch was cold to the touch. He tripped it carefully and let the plank-door swing inward.

Darkness. A smell of old leather and bear-grease. A pungent whiff of Indian herbs. Only a paler shaft of moonlight from one unblinded window. Madigan lifted the Colt and stepped in.

Then something made a swishing sound and the reek of grease was very strong. In the light from the door, Madigan spun. A bare arm circled his neck from behind and he saw the other hand lifted and the knife glinting. He caught at the wrist, twisting, and the squeal was high and wild. His elbow dug back into soft flesh; for an instant, he saw the woman's face, wide-eyed, the white teeth bared. He lashed out and saw her stumble back against one wall and then the voice said, "Don't move, Madigan."

He froze, outlined on the threshold. Somewhere across the room, in complete darkness, a gun hammer clicked. The Apache woman started forward again.

"No," the voice ordered. "I'll handle him now."

The squaw stood still.

"Drop the gun, Madigan, or I'll blow you in half."

He did, then carefully straightened. "It's been a long time, Pike."

"You had to come back, didn't you?"

"There was a score to settle." Madigan's eyes strained. Faintly, he saw a darker shadow in the blackness. A figure seated behind a table, a shotgun trained on the door.

"Well, you come to the wrong—"

Abruptly, Madigan's boot hooked out. The door slammed shut as he dove sidewise and caught up the fallen Colt. The woman made an animal sound but the figure at the table didn't move. Against one wall, Madigan was motionless.

Softly, Pike Brewton laughed. "Wrong move, kid."

Madigan didn't answer. A shotgun could follow sound.

"You only hurt yourself," Brewton's voice said. "I'm used to the dark."

Edging along the wall, Madigan listened. Now, beyond the faint window-light, the figure was opposite him. But the head didn't turn. Only the gun shifted slightly.

"Madigan?"

He didn't breathe.

"Madigan, it's no good." Brewton's voice had tightened a notch. "If the Dutchman sent you—"

He dove and came up behind the chair. Brewton tried to turn. Madigan's boot kicked the rifle free, an arm clamped under Brewton's jaw. Brewton clawed at it, then went still at the pressure of the Colt under his ear.

"All right," Madigan said flatly. "Tell her to light a lamp. Tell her one wrong move and you die."

The doorlatch clicked; moonwash struck across the floor.

"Tell her. She hightails and you get a hole in the head."

Brewton spoke harshly. The squaw closed the door.

"The lamp," Madigan said.

IX

FINALLY, the woman obeyed. A chimney rattled and the match flared. The wick bloomed and slanted upward on a puff of kerosene smoke.

The squaw was not young any more, but once there had been beauty in her face. She backed away; her eyes never left Brewton. In the end she nodded and sat cross-legged against the rough wall.

Brewton hadn't stirred. His spine was rigid against the rawhide chair back.

Behind him, Madigan eased the arm-grip.

"Move fast, Pike, and you won't move again."

Brewton seemed to sag, but both hands stayed on the chair arms. His head did not turn.

Madigan circled the table slowly and then stared.

Brewton's town suit was dusty and frayed. The shirt-front was still white but the collar was worn ragged. The hands on the chair arms were black-nailed claws and, above the shirt-bosom, Brewton's head tilted bird-like, listening. His mouth was half open. The scar cut an angle across both of his eyes. One was an empty socket. The other stared without seeing.

"Jesus," Madigan said.

The sound of his voice made Brewton go taut.

"If you kill me, Madigan, you'll answer to Villamanos."

"But you're . . ."

"Blind?" Brewton's mouth twisted. "As if you didn't know."

"I didn't."

"The Dutchman didn't tell you?"

"I never said it was the Dutchman."

"It had to be."

Blind, Madigan's mind echoed. *A blind man, holed up in this dead house, sitting on a fortune. A blind man riding into Dragoon Wells, finding Hallie . . .*

"Did he tell you it was me that crossed the bunch?" Pike Brewton said hoarsely.

"That was part of it."

"It figured. Once you were out, once you started asking questions, he had to cover trail."

"What trail?"

"His own." Brewton swore thickly. "Five years, Madigan. Five years in this stinking hole, knowing all the time it was the Dutchman. Him and—"

"That's your story."

"That's the truth. Why would I lie now? To protect what I haven't got?"

"That payroll . . ."

Pike Brewton's hand slammed down on the table. "I never saw a goddamn coin of it. Believe that or go to hell."

"Then the Dutchman . . ."

"Yeah. The Dutchman." Brewton leaned across the table; his mouth was wet. His one eye blinked. "He had it all worked out from the start. He knew when we split after the job it would be him and me with the shipment. We made good time that night. Before sunup, we were

in the hills and headed north. A circle, remember? Two or three days and we'd double back for the hideout, meet up with Hays and Burke."

Madigan waited. By the wall, the Apache woman's eyes glittered. Brewton's breathing was a harsh rasp.

"We were in a narrow draw when he made his play. Not a word. Just the click of the breech behind me and I knew. I tried to swing my pony around, but he fired too fast and then . . ." One grimy hand traced the scar, trembling. "I don't know how long I was out. Then I couldn't see, but I heard and I lay still. There were horses. Not just mine. Not just the Dutchman's. I heard the Dutchman say he'd better finish me and somebody else, a man's voice said that hell, I was done for. I didn't even breathe."

"Somebody else," Madigan said slowly.

Brewton didn't answer. He wasn't here now; he was back five years, living it all again.

"I passed out again. The next thing I knew was sun burning my face, only I couldn't see it. I reckon I went off my head, then. I tried to guess, to find a sense of direction. I started to walk. If I could get back to the Wells . . . I was ready to spill it all, just so they'd get him. It got cold and I knew it was night again."

It took an effort, but Brewton straightened, then sagged back against the chair.

"Two Apaches found me, wandering in the desert. They brought me here. Villamanos told me later. First, they figured on a reward. Then a medicine man got to working his head about me. I should've been dead, but I wasn't. That meant I had a charmed life. It meant luck followed me. Right then, Villamanos needed luck. He was in strange country, cut off. So they put a squaw to nursing me. Villamanos came to the wickiup and

we talked. I knew the country. I knew where a renegade bunch could find remudas to raid. The raids worked. The luck charm, according to their medicine boy . . ."

The woman stirred and Madigan raised the Colt. She ignored it. She crossed to a goatskin hung on the far wall and drew liquid into an earthen cup. Gently, she placed the cup between Brewton's hands.

He drank. The back of a fist wiped his mouth and he made a crooked smile.

"One other thing was in my favor. The squaw that nursed me was Villamanos' sister. She wanted more than nursing. She smells of bear-grease, but at the wedding feast they made me a blood brother."

Madigan stared at the woman; the savage anger had gone out of her face. Her smile answered Brewton's.

"And a prisoner for life," Madigan said.

"Maybe. But safe, Madigan. What else was there for me? A blind man riding alone. Waiting to be run down again by the Dutchman . . ."

"He knows you're here."

Brewton's grin soured. He nodded. "Villamanos told me. The Dutchman's scouted the edges of the village. More than once. But he won't try to get me. Villamanos would bury him to the neck and let the ants take the rest."

"I got to you."

"But you won't kill me. Why should you? You'd face Villamanos too. No, Madigan. You waited five years for your cut. Now I'm telling you where to find it. The Dutchman . . ."

"Maybe I'm not after money."

Brewton stared sightlessly, then blinked.

Madigan said, "Six months ago somebody gunned down Hallie James."

Nothing happened to the ruined face. "Hallie? The girl you tied up with at the Wells?"

"That girl."

Abruptly, Brewton laughed. "How the hell could I have done that? Now, if you figured on Hays or Burke . . . they'd be tearing the territory apart for their slice. . . ."

"They're dead," Madigan said tonelessly.

Brewton whistled softly. "You play rough."

"I want answers. They didn't have them."

"Then who else is there? The Dutchman, Madigan."

"You said he wasn't alone that night."

Brewton leaned across the table again. "Yeah. The Dutchman . . . and somebody. . . . Look, Madigan. I can't get to him. All I can do is rot here and remember and hate. But you. . . ." The blind eye blinked with excitement "I can tell you this much. Once Villamanos put a scout on the Dutchman. He skirted the village twice and then, like he was headed home, he turned south and . . ."

