WE WILL SEND ANY ITEM YOU CHOOSE FOR APPROVAL UNDER OUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Send Only $1

Dramatic Diamond Values

Your Choice

$99

Not one ... not two ... but three exciting new Diamond Ring creations from which to choose. Select from Diamond Engagement Ring, Diamond Bridal Duette or Diamond Ring for Men ... each at a fabulous low price of only $99.

A407/C204 $99
10 Diamond Bridal Set with 5 Diamond Engagement Ring, matching 5 Diamond Wedding Band. 14K yellow or 18K white Gold.

A516 $99
Brilliant 3 Diamond Engagement Ring beautifully styled in 14K yellow or white Gold.

D502 $99
Handsome Ring for Men with 3 sparkling Diamonds, center simulated Ruby. Set in 14K yellow Gold.

Send $1, pay $9 after examination, $9 a month

Prices Include Federal Tax

Ronson Case and Lighter Combination

$10

Ronson Cigarette Case and Lighter Combination with sure-action safety lighter. Hold 14 cigarettes. Send $1, pay $1 after examination, $1 a month.

Send $1 with coupon — Pay Balance of Down Payment After Examination

L. W. Sweet, 25 West 14th St. (Dept. P20)
New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find $1 deposit. Send me No.

Price $____. After examination, I agree to pay $____ and required balance monthly thereafter until full price is paid, otherwise I'll return selection and you will refund my dollar.

NAME _______________________
ADDRESS _____________________
CITY ___________________ STATE ________

Simply indicate your selection on the coupon below and forward it with $1 and a brief note giving your age, occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. We will open an account for you and send your selection to you subject to your examination. If completely satisfied, pay the Expressman the required Down Payment and the balance in easy monthly payments. Otherwise, return your selection and your $1 will be refunded.

Parker "51" Pen and Pencil Set

$19.75

G1315

Famous Parker "51" Aerometric Pen and Repeater Pencil Set. Won't leak. Send $1, pay $1 after examination, $2 a month.

Send for Free Catalog

BULOVA

21 Jewel "Excellency" Watches

Your Choice $49.50


Send $1, pay 395 after examination, $5 a month

L. W. Sweet

Mail Order Division, Finlay Straus, Inc.
25 W. 14th St., New York 11, N. Y. Dept. P20
Opium Smugglers Meet Their Match

When...

Opium? In my car? Preposterous! I'm Senator Blaik.

You're being used by opium smugglers, Senator. Let me show you.

Amazing! You say they put it in the tire at that parking lot?

Exactly! And tonight the gang at this end will try to nab it. May I use your phone?

That's that, well, you folks have your dinner. I'll be back about nightfall.

Why not stay and have a snack with us?

Mind if I shave, sir? I've been on duty since dawn.

Certainly. Here's a razor.

This blade sure makes short work of whiskers. My face feels great.

I'm sold on thin Gillettes. They're plenty keen and long-lasting.

When you're out to get quick, easy shaves at a saving, thin Gillettes are just your pace. You can't find another low-price blade so keen and long-lasting. Thin Gillettes are made for your Gillette razor...fit exactly and protect your face from nicks and irritation. Ask for thin Gillettes in the convenient new 10-blade package.

Late that night

Put up your hands and no funny business!

So this time tomorrow I'll be he-ding easy on the "Super-Chief".

That's wonderful! We'll be on the same train!

When you're out to get quick, easy shaves at a saving, thin Gillettes are just your pace. You can't find another low-price blade so keen and long-lasting. Thin Gillettes are made for your Gillette razor...fit exactly and protect your face from nicks and irritation. Ask for thin Gillettes in the convenient new 10-blade package.
One Exciting G-man Novel
SKY QUEEN of the WOLF PACK. .......... Bruce Cassidy 10
FBI-man Steel dodged a cut-throat crew to help his glamour-gal save a traitor.

Three Action-Packed Novelettes
MAKE MINE MURDER! ...................... John D. MacDonald 44
Steve Archer crashed head-long into the Federal case of the dipso doll.
DIG MY GRAVE IN HELL .................. Paul W. Fairman 82
Satan helped the foreign agents develop their fiendish scheme.
KILL THAT CORPSE! ....................... Roe Richmond 110
Mike Murray took a voluntary slay ride with a trigger-happy bandit.

Four Thrilling Short Stories
IRON CURTAIN CALL ..................... John Bender 35
Metropolitan cop Harry Nailer had to teach the cloak-and-dagger baby cooperation.
CRY SLAUGHTER! .......................... Tedd Thomey 61
The flint-hearted babe suspected that chivalry was dead when she met G-man Smith.
DEADLINE FOR HOMICIDE ................ Larry Marcus 72
Rod Randall courted death when he called on the racket prince’s lush mate.
SHIV FOR YOUR SUPPER ................ Hank Sears 100
Private-op Jim Blair was angled into playing watchdog to a gambler’s playful wife.

Features
NEFARIOUS NOTIONS ........................ 6
"Your Honor, I didn’t do it!"
POPULAR FILMS ............................ Ted Palmer 8
Good movie-going for fiction fans.
YOUR NEXT ISSUE ....................... 43
Exciting glimpse at Wallace Umphrey’s novelette “G-Heat.”
OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY ............ 81
The back of the police blotter.

Next Issue Published June 17th

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.
BUY DIRECT AND SAVE!

FACTORY to YOU
or WAY BELOW RETAIL

Get GAYLARK DeLuxe SEAT COVERS

ACTUALLY THE VERY SAME MATERIAL USED IN COVERS SELLING UP TO $251

You've never seen seat covers like these before—NOW offered to you at tremendous savings. Cheerful patterns that brighten up your car—cover up worn upholstery—protect new upholstery. GAYLARK'S new Seat Covers are TOPS in quality, smart styling, and value. Stunning new Unblend plaids compliment your car interior. Just the handsome touch YOUR car needs!

Every GAYLARK Seat Cover is designed for maximum service, with double stitched seams for greater strength. Easy to install too! On-in-a-jiffy with elasticized slip-over sides that give a snug, smooth fit. Here's VALUE for you! So buy direct from GAYLARK—and YOU pocket the difference.

$398 for 3-pass. 1-set or solid back coupe or rear seat of coach or sedan.
FRONT SEAT COVER $4.98
$895 complete set of covers for sedan or coach.

CHECK THESE IMPORTANT ADVANTAGES
✓ Sturdy Construction
✓ Up-to-the-minute Styling
✓ Full Protection for Front and Rear of Seat
✓ Washable Plastic Coated Fibre
✓ Colorful "Unblend" Plaids
✓ Double Stitching throughout
✓ Trimmed with Richly Grooved Leatherette
✓ Perfect, Glove-like Fit
✓ Genuine DuPont Coloring
✓ Money Saving

SEND NO MONEY

GAYLARK PRODUCTS, Dept. B-12
615 N. Aberdeen, Chicago 22, Ill.

Gentlemen: Rush Gaylark Seat Covers on 5-day money-back guarantee
☑ Complete front and back covers $8.95
☑ Front seat cover only $4.98
☑ 3-pass. divided back coupe $4.98 My car is a 19... Make...
☑ 3-pass. solid back coupe or rear seat of coach or sedan $3.98
☑ Type 1 ☐ Type 2 ☐ Type 3 ☐ 2-door ☐ 4-door
☑ Rush postpaid—$... enclosed. ☐ Send C.O.D. plus postage.

Name... (please print)
Address...

GAYLARK PRODUCTS 615 N. Aberdeen, Chicago 22, Ill.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

Like thousands of others, you will be completely satisfied with GAYLARK Seat Covers. If not—your money will be cheerfully refunded, at once.

WE HAVE COVERS TO FIT EVERY POPULAR MAKE OF CAR—NEW OR OLD MODELS
NEFARIOUS NOTIONS

Given a ticket for parking overtime in front of a women's shop, a Tyler, Tex., woman told authorities that she was unavoidably detained in a girdle.

* * *

Picked up for pilfering sweets from a downtown store, a Los Angeles man told police he had to have the confectionery for his monkey who wouldn't eat anything else.

* * *

Taken into tow for attempting to burn down a church, a six-year-old Berwick, Pa., boy said he had done it because the services were too long.