The Apache woman screamed.

Madigan swore and started to wheel and behind him the plank door slammed wide. All he saw was the blinding flash of the shotgun. Its roar seemed to tear the room apart. Pain ripped across his left shoulder and he went down face-first and above him the gun crashed again. A second time, the squaw screamed and he saw the table legs shudder under fallen weight. Boots pounded on the porchboards outside, running wild, and then there was the shuttle and beat of hooves.

Madigan stumbled to his feet. Movement shot agony along his left arm. He made the door and was through it but the rider was bent low and forward. Madigan fired three times. The horse didn't falter.

Behind him, now, there was a low, animal whimpering. He turned.

Brewton had fallen across the tabletop, his head wrenched crooked, both arms spread-eagled. A pool of blood widened too fast, puddling at the base of the lamp. On her knees beside Brewton, the woman rocked to and fro, moaning.

Madigan laid down the gun and used his right hand to drag Brewton back into the chair. The bony head flopped to one side; the shirtfront was a ragged, red-black hole.

"Pike." Madigan caught the sagging chin.

The dead eye rolled; Brewton coughed and blood bubbled from a mouth-corner.

"Pike, you said south."

The lips moved.

"The Dutchman, Pike. You want me to get the Dutchman."

It got through. One last time, hatred warped Brewton's face. His chest heaved.

"Dollar . . . toos. . . ."

"Pike, I can't hear you. I . . ."

Then he knew Brewton had stopped breathing.

The woman held Brewton's limp claw against her face and moaned softly.

Madigan's head reeled; the room went lopsided. The left arm was numb now, except when webbed shocks of pain spread from the shoulder. *Don't pass out. He said Dutchman. Only it couldn't be. The Dutchman's behind bars in a Maricopa calaboose. But somebody else, Brewton said. Somebody working with the Dutchman from the start. Somebody bigger, smarter . . .*

He had reached the porch and night air helped. He breathed deep and could see the moon riding high and

clear and below it the village. *Move, damn you. Ride.* Villamanos had to hear the shooting. He staggered along the corral pole and fell against the dun's flank and his mind kept saying: *All right, bright boy, where now? South. Villamanos had trailed the Dutchman south. Like he was headed home. But what had Brewton meant, there at the last? Dollar . . . Toos. . . .* Madigan swore. It had to make sense.

He was in the saddle and the dun tooled under him. *The Dutchman. Maricopa. Make him talk this time. Get all of it out of the bastard. Beat it out of him. If I don't bleed to death first. I won't. Just don't pass out.* He dug rowels into underbelly and pulled east and south of the moon, the dun rising from a trot to a full gallop. The long rise beyond the village was too far away, but he had to make it.

And now he could hear the other horses. Twice, an Apache whoop shrilled across the night. He leaned forward and spurred again. The dun trumpeted and lurched suddenly in a pothole. Madigan pitched headlong and there was sand grinding his face and then the moon directly above him and then nothing at all.

First, the smell of Indian shag burned his nostrils. Then, he felt sunlight on his body. The ground was hard under him. Somewhere, a mongrel yapped and children squealed with laughter. Madigan opened his eyes.

It was long past dawn. The sun was halfway up in the east, edging South Mountain with gold lace. Under the sparse-leafed cottonwood where he lay, a few squaws sat in silence. Madigan blinked. A shadow blotted out the sun.

Villamanos stared down at him from a great height.

"Two of my scouts are dead, white-eyes."

Madigan's throat felt like sawdust. He tried to rise to one elbow. The shoulder-bandage cut into him. He lay back, panting. Above him, Villamanos waited.

"I had to get to Brewton," Madigan said hoarsely.

"To kill him."

"No."

"You meant to kill him."

"At first. I thought he had killed my woman. But when we talked . . ."

Slowly. the Apache nodded. "A woman can mean much to a man. Or a man to a woman. It was so with Brewton and my sister."

"Look," Madigan said. "I didn't . . ."

"My sister told me. It was another gun that killed our blood brother. But it was your coming that destroyed him. It was you who robbed us of our talisman of luck."

Their eyes held. Slowly, Madigan managed to sit up.

"We both want the same thing," he said.

"To make the killer pay his debt."

Madigan nodded. "I think I can do that."

"The one called the Dutchman?"

"And someone else."

There was a long moment of silence. The seated squaws watched. A knot of Apache braves had gathered around the leader. In the end, Villamanos said, "Your horse had been tended. Your canteen is full."

Madigan got to his feet. It wasn't easy. The stretch of land swayed, then righted itself. The shoulder was still stiff but he could flex the fingers of the left hand.

"I'll need a shirt," he said.

Villamanos made a sign. One of the squaws brought a buckskin jacket. An Apache had led the dun into cottonwood shade. Madigan felt their eyes and held his walk

steady. When he swung up, the dun shifted, but he didn't sway in the saddle. It was then Villamanos held out the Colt, butt-first. Madigan let it drop into leather.

"You will find them," Villamanos said. "You will make them pay. If not, I will find you myself, and you will answer for them."

"I'll find them," Madigan said.

Finally, Villamanos let go of the dun's rein and nodded.

"We will know when it is done. Our luck will return and my sister will no longer weep."

Madigan didn't answer. Riding loose, he turned the dun down the short village street, past the rows of watching faces. He didn't look back.

Now, he told himself, *Maricopa.*

X

HE DROVE the dun hard and spelled only twice for watering and graze, but still it was sunup before he turned down the main drag. A bell was chiming in the steeple of the Presbyterian church and three townswomen hurried to morning service. The hotel slept. The Olive Branch had not opened for the day but, outside the Casino, a bartender sunned himself on a rocker by the hitchrail. He stopped chewing his broomstraw and sat erect to watch Madigan pass.

The shade was drawn on the window marked U. S. MARSHAL'S OFFICE. Madigan tied in and crossed the

boards before the door swung open. The man on the sill was short but built across. He had a beard and black eyes with squint-creases at the corners. He wore a badge on his leather vest.

"I want to see the deputy," Madigan said.

"He ain't here. I'm Marshal Reckonridge."

"It was him I dealt with."

"I told you once, mister . . ." The marshal stopped, his black eyes narrowed. "Your name Madigan?"

A nod answered him.

"You better come inside," the marshal said.

The office was dim and cool and small. There was a cot against one wall and a rocker by the stove and tobacco stains around a spittoon in the corner. By the desk, there was a barred doorway. The cells would be in the rear.

"Sit down, Mr. Madigan."

"I'm in a hurry."

Reckonridge thumbed back his hat. "I don't doubt."

"The other night, your deputy—"

"His name is Ben Tully."

"Whatever. The other night—"

"He's up at Pritchard's rooming house."

Madigan started for the door.

"You'll be wasting a walk, mister. The doc won't let you see him."

Madigan halted and turned slowly.

Very low, he said, "I left a prisoner in his custody."

"That was the problem," Reckonridge said. "Ben's head was bust wide open. . . ."

"You mean the Dutchman broke out?"

"Not exactly. Way I make it, Ben was here alone that night. Must've dozed off. No reason not to. This Dutchman fellow was locked up and . . ."

"I said I was in a hurry."

"Now take it easy, mister. Like I said, Ben dozed. Next thing he knew, somebody come up behind him and . . . well, when he come to, the cell was open and the Dutchman was gone . . ."

"Somebody else," Madigan said softly.

Reckonridge nodded. "Hell, Ben might've knowed. Man like this Dutchman don't work alone. Always got somebody to back him."

Somebody, Madigan's mind echoed. *From the beginning. South. The Dutchman rode south. Villamanos had told Brewton that . . .*

"Now, if I'da been here—" Reckonridge was saying.

"One more thing," Madigan cut in. "This—Tully—he was supposed to wire . . ."

"Frank Regan, down Dragoon Wells." Reckonridge frowned. "That was another thing. The depot was closed so Ben figured might just as easy send word in the morning . . ."

Madigan swore.