* * *

Asked why he had jumped into the river from which Chicago police had fished him out, a citizen of the Windy City explained he hadn't jumped, the wind had blown him in.

* * *

A Wayland, N. Y. man, arrested on arson charges in connection with $50,000 worth of fires in six weeks, told police that he was merely "sore at people who wouldn't fix up places for other people to live in."

* * *

Arrested for careless driving, a Cromer, England, man explained that he was "under the influence of ice cream."

H. H.
You know the type of training. Are you considering asking for I.C.S. for information on why not do it now?
Palmer Picks:

For Murder Drama: "Too Late for Tears" with Lizabeth Scott, Dan Dur- yea and Don de Fore (United Artists).

Mysteriously, Jane Palmer (Lizabeth Scott) and her hus- band acquire a leather bag containing a fortune in cash.

Although she is determined to keep it, her husband thinks differently and checks it at Union Station. With the help of a blackmailing crook (Dan Duryea), Jane drowns her husband, but they fail to find the claim check for the money. The husband's sister and a stranger (Don de Fore), who arrive on the scene, locate the check. Jane takes it at gun's point, sheds herself of the blackmailer with a well-administered dose of poison and flees to Mexico.

The sister and stranger follow her, unravel the plot and bring Jane to a just end.

Suspensefully played, the picture makes for some spine-tingling moments.

For A Western: "The Red Pony" with Myrna Loy, Robert Mitchum, Louis Calhern, Sheppard Strudwick, Peter Miles (Republic). Technicolor.

Not in a sense a true Western, but a picture laid against a ranch and a boy's dream about a pony come true, which even the most calloused Western picture-goer will find moving. As the story unfolds you can see the boy (Peter Miles) growing apart from his father (Sheppard Strudwick) through his love for his pony and the hero-worship of a ranch hand (Robert Mitchum) who helps him raise the animal. Myrna Loy, as the mother, understands the boy and helps him out.

A simple story, well-told and rich in human values and colorful backgrounds.


Building this famous Canadian railroad was more than just ties and trestles—at least according to this version where it takes six-guns and two-fisted action by Tom Andrews (Randolph Scott) to overcome bad whites and renegade Indians.

Although Andrews has a temporary love af- fair with a female doctor (Jane Wyatt) in the railroad camp, it is his own true love, a French-Indian girl, who warns him of the Indians' plan to attack the camp. Andrews goes on a private sortie to prevent the signal for the attack from being given and gets the ringleaders—but too late. Returning to camp he joins the fight which the Indians abandon after they hear the whistle from a relief train.

The railroad background gives a different flavor to this outdoor action picture. Plenty of bang-bang and dust-biting keep it fast paced.

For Sports: "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" with Frank Sinatra, Esther Williams, Gene Kelly (MGM). Technicolor.

Imagine Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly, as vaudevillians turned baseball players, fielding "hot ones" for a baseball team owned by Esther Williams. Silly, but nonetheless fun. When a gambler (Edward Arnold), who is betting against the team, inveigles Kelly to direct the chorus at a night club, Kelly begins to slip from the loss of sleep and is benched. Eventually, wised up by a little gal who is sweet on Sinatra, he gets back in the line-up.

The picture—and the baseball—are played for the laughs.

by Ted Palmer
"I WAS ASHAMED OF MY FACE
until Viderm helped make my skin clearer in one short week"
(FROM A LETTER BY E. S. JORDAN, DETROIT, MICH.)

If your face is broken-out, if bad skin is making you miserable, here is how to stop worrying about pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.
JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

IT DOESN'T PAY to put up with a broken-out face. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. Nobody likes to look at a face that is blemished by blackheads or pimples. WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH, CLEAR, HEALTHY-LOOKING SKIN. Business executives don't choose men whose complexions are against them. And it's just plain foolish to take chances with your happiness and success in life when the Viderm formula can do so much to give you the clearer, blemish-free face you want.