"You ain't no sorer than I was, mister. I had Ben Tully measured for a good lawman. Plenty of sand, you know. Now it appears like . . . Anyways, when he told me about it, I wired Regan. Expect he ought to ride in some time today."

The Dutchman, Madigan thought. *It was him, after all. Sure, he told you where Brewton was holed up. But all the time, he figured on getting to Brewton first. The deputy's locking him up must have been a real shock. But then he was busted out. And he knew the way. Brewton said the Dutchman was scared of Villamanos. But the chance had to be taken. He'd had to reach that house on the hill, slam down that door with a fistful of shotgun . . .*

". . . Look like you need a rest, mister. Why don't you look in at the hotel and when Regan gets here . . ."

Don't listen to him, Madigan. Think. When he finished Brewton, the Dutchman had to hightail. Where? South? Like he was headed home. Him . . . and somebody else. And Brewton's face, the hate in it right at the last. He was trying to tell you. Dollar. *Hell, that could mean anything. Something about the payroll, maybe. But the other. Not even a word.* Toos. *A name? A place? He wanted you to find the Dutchman. There had to be a hideout. A town, maybe.* Toos . . .

"You all right, mister?"

"Shut up."

"Now, I know you got reason to be sore, but . . ."

Madigan swore and then, suddenly grinning, swung for the door.

Reckonridge blinked. "You ain't gonna wait for Regan?"

"No time."

"Now, he'll want to know where you—"

Madigan glanced over his shoulder. He wasn't grinning any more.

"Tell him Tucson," he said.

The dun was wearing thin; its great chest pumped heavily on each grade and, more than once, its footing went wild. He must camp soon. Nearly a hundred miles. No short ride in any season and now the summer desert drained man and animal. He must find a sump and shade.

Night came down behind him, stealing across the gramma, turning it from green to blue. Twice, from a rise of land, Madigan glimpsed a wink of light to the north. That would be Casa Grande. Between him and the town, the Santa Cruz washed its muddy banks, mak-

ing the long slow bend southward. He began to follow it.

Ease off. Stop thinking. But his eyes kept raking the distance and his mind went on like the wings of a windmill in a coming storm. He had to be right. Pike Brewton had to mean Tucson. Senselessly, the other word echoed over and over. Dollar. Dollar. Dollar. But Tucson made sense. It was the only town with that sound lying south. And a likely hideout. Booming with miners from Bisbee and Tombstone, wide open and wild. A man could be rich overnight and nobody give a damn how he got it. Men did it every day—on a roll of the dice, in the mines, staking claims.

Madigan's mouth thinned. The Dutchman would be like a mantis on a green leaf, swallowed up in the noise and bustle. Living high on the hog. The Dutchman—and somebody else. *Who, goddamn it?* A sidekick, in with the Dutchman right from the start, letting the Brewton bunch do the dirty work, paying the Dutchman to bushwhack Pike. And then a fat, two-way split of the take.

And by now? Madigan thought. Maybe the Dutchman had killed off his partner and grabbed it all. Only somebody had busted him out of that tank in Maricopa. *Think straight, bright boy. Yeah. The Dutchman and somebody, playing it big in a town so near Nogales they could disappear across the border if the going got too hot.*

When he found the spot, the creek was mud-clotted and the only shelter a single greasewood. The dun's head hung wearily. Madigan tossed on his saddle-pillow. Sleep would not come. When it did, he dreamed and woke sweating.

The second day the sun was a white-hot branding iron across his aching shoulder. A faint, red-brown stain

marked the bandage, and he rolled with the saddle, trying to ease the pain. The sand gave back the sun in a blinding glare. Before noon, he knew he was being followed. The sun was lower and a fiery red when he turned and saw the Indian on a ridge behind and to his right.

Madigan smiled grimly. Villamanos hadn't played all his aces. He still had one in the hole. Madigan would keep his promise or answer for it. He licked his cracked lips and rode on.

He had to rein in on the nerves. It was going to work. The Dutchman would never figure him to be on this trail. If he'd gunned Pike down, he knew Madigan was hit too. Probably dead. No. The Dutchman would be sitting in some cool saloon with his boots on the table, sure he was in the clear.

The Apache did not close the distance, but rode patiently, mostly unseen, rarely in the open, watching. Madigan let it go. He had the dun to fret over. A froth whitened the bit by sundown; the horse heaved under him without gait or strength. *Another night, girl. One more night. We'll hit a campsite soon . . .*

He felt the jolt suddenly and, an instant later, heard the whine of the rifle. He swore and reined up, but the dun's head reared, wall-eyed; its nostrils flared and trumpeted. The forelegs buckled together and Madigan felt the grinding snap as its long neck twisted under, and he was clearing the saddle, whirling in darkness.

The ground came up hard against his shoulder and pain blinded him. He rolled, scrambling to his feet. The dun lay on its side, blood pumping from the heaving chest, and Madigan had the Colt clear, but the sound of hooves was too close. Two riders drove down on him like the splayed tines of a pitchfork. Madigan fired

blind and stumbled back and fired again before the first horse slammed by and the rifle butt came down between his shoulder blades.

There was choking dust and he was on both knees. The Colt had been jarred loose and lay out of reach. Above him, the horses wheeled and a hoof grazed his thigh. One of the riders wore a black Stetson and a crooked grin. The other had a sniveling voice.

"You sure it's him?"

"Sure as hell. Look at that shoulder. The boss said he was winged."

"Then what're you waitin' on?"

Madigan staggered up and back. The black Stetson kept grinning as the rifle came up lazily.

"From the Dutchman to you. For old time's sake."

"You talk too much," the sniveler said.

"He ain't gonna tell nobody."

Madigan dove, clawing for the sand-buried Colt.

The black barrel followed him and then there was a bark and whine, but it came from a great distance. The black Stetson tore free; a hand clapped to the back of his neck, the rider sagged forward, still grinning, and slid to the ground.

The Apache. Madigan's curse was half wild laugh. He had the Colt up now and the second rider spun briefly, staring at the lift of land behind him. The Apache's Sharps slammed again and the rider dug spurs to his buckskin. Madigan fired at the hunched target and it kept going, but when he squeezed off again, the rider jackknifed backward like a man mule-kicked in the spine.

Madigan wasn't steady but he made it. The frightened buckskin had sidled off a few yards and stood watching. The rider moaned. On one knee, Madigan hauled him

over on his back. The moan turned into a wail, but colorless eyes were already glazed over.

"Where is he?" Madigan hissed. "Where's the Dutchman?"

It was no good. The tongue moved thickly and the eyes rolled back.

Madigan swayed upright. *Tucson. Goddamn it, it had to be Tucson. The Dutchman must have had Maricopa watched. He knew when you left. And where you were headed. Reckonridge's big mouth could never keep that quiet. So this was the Dutchman's answer—get you before you hit Tucson.*

The buckskin looked clean and strong. Madigan found a canteen looped over the horn. Water doused his head, cleared his senses. Finally, he scanned the horizon. The Apache sat his pony like a statue against the night. Once, slowly, he raised the Sharps in salute. Madigan nodded.

You're not alone any more. And, if Regan gets your message, that'll make two behind you. And a fresh horse. He smiled thinly. *Come down to it, the Dutchman did you a favor.*

Now, ride on a bit. Find a camp for the night. And sleep.

Tomorrow will come.

XI

FIRST THERE WAS flatland and a late noon haze that blanketed the still-distant town and the foothills that circled it; and, beyond the foothills, the constant shift

of reds and blues in the mountains. Palo verdes and grease-woods thinned and then there was a wheel-rutted road; shanties went by, and a stockyard. The smell of malt rose from a brewery and the road turned into a street.

Madigan rode slowly, eyeing the clutter of false-fronts with whitewashed signs, the assay offices and bon ton stores and a spur of track into Southern Pacific depot shade. A skinner hawed and his Army wagon swerved about on the wide span of Congress Street. Papago squaws hawked beads at a sidewalk stand; a Yaqui brave strutted in a red shirt and a bunch of Cavalry boys came out of the Nugget Bar and crossed to the malty shade of the Silver Dollar Saloon. Tucson boasted three doctors, four restaurants and a bathtub you could use if you crossed the palm of a Negro attendant at McBride's Tonsorial Parlor.

Madigan drew in at a hitchrack and studied the mill of townsfolk, the flash of Mexican sombreros and sashes, the passing of Army blue and yellow. He saw the street wander north and dwindle and, farther out, a white-washed adobe house that looked like money. The mayor's house, maybe. Madigan frowned. Somewhere here. The Dutchman. Somewhere . . .

Traildust clogged his throat; there was a knot in his middle. He stabled the buckskin and walked back to a saloon and suddenly he wasn't in a hurry any more. The knot didn't ease, but a dead calm set in. The waiting was over. He could feel it in his bones.

The place was dim and narrow and, coming out of sunglare, he blinked. The bartender had both hands full of beermugs, and a string of miners and Army lined the bar. Madigan stood at the end and said, "Rye."

"In a minute, mister."

Finally, it came. Madigan tossed back his head and let the whiskey burn down. He started to say, "Again," but the barkeep was watching him too steadily. A couple of soldiers turned and stared. One of the dance-girls whispered something and the place got quieter and, in the bar mirror, Madigan saw other faces, a prospector with a beer halfway to his mouth, a gaunt, gray-faced man in black tailcoat and string-tie, smiling. And, finally, the figure that walked slowly until it was directly behind him—a thick-set hulk with a square face and small eyes sunken in flesh-pockets. It wore a tin star.

Madigan set down his glass. "Again," he said.

The barkeep didn't move to fill it.

The tin star said, "I'll trouble you for your name."

A trap. And you rode into it blind. They know you, all right. The Dutchman saw to that. The kind of money he had could buy a lot—even the law.

"Madigan," he said.

The sheriff nodded. The tender refilled the glass. "Finish your drink, Mr. Madigan. And then ride."

Madigan didn't touch the whiskey. "I figure to stay a while."

"Not in my town. Ain't room for no hardcase in Tucson."

"I'm no hardcase."

"Don't argue, mister. Just take my advice."

Madigan turned carefully. "It won't work, Sheriff. Tell the Dutchman I can't be scared off."

The tiny eyes didn't flicker. "You heard me."

Madigan laid a coin on the bar and started for the door. The sheriff made two strides and grabbed his arm. Madigan wheeled and the Colt was free, but a callused fist hammered down on the corner of his bad shoulder. He slammed back against the bar.

The sheriff said, "You saw that, Judge."

The man in the tailcoat nodded, still smiling, and scratched his gray jaw. "Plain as day, Sheriff. Resisting an officer of the law. Open and shut case." A bony hand slapped the mahogany. "Thirty days."

One of the girls giggled shrilly.

The sheriff winked and turned. "All right, Madigan—"

He stopped short.

The Colt was leveled now; Madigan's drawn lips held in pain. "Like you said—all right. You want me, come and take me."

Along the bar, nobody moved. The sheriff's eyes slitted behind their pouches; a muscle twitched in his jaw. He wet his lips with a fat, blunt tongue.

"So we'll let this time pass, mister. But the warning stands. Get out of Tucson while you can still ride."

"I got business here. I aim to settle it."

"Mister, you better—"

"No," Madigan said quietly. "You better, Sheriff. Stay clear. The Dutchman could drag you down with him."

The sheriff blinked. The judge wasn't smiling now.

Madigan let the Colt slide into leather. When he walked out, nobody tried to stop him.

The tub was wooden staves with great cooper's bands and the water ached cold against his shoulder-wound. The Negro wasn't too glad to shave him, but he didn't argue. Figures went by the window. Madigan lay back, his eyes slitted, but watching. The word would reach the Dutchman. In the end, he would have to come. As he had in Maricopa.

Shadows lengthened as Madigan crossed to the hotel. There was a lobby with carpets and potted plants and leather furniture from the East. The manager had a

celluloid collar and pince-nez that glittered over myopic eyes. He smiled too much.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we're full-up. Most every place in town . . ."

Madigan swung the register and wrote in his name. "I want a front room."

The pince-nez trembled and winked, but the smile stayed on. "That'll be two dollars in advance."

Madigan paid. "If somebody asks for me send him up."

"Mr. Madigan, I don't want trouble with Sheriff Carr. I run a reputable establishment."

The words dribbled away under Madigan's stare.

"Just tell them to knock before they come in."

The room had old furniture and a mattress like rock, but the window had the right view. Madigan drew the bust-bottom chair up to it and lit a cigarette. A couple of Cavalrymen passed under the far awnings; against a hitchrail outside the depot, a man leaned and gazed from time to time at the hotel front. Madigan nodded. Sheriff Carr was making sure he was under thumb. And there couldn't be but one reason—the Dutchman was in Tucson. Him and somebody else. Like Pike said. Holed up somewhere out there, knowing he had to settle this.

So wait. And think. He shifted in the rocker. *That other word*—dollar. *It meant something, damn it. A man didn't die babbling nonsense. Pike was trying to tell you. What?* The cigarette burned low and he lit a second from it.

Lights began to flicker on. Night came out of the mountains, crossed the humpbacked foothills and drained down the dusty bed of Congress Street. Somewhere, a mother called, "Youoo . . . Johnnie . . . you get in to supper now." A dog barked. The crowds along the board-

walks thinned and altered; mostly men, now, finished a day's work, headed for a cool beer. And somebody. Was he down there now, one of the unknown town faces? What did he look like? The judge, maybe? Or even Carr with his tin badge? What the hell did Pike mean? Tucson. Dollar. . . .

A late stage tooled in from the south, the driver leaning back on the brake and cursing. It rolled past, headed downstreet for its stop, outside the saloon with the white painted false front and bright-lit windows. Madigan watched the passengers climb down, followed one man to the batwings, and then his eyes stopped. Above the porch-awning, the board sign had yellow letters a foot high—SILVER DOLLAR SALOON.

Madigan stabbed out the cigarette. *Yeah, Pike. Dollar.*

The lobby was empty. Behind his counter, the manager stood up; pince-nez and Adam's apple had a bobbing contest. Madigan paused on the walk outside. Nobody stood at the depot hitchrail now. The sheriff's man worked fast. The street was dark; there was a cloud-cover across the moon. Madigan walked slowly, passing the black holes of alleys.

You're asking for it now. Maybe this was what the Dutchman wanted—you, out in the open. Any window could hold a sniper. He didn't stop. Once, a figure broke out of building shadows and jostled him. Madigan cleared his gun before he saw drunken eyes and gaping mouth. "Jesus," the lush muttered. Madigan holstered the Colt and walked.

Easy, he told himself. *Regan said it, didn't he? About guns and hating leading to death. Not this time. The Dutchman lives to hang. And somebody else. For Hallie . . .*

A piano was wrangling about Father, dear Father

coming home with me now. The bright glare came from chandeliers. The Silver Dollar Saloon was no honky-tonk. The walls had murals and a painting of Mazeppa lashed to a white stallion and there were dealers with green eye shades and sleeve garters and a little stage with arc lamps. Girls hung over the shoulders of poker players and three waiters carried trays from table to table.

Sheriff Carr stood with his back to the bar, facing the door.

Madigan let the batwings rock shut behind him. The judge's lank black figure came between him and Carr. "Sir, you have been duly warned against violence and it becomes my duty now as magistrate . . ."

Madigan brushed him aside.

The piano had gone quiet. A chair scraped back. Sheriff Carr grinned.

"His Honor talks big when he's likkered up."

Madigan said, "I didn't come for His Honor."

"Or me."

"Or you."

Carr leaned away from the wood. In the same moment, two other men stood up from a table; one of them had come from the depot hitchrack.

"Mister," the sheriff said, "you saddle up and git."

"I want the Dutchman."

The judge came weaving forward. "Sir, that is impossible."

"Shut up," Carr snapped.

The judge blinked and glanced at a door by the bar. "But, my dear sheriff, you have been given your orders. The Dutchman . . ."

The sheriff took two strides and shoved hard. A bony

tangle of legs and arms smashed into a table and went sprawling. Carr swung, breathing thickly.

Madigan was halfway to the door by the bar.

"Now you hold it, mister . . ."

Carr's massive paw clamped on his shoulder and wrenched. Madigan winced and spun to drive a right from knee-level into the thick gut. Wind burst from the hole of Carr's mouth; he staggered back. The other two were closing now and Madigan caught up a chair in both fists. It came around in a wild arc and the first man lifted his arms too late; a rung lashed across his face and blood spurted from his nose. The man from the depot slammed in from the left as Madigan sidestepped; a blunt head lurched by; Madigan brought both fists down behind the ear. The legs buckled.

Carr was swearing, but the door was there now, the knob to hand, turning. Madigan threw full weight against the panels. It crashed inward. Madigan came to a dead stop.

The room was small. The pool of light from a hang-down kerosene lamp swayed lazily across a green felt tabletop. There were two glasses, one full, and a bottle beside a half-finished hand of solitaire. Once, twice, the light flickered across a broad, thick-lipped face and hard hat. One of the Dutchman's hands rested on the table edge; it held the .45 level on the door.

"Do not move, please."

Behind Madigan, in the bar, feet shuffled. Sheriff Carr's whiskey breath hit his neck.

"Never mind," the Dutchman said.

Carr growled. "You let me handle him . . ."

"I said no. Wait outside. I tell you when you can have him."

Carr muttered, but finally the door closed.

"Lay your gun on the table. By the barrel."

Madigan did.

The Dutchman's free hand lifted the full glass. He sipped.

Madigan said, "What're you waiting for?"

Bushy eyebrows lifted. "Waiting?"

"You want me dead. Now's the chance."

The Dutchman said, "Sit, please."

The chair grated.

"Maybe I don't have to kill you, Madigan."

"You have to."

The Dutchman ignored it. "Maybe I like it here. I don't be running no more. I don't get reputation for killer. Not here, where I make a life."

"So?"

"So, maybe we be reasonable. Say you might take a little slice off the top . . ."

"No."

The heavy mouth hardened. "Like I say—reasonable. You take cut and go your way . . ."

"Till one of your boys bushwhacks me, like the two you sent last night."

"Now look. You got no room to bargain."

"I don't aim to. I mean to settle."

"You talk big."

"We're going back, you and me, Dutchman. Back to Dragoon Wells. With the payroll."

The laugh was sudden and raw.

"You're going to pay," Madigan said. "For all of it. For Pike and the double-cross. For Hallie. You and whoever backed you that night five years ago."

The Dutchman said, "Sonofabitch," and the .45 swung up. Madigan lunged forward, the side of one hand hammering down on a fat wrist. The Dutchman's fingers

splayed and Madigan clawed up the gun. The Dutchman lurched back in his chair; his face looked suddenly gray. Madigan shoved the muzzle against fleshrolls of chin.

"I ought to finish it right here. Right now. For Hallie. But you're going to talk. You're going to tell me who else—"

That was when the door opened behind him and the voice said, "Put it down, Madigan."

XII

THE DUTCHMAN'S jaw strained back, away from the gun; his eyes rolled. The room was very quiet. So was the saloon beyond. Madigan knew he should move. Fast. But all he could think was, *I know that voice.*

It was gentle with a slight Virginia drawl and the trace of a smile.

"Nice and easy now, boy," it said.

Madigan straightened and turned.

Lafe Fenimore dusted a cigar ash from his dove-gray waistcoat. "Now, that's a lot better."

The Dutchman sagged in the chair, a hand at his throat. "This gun-happy bastard—"

"Never mind," Fenimore said "I reckon we can square off the misunderstanding. Madigan and I are old friends."

"What are you doing here?" Madigan said.

"I might better ask you that one, boy."

"What are you doing in Tucson?"

Fenimore's delicate brow lifted; he smiled again. "Been here close to a year now. As to the Silver Dollar, I own it."

Crazy, Madigan's mind repeated. *Yet, it could fit. If* . . . Blood pounded at his temples.

"And the Dutchman's one of your men," he said.

The smile went away and Fenimore's eyes looked sad. "Why didn't you take the sheriff's good advice, boy?"

"You know why."

"He gave it under my orders, if you mean that. But not for the reasons you might think."

"Look, Fenimore . . ."

"No. You look, boy. I know how it is."

Their eyes met.

"You think you were the only one loved Hallie James?" Fenimore said. "I knew you'd be coming back from Yuma, that Regan wrote you of her dying. But you can't let it drive you loco like this. . . ."

"I know what I'm doing."

"Do you? Trying to gun down an innocent man like the Dutchman?"

"Innocent?"

"That's right. He told me the story. How you got it in your head he crossed you and killed Hallie. That was when I got him to lay low, let the sheriff handle you. . . ."

"You're lying."

Fenimore looked surprised, then shrugged. "Madigan, you insist on throwing a wild gun in this town and you'll hang. The Dutchman's been with me since I bought the Dollar. I vouch for him."

Madigan nodded slowly. It fit. It wasn't crazy any more.

"I know you do," he said. "And the Dutchman's been your gun for longer than that."

This time, the smile didn't fade. It hardened. "Now don't say what you can't prove, boy."

"I'll prove it. You're the one he made a deal with long before we hit that train at Dragoon. You were with him when he left Brewton for dead. You're the second half of the payroll split."

Fenimore's lean figure straightened, a finger hooked in the vest-pocket.

"No," Madigan said. "You got a shoulder holster under that fancy coat; don't go for it."

The .45 raised easily, Madigan took a backward step, covered both Fenimore and the Dutchman.

"One shot," Fenimore said softly, "and you'll be riddled like a buck in season. The sheriff—"

"Maybe it would be worth it." Madigan could hear his own breathing. "What was it with Hallie? I want to know that, Lafe. Did she get wise? Was she waiting to tell me when I got out, afraid to put it in a letter? Did you set her up real nice and then send the Dutchman to blow her face off?"

His voice went raw and choked off.

Fenimore was pale. "You're dead wrong about this, boy." He took a step.

Madigan said, "I promised myself you'd pay by law, but don't push your luck."

"Look, Cass." Another step. "We got to talk sense. . . ."

Abruptly, Fenimore dove low and to one side, bellowing, "Carr!" The Dutchman's chair tumbled backward and the hang-down lamp swayed wildly and Madigan felt shoulder ram his midsection. He brought up a knee and clubbed the .45, but the Dutchman had his gun arm, wrenching it back and up and Fenimore's knuckles

caught him across the mouth. Then Carr was in the room and two deputies, and Fenimore dragged clear, leaning against a wall, dusting at his vest-front.

Both arms pinned by mauling fists, Madigan hauled to his feet. He could taste blood.

"Get him out of here," Fenimore said hoarsely.

In the glare of the saloon, people edged back; one of the girls squealed. The sheriff had his own gun drawn and Madigan's Colt in the other hand. The judge sat at a table, staring blearily.

"Sober him up," Fenimore told Carr. "We're having a trial here tomorrow. This man tried to kill me."

The sheriff's head jerked sideways. "You heard Mr. Fenimore. Get him in a cell."

"I don't think so, Sheriff."

Everything stopped. Heads turned. Carr started to swear and Fenimore's eyes narrowed. Madigan watched a figure move away from the far end of the crowded bar. Frank Regan thumbed back his sweat-stained hat.

"Mr. Madigan's my prisoner," he said gently.

Carr's mouth worked. "Listen, friend . . ."

"I'll handle this, Sheriff." Fenimore had found the smile again. "Well, Regan, you come a long way."

Regan nodded at Madigan. "On his trail."

"That so?"

"I knew it'd mean trouble once he busted Yuma. I wasn't wrong. He's wanted real bad in my territory, Mr. Fenimore. Seems he gunned down a couple of cow-dealers name of Burke and Hays."

Madigan watched Fenimore's face but nothing showed.

"Then there was this Pike Brewton up Maricopa way," Regan said. "So I thank you for your help. I'll just take him along now."

"Hold on, Frank." Fenimore stood between them. "We got our own trial planned."

"Well now, maybe. But on what charges?"

"He tried to gun me."

"But he didn't. Now, you take my warrant . . . it reads murder, Mr. Fenimore. It won't be Yuma this time. It'll be a rope."

Fenimore's mouth tightened. "Regan, you're not in your own territory."

"No, but if you like, I could call in a U. S. Marshal."

"All right," Fenimore said flatly.

For a minute nobody moved. Then Fenimore nodded. Madigan flexed his released arms. Slowly, Carr holstered his .45.

"I'll take the prisoner's gun," Regan said.

Carr balked.

Regan smiled. "Evidence. He used it in the killings."

Fenimore nodded again. Carr handed over the Colt.

"Well," Regan said, "that about does it, gentlemen. You, Madigan . . ."

Their glances met.

"You'll never make it stick, Regan," Madigan said.

"I will," Regan said. "Bank on it. Now, move."

It was a long walk to the batwings. A longer one to the livery stable.

Madigan said, "Thanks."

"Just walk. Don't look back."

"I'll take my gun."

Regan gave it to him. "You promised not to use that."

"I didn't."

"You came damn close." Regan's boots struck the boards angrily.

"It was Fenimore. From the beginning. Him and the Dutchman. They crossed Brewton."

"And killed Hallie James?"

Madigan only nodded but his eyes were hard-bright. The buckskin and Regan's roan were waiting. They mounted and rode south.

"Reckonridge told me Tucson," Regan said. "I got in about sundown and talk was all over town. You after the Dutchman. I laid back—figured you'd need an ace in the hole."

"I said thanks."

"Never mind. I look after my deputies."

Madigan grinned. The houses were thinning on either hand. Ahead, the flats lay silent and the mountains crouched under a yellow moon.

"I have to go back," Madigan said. "You know that."

"I know."

"Fenimore won't buy your story for long. Even if it was true, he couldn't risk it. I might talk. People might start to listen."

"He has to kill you," Regan said.

Their eyes held. "And you, now."

Regan didn't answer. Finally, he said, "I figure we'll be tailed. Fenimore'll move fast. He's running scared, and not far from the border."

"He won't go empty-handed. He'll head for the payroll first."

"We nail him with that and it's finished."

Madigan reined in. They had topped a rise and come down the far side and behind them the lights of Tucson were blotted out. "I cut off here. You keep going. About a mile out, there's an Apache camped—"

Regan nodded. "I spotted him on my way in. Friend of yours?"

"In a way." Madigan told him how Pike Brewton died. "Villamanos means to see I keep my bargain."

Regan grinned. "I don't mind an extra gun on my side."

"Ride till you hit the camp. The Apache'll listen. I want him to move on with you. If the Dutchman or Carr trails us, they'll expect two riders."

"You got the damnedest habit of using me as a decoy."

Madigan grinned back. "You're all right, Regan."

"You come up with that payroll, that's all."

Regan spurred the roan.

For a minute, Madigan stared after him, then reined about and began the wide sweep east and north again.

Tucson had died for the night but here and there a flicker of life still pulsed feebly. A yellow square of window burned in the jailhouse. In the glare of the Silver Dollar doorway, a girl paused and called back, "You coming, Jessie? Mrs. Morrisey'll lock us out." Another girl joined her and they trotted off toward the rooming house on Curry Lane. The clock in the town hall steeple chimed twice. The moon had begun to go down.

Madigan left the buckskin in an alley halfway along Congress Street. Keeping to building-shadows, he walked carefully but without hesitation. His mouth was a thin line and his mind felt very clear and cool.

It had been Fenimore right down the line. Somehow, Lafe had guessed at the job Pike Brewton planned. Had he pumped Hallie for the details? He was her friend, her protector; she would have confided in him. And then he had gotten to the Dutchman. That part was easy—just mention a bigger slice and the Dutchman was his. And, after the double-cross, the long years of laying low. Until Hallie found out how he had used her; until she was a threat that had to be wiped out. . . .

Stop it, Madigan thought. *No more thinking. Just make him pay.*

The money. It all hinged on the payroll now. The only real proof. Where would Fenimore stash it? At the Silver Dollar . . . ?

Madigan halted in waning darkness. Diagonally across Congress, lights still burned in Fenimore's saloon. Further downstreet, a figure came out of the jailhouse and turned along the far walk. Carr or one of his deputies, making the rounds. *Let them. Just stay clear till you find Fenimore.*

His shoulders stiffened. Abruptly, the windows of the Silver Dollar had gone black. Now the batwings flapped and Fenimore's lean figure strode out across the walk. It paused, the head swung slowly, scanning the moonlit waste of the street. Fenimore turned northward and walked fast; he carried a black valise under one arm.

Regan was right. He's on the run. And he'll take the money. If it's not already in that bag.

Holding to the shadows, Madigan kept pace. *Take him. Now. But if it's not in the satchel? No. Easy. Don't spring the trap too soon.*

Fenimore kept to Congress Street, passing the bank and the church, the sprawl of a stockyard corral near the railroad depot. Then, abruptly, he crossed the wagon ruts and turned in at a hedge-flanked picket gate. The whitewashed adobe house sat back of its trellises and tree-shaded yard. In one window, a lamp burned softly.

So it didn't belong to the mayor. It was the house of Lafe Fenimore, the big man in Tucson, the man with money to burn. Madigan heard the screen door click, creak and slam shut, and Fenimore was gone.

Madigan was sweating. A night wind stirred and a chill crawled up his back. *What now? Nail him in the*

house? What was he doing in there? Packing to clear out for the border? Another window, farther along the porch, showed bright now. *You have to move. And soon, Madigan. But if the money's not on him . . .*

The screen door creaked again. Fenimore came out, stood for a moment at the gate, finally started back along Congress. Madigan swore. *What the hell kind of game . . . ?*

Then he saw that Fenimore wasn't carrying the satchel.

He left it. In the house. But unguarded? Not if that payroll was in it. But you're not sure of that.

No, but I can damn well make sure.

The lamp in the window was still burning. So was the light on the far end.

Madigan edged along the portico. He swung the door gently outward, stopped the instant it began to squeal. The main hall was dim-lit, but it smelled of rich carpet and furniture oil. The room where the lamp burned was graceful, with leather chairs and a rosewood table and a draped mantlepiece. *Money,* Madigan thought. *Every inch of it spells high living.*

Somewhere in the house, a board groaned and there was a scent of mimosa. Madigan moved along the hall to another doorway at the far end. Here, the lamp was turned up. There were gilt-framed pictures on the papered walls and in one corner, a mahogany piano that had to be from the East. There was a desk of gleaming rosewood ornamented by a gold and onyx inkstand. The satchel stood on a table by the flickering lamp.

Madigan's hands weren't steady, but the catch gave without pressure. The bag-mouth gaped, his hand dug in. Empty. *But a man didn't carry an empty valise. Fenimore had brought something here, taken it out of the*

bag . . . the money? But you put money in a safe place . . .

Safe. Madigan's gaze raked the room and stopped abruptly. In one corner, a fringed, embroidered cloth was draped over something square. Madigan took two strides and caught at the edge. The safe was black and squat, with gold scrollwork lettering. Madigan went to one knee, rubbing sweat from his fingers. It had to be here. Fenimore must have brought it from the Silver Dollar for safe-keeping. He wasn't planning to ride out. No. Just to kill off the last two witnesses. Cass Madigan and a sheriff named Regan. . . .

His fingers touched the cool metal of the dial.

"Hello, Cass."

XIII

HE DIDN'T MOVE.

Somewhere at the back of his head, a voice said: *Fenimore's right—you're loco.* The scent of mimosa was very strong. For a moment, oddly, he thought he heard the echo of a gentle song, a girl's voice whispering, "I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and slaves at my side. . . ."

He straightened and turned slowly and the girl was standing in the doorway. Her honey-colored hair was piled high to show delicate ears, and the soft ruffle of a dressing gown framed her oval face. She was smiling.

"Hallie," Madigan said.

"Oh, Cass."

It was a small cry and he knew now she was real. She came to him swiftly with a rustle of silk and her arms were soft and firm about his neck.

"Cass, I've waited so long."

Her cheek was cool and her lips raised and suddenly he caught her to him.

"My God! Hallie."

There was nothing but the smell of mimosa and her body against him, her mouth . . . Then something broke inside him. His hands reached up and pulled her arms free. He stared at her smile.

"You little—"

"Cass, don't say it. I've been through hell these last days. I knew you were out. I was afraid. But I wanted you to find me . . ."

"Sure you did."

"Cass, you don't understand . . ."

"You're damn right I don't. But I'm going to."

Hallie shook her head. "I never planned it this way. I swear."

"You used me. You and Fenimore. From the beginning."

"No. That's not true. Not from the beginning, Cass. When we met, when you told me you loved me—"

"That was a two-way street."

"And I meant what I said. The way I felt about you . . ."

"Right up till you found out about the train-job. Then it was Fenimore."

"Lafe was somebody I needed. I couldn't do it alone. But once we had it done, once it was all over, I meant you to have your share. Our share, Cass. But bigger, with the others . . ."

Her soft eyes turned away.

"Crossed?" Madigan asked. "Is that the word? Or blinded and left for dead like Pike?"

"That wasn't my doing."

"You knew Fenimore. You knew he'd have to settle Brewton for good."

The girlish head shook again. "Cass, I was thinking of us. You and me. But then you got hit, you were dragged off to Yuma. What could I do? Fenimore wanted to lay low, let it blow over. All right. I could wait. By the time you were out . . . But that went wrong, too. After all that time, Burke and Hays began making guesses. One night they came to the Golden Eagle. They tried to question me. Lafe threw them out."

"But he knew they'd be back."

"Yes. They'd be back, digging with their dirty hands. . . ." Hallie's eyes darkened, remembering. "Lafe said I had to disappear. The Dutchman was already here in Tucson. I was to come down, stay out of sight—"

Madigan's mouth tasted dry and sour. "So you died."

She looked up quickly. "That wasn't my idea, Cass. Fenimore—"

"Who was she, Hallie? Who died in your place? Some little dollie Fenimore had at the Eagle? What did he do? Play up to her, put her in your room, and then one night knock on her door? It had to be in the face, didn't it? The face had to be blown off and her in your clothes, with your locket—"

"Stop it, Cass."

He caught her shoulders roughly. "You're going to hear it all, Hallie. They used a shotgun . . ."

"Stop it!"

"A double-barreled, sawed-off . . ."

"I told you I didn't know!"

Madigan let her go. "Not then, maybe. But later. And you managed to live with it, didn't you?"

"Cass, what else could I do then? Go to Regan? Throw it all away? The girl was dead. It wouldn't do any good."

"You managed," Madigan said.

Her hand caught him across the mouth and her face wasn't soft and young any more.

"All right, talk, Madigan! Is that what Yuma did to you? Turned you into a circuit preacher? All your life you took what you wanted and now, all of a sudden . . ."

"Yuma didn't change me, Hallie. I met a girl—"

"And expected her to be a saint. All fine and clean and untouched. Your girl wouldn't think of money. She would love you and live any life you could afford."

"It would've been a good life."

"On a farm somewhere? Was that the idea? Well, maybe I wanted to want that, too. Only I was afraid to. So judge me, Cass. Only, first, you're going to listen. That payroll meant life to me. The kind of life I always dreamed about. And you know where I did that dreaming? In Philadelphia? No, that was just another dream. On a farm, Cass, a grubby little dirt farm, with a drunk for a father and a mother that died of being treated like a slave. I had to scratch for every penny I ever got, but finally I had enough to bring Billy and me out here. Billy didn't live through it. But I did. I had the dream, Cass. Someday I'd be the lady I pretended I was. I'd have the fine house and the clothes and a man . . ."

"Like Fenimore."

"All right, like Lafe. Or any other man who could give me what I wanted. But then you came along. You looked at me and saw what you wanted to see. Your dream, Cass. Not mine. I could love you, but did that mean I had to settle for the dirt again and the fight with

the land and having babies till I lost my looks and just gave up and died like my ma? Just laid down and turned my face to the wall and died, Cass?

"It wouldn't have been like that. Not for us."

Their eyes met. Suddenly her face was gentle again.

"Maybe," she said softly. "There were times, when we first met . . . But then you told me about the train." Her hand touched his cheek. "Cass, it can still be us."

"No," he said.

"Yes. It can. Us, together. But with a real life now. You were after the safe when you came in here. You weren't wrong. It's all in there, except for the slice the Dutchman took. And more. My share of what we made on the Silver Dollar. We could go away, Cass. Just you and me. . . ."

"And Fenimore."

"Lafe doesn't matter. If he gets his cut—"

"Or, if he balks, I handle him," Madigan said. "Is that it, Hallie?"

"I didn't say . . ."

"But you wouldn't cry long at his funeral. After all, you'd end up with everything."

She smiled. "Cass, we could have it all."

He didn't answer. Her face lifted and her mouth found his.

First there was the splinter of glass and the window-drape bellied inward a split second before they heard the rifle's crack. Hallie choked back a scream as he dragged her to the floor. Madigan clawed free his Colt. The second shot whined and gouged a hole in the adobe wall. Madigan crawled to the table and blew out the lamp. She was beside him, holding close.

"Oh, Cass."

He loosened her grip. "Stay down. Out of range."

"It must be Lafe."

He didn't answer.

"Cass, if he heard—"

"Even if he didn't, he can guess. He knows you."

"That's a rotten thing to say." Her eyes glistened in the dark.

Madigan, bent low, reached the shattered window. His shout was flat and dry.

"It's no good, Fenimore, it's all over."

"Not yet, boy." The answer came from the building shadows across the alley, but Madigan could see nothing there.

"You got ten minutes, Madigan."

He didn't answer.

"You hear me?" Fenimore rasped. "I got a notion what she told you but that don't matter now. I knew from the start what she was, and I bought it. Everything I did was for her. I don't aim to lose her now. Her or the money."

Madigan waited.

"Ten minutes." The shout was more shrill now. "We meet outside the Silver Dollar. It's come down to you and me."

"And Carr and his men," Madigan said.

"Not this time. They'll be ordered to stay clear. I want you for myself, boy."

A second passed. Nothing moved in the alley shadows.

"All right," Madigan yelled. "Ten minutes."

Hallie was behind him, her hands warm on his shoulders.

"Cass, you'll be careful."

He turned, looking down into her eyes. "I'll be careful."

"Don't trust him. He'll win any way he can."

He slid the Colt into leather.

"And you think I'm the same," Hallie said.

"He said ten minutes." Madigan started past her.

"No, wait. What I did . . . maybe it wasn't all right. But it's over now. Once Lafe is settled, we could go away, north maybe, to Montana. You'd have a spread of your own, something to build on. . . ."

"You don't see, do you?" Madigan said. "You really don't see."

Her hands touched his face. "Cass, I love you."

For a moment, then, he heard a girl singing again, felt her in his arms in cottonwood shade by the Gila, heard her laughter in the moonlight, and he caught Hallie roughly in his arms and kissed her.

She smiled. "I'll be waiting, Cass."

"I know," he said gently.

Congress Street was a moon-pale stretch of no-man's-land between darkened buildings. Madigan walked slowly, in the center of the drag, the Colt undrawn but his gunhand swinging free and ready. There was no thinking time left. There was only instinct and a long walk to the end of a road. He shut out the memory of Hallie's face. He saw nothing but the sleepy Southern Pacific depot and then the stockyard; the white clapboard ghost of the church, the bank window glimmering with gold-leaf letters. He could hear the strike of his own boots.

Nothing. Nobody. Far ahead, the now-lighted doorway of the Silver Dollar and now, on his right, the jailhouse. He did not break stride. *They'll be ordered to stay clear.* But Hallie had warned him. . . .

A shadow broke the light in the calaboose window. Sheriff Carr came out, walking heavily to the board-

edge. Behind him, three deputies fanned out under the awning.

Madigan stopped.

"We got our orders," Carr said hoarsely.

Madigan nodded. "Remember them, Sheriff."

He went on. The feel of them at his back made his shoulders tighten, but he didn't halt again until the Silver Dollar was ten strides ahead. His voice cut across silence.

"Fenimore."

Nothing happened. A rocker on the porch swayed emptily in the night wind; a torn poster flapped on one wall.

Then the batwings, very gently, stirred. Fenimore had taken off his coat; his gray vest gleamed pearl-like in the moonlight. The shirtsleeve of his gun arm was folded back neatly and the .45 was slung low on his thigh and thonged.

He crossed the boards and street ruts until he stood squared off. He smiled.

"You're prompt, Mr. Madigan."

"No point in wasting time," Madigan said quietly. "We got a long trip ahead."

"Really? I hadn't planned on traveling."

"All the way back to Dragoon Wells."

"And then?"

"Then you'll tell the whole story."

The grin faded. "And end up in Yuma? No thanks."

"You'll turn over the payroll," Madigan said.

"Hallie wouldn't like that."

"Keep her out of this."

"That's not easy. She was the core of it. From the start. She still is."

Madigan straightened. "I'll take your gun, Fenimore."

"Try, boy."

Madigan began to walk. The shirted gun arm twitched. Fenimore's head turned slightly to the left, but he wasn't looking at the jailhouse. His eyes seemed to lift. A voice barked, "Behind you, Madigan!"

He moved instinctively, crouching to the left and wheeling and, on the roof of the bank, against the moon, saw the figure suddenly rise straight, the rifle butt brought to shoulder, and his mind said *the Dutchman.*

He had the Colt clear, but a rifle slammed first. He didn't see the burst of yellow from the rooftop. All he saw was the Dutchman's squat form abruptly jolt backward and teeter for an instant before it pitched over the cornice. The body hit road-bed heavily and lay like a crumpled sack. The Dutchman's hard hat sailed gracefully for a moment, then rolled in the dust.

Fenimore had backed off and drawn the .45. Madigan came to his feet as a figure ran from the alley across from the Silver Dollar. Frank Regan held the Winchester level on the jailhouse porch.

"Carr!" Fenimore shouted.

"Never mind," Regan snapped.

Carr pulled up a few steps from the boardwalk. His men followed suit.

"Carr, you yellow bastard!" Fenimore said thickly. "There's only two of them!"

"That's right, Sheriff," Regan cut in. "But, wearing badges. Madigan's my deputy. Fenimore is wanted in Dragoon Wells. Robbery and murder. You want to hang along with him, now's your chance."

Carr's face went sullen. "We never done nothing outside the law, Regan."

"Keep it that way."

Carr lifted a hand; slowly, the deputies backed off.

"You lousy . . ." Fenimore's voice choked off. "After I paid you . . ."

"Never enough to swing for," Carr grated.

Madigan said quietly, "All right, Lafe. The gun."

The torn poster fluttered against its wall; the Dutchman's hat rolled back and forth in the dust.

Fenimore didn't move. "You're a damn blind fool, Madigan. You're losing it all. Even Hallie."

"You heard me, Lafe." Madigan started forward. His stride was even, steady, closing the distance.

Fenimore crouched, backing slowly, the .45 raised.

Madigan watched the narrow, twisted face. He put out a hand. "The gun."

Fenimore swore and squeezed the trigger blindly. Madigan lunged to the right, his own Colt making a sure arc and then kicking in his grip. He saw the surprised look in Fenimore's eyes; the mouth hung unhinged. the free hand clutched at his vest front. Fenimore coughed and fired again and a dust-devil spouted near Madigan's boot. Madigan squeezed off twice and saw the double jolt of lank frame as Fenimore caved backward and to one side and hit the street facedown. The wide-flung gunhand twitched once and then went limp.

Along Congress Street, for a long minute, nothing moved. The town hall clock chimed four, each separate tone dying on the wind. In the end, Sheriff Carr made a sign and walked back toward the jail. The deputies scattered slowly. Nobody spoke.

At Madigan's elbow, Regan said, "I'll tell Carr to handle the burying."

"You said it would end with guns."

Regan sighed. "It generally does." Then: "Me and the

Apache rode a ways out. When nobody tailed us, I figured I better head back."

Madigan holstered his gun. "You figured right."

"Cass?"

"Yeah?"

"He said something about Hallie James."

Their eyes met. "She's alive," Madigan said.

"I'll be damned. Then, it was her, right from the—"

Madigan's stare stopped him.

After a minute, Regan said, "You found the payroll?"

"I found it."

"Then it's over."

Madigan's gaze reached up the long, quiet stretch of Congress to where the white adobe house stood peaceful in waning moonlight. The lamp in the window still burned.

"Not yet," he said quietly.

She was in the room with the piano and the rosewood desk, but she no longer wore a silk dressing gown. She had changed to a plaid skirt and riding breeches and boots and her hair was caught neatly behind the ears by a ribbon. Somehow, she looked even more the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

A carpetbag stood by the desk and she was bent over a rawhide saddle pouch; a neatly banded packet of bills filled one delicate hand. At the sound of his tread, she looked up. The money pack slipped to the desk.

"Cass, I heard the guns . . ."

She ran to him; he could smell the mimosa in her hair.

"I'm so glad it was Lafe and not you."

"And if it had been me?"

She looked up and her eyes were very dark and deep. "I knew it wouldn't be."

"But you were ready—either way."

Cool fingertips covered his lips. "Don't, Cass. We've been through so much. But it's over now. From here on, it's just you and me. Carr doesn't know a thing. The Dutchman will settle for his cut. . . ."

"The Dutchman's dead too."

First there was surprise, and then a half smile.

"That makes it even better, doesn't it, Hallie?"

"I didn't say that."

He walked to the desk and opened the saddlebag. It was carefully packed with the same neat piles of bills. He dropped the last packet in and tightened the buckled thong. He slung the bag over one shoulder.

"Oh, Cass, you won't be sorry. I promise you. It'll be like we always wanted. We'll just ride out . . ."

She stopped, staring at his expressionless face.

"Cass . . . ?"

"I've been working with Frank Regan," he said quietly. "He gets the payroll."

She blinked and shook her head. *Like a little girl,* he thought.

"But he doesn't know about me."

Madigan didn't answer.

"Cass, you wouldn't . . ." Her tongue moistened dry lips. "All right, let him have the money. We'll just go away. Isn't that right? We'll make a new start."

"It wouldn't work, Hallie."

Her eyes went dark; her mouth twisted. She tried to hit him but he caught the swinging wrist.

"Don't try to run any more. Regan will be up to get you."

The anger went away and the little-girl face crumpled. She began to cry.

"Cass, you can't do it. You love me. I know you love

me. And it's not as bad as it looks. All I wanted was a decent life. It's not as if I killed anybody. . . ."

"I reckon you did," Madigan said gently. "I reckon you killed Hallie James."

She looked up at him for a long time. Finally, she drew away. He was at the door when she said, "Cass?"

He turned.

"Goodbye, Hallie," he said.

She didn't answer.

"It's all there," Madigan said.

Regan nodded and slung the saddlebag over one arm.

Madigan unwound the buckskin's lead from the hitch-rack.

"She's waiting up there for you," he said.

"I'll take care of her."

"Frank . . ."

"Don't fret, Cass. I'll go easy. Probably the jury will, too. I don't reckon many men ever met Hallie without loving her a little."

Madigan nodded and swung up to the saddle.

"You could come back to Dragoon Wells," Regan said. "We make a pretty good team, you and me."

Madigan smiled. "Someday, maybe."

"And now?"

"I don't know, Frank. North, I think. Maybe Montana. I'd like to start a spread. . . ." Madigan's eyes reached up along the street once more to the white adobe house.

"Frank?"

"Yeah, boy?"

"You reckon a man can be born again at thirty?"

A slow grin eased the hard, narrow jaw. Regan nodded. "I reckon."

Madigan reined the buckskin into the center of Congress Street. He didn't look back.

The false fronts dwindled on either hand and then the last straggle of shacks and the sky had begun to pearl with dawn when he reached the northern flats. On a foothill ridge, he caught sight of a lone horseman. The Apache raised an arm in salute. Madigan answered the sign and the Indian pony wheeled, cut down beyond the rise, and was gone.

Madigan stared north to the purple and blue haze of the mountains. Finally, he nodded and patted the buckskin's neck.

"I reckon," he said.

The buckskin answered the gentle nudge of spurs.

The sun was beginning to rise.