Good-looking Skin Is Not for Women Only
You—yes, you—can have the same handsome complexion, free from externally caused skin troubles, simply by giving your face the special care that screen stars give theirs. Because, remember—a good-looking, handsome appearance usually begins with the condition of your skin. There's almost nothing to it—it is just about as easy as washing your face. The whole secret consists of washing your face in a way that thoroughly purges the pores of every last speck of dirt and grime—something that ordinary cleansing seldom does. In fact, examination after examination shows that, usually, it is not a case of "bad skin" so much as faulty cleansing that leaves oily grime clogging up your pores. What you should use is a highly concentrated soap like Viderm Skin Cleanser. This penetrates the pores and acts as an antiseptic. Specks of irritating dirt and grime are quickly loosened. They dissolve and disappear, leaving your skin entirely free of the dirt particles that otherwise remain as pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.

Squeezing pimples or blackheads to get rid of them is a nasty, messy business—but that isn't the worst of it. Doing so may also be injurious and leave your face with unsightly, embarrassing blemishes. There is, now, a much easier, safer, cleaner way to help you rid your face of ugly, offensive, externally-caused skin troubles. You merely follow a doctor's simple directions.

Don't murder your skin! Here's all you have to do to get it smoother and clearer and to keep it that way. Use Viderm Skin Cleanser when you wash your face. Rub the rich lather of this highly-concentrated medicated soap on your face for just a few seconds and then rinse it off. Then apply a little Viderm Medicated Skin Cream and that's all there is to it. Viderm Medicated Skin Cream quickly disappears, leaving your skin nice and smooth. This simple treatment, used after shaving, helps heal tiny nicks and cuts, relieves razor-burn and smearing, besides conditioning your skin.

Give Your Face This Treat for 7 Days
Stop worrying and being embarrassed over what may happen to your skin. Just send for your Viderm Double Treatment this minute, and be confident of a smoother and cleaner complexion. Follow the simple directions, written by a doctor, that you will get with your Viderm Double Treatment. Then look in your mirror and listen to your friends admire your smoother, clearer skin—the kind that women go for.

Just mail your name and address to The New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dept. G-1, New York City, N. Y. By return mail you will receive both of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and mailed in a plain wrapper. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing. After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.
Pete lashed at Steel with cast-iron fists.

FBI-man Joe Steel dodged a pistol-packing honey and a cutthroat crew to help his glamour-gal flyer save her traitor brother.
CHAPTER ONE

Murder Mist

The girl had been crying and she had cried so much there were no tears left in her. The tight, screaming hysteria was gone and there was only the sag of weariness and despair. A subtle change had come over her face. She was not the same girl she had been ten hours before. The fence was down. Now she too belonged to all the other lost ones in the smoky waterfront hang-out. She was one with the brotherhood.

And not one in that room recognized her. Not one of them remembered when her name had been plastered over every newspaper in the country. Mary Black, aviatrix, queen of the skyways, solo to Honolulu, solo to Guam, solo to Australia.

But people forget. In seconds, minutes, hours, people forget. And it was to places like this that they came to forget.

The joint stunk of dead fish and slopped-over beer. It was a long, wide,
flat shack, built like an airplane hangar with the roof shoved down almost to the floor. The smoke and the stink was so thick it seemed to hold the ceiling up off the table-tops.

On the front of the place the sign read: SAN PEDRO BAR AND GRILL. There was a bar and a hot-box in the back room where a pasty-faced guy with million dollar fingers traded stacked poker hands for hard-earned jack.

Outside, a twisting narrow alley staggered down a row of unpainted waterfront shacks and finally died in the wet ebony streak of the state highway. The acrid tang of salt water hung over the place like a new paint job. Out back, the briny tar-choked Pacific chewed at the wooden pilings and washed in dead sea-weed and upside-down fish snagged in the mire of the L.A. backwater.

Over it all a heavy ocean of fog swirled—thick, impenetrable stuff, carrying with it the sour odor of fresh crude oil from the nearby wells. From the angry, choppy waters past the breakwater drifted the lonesome, mournful cry of the buoys.

Joe Steel ran his palm over the surface of his face to collect the fog-dew before he walked over to the girl. He was thinking it was a night for the coast guard cutters to sweat; and a night for the gun-runners to howl.

Steel stood there a moment, his back to the door, letting his eyes rove the place, photographing the faces, the eyes, the expressions. Then he started moving across the floor. As far as he could make out, no one he knew was there. No cold, watching eyes met his.

He stood above the table looking at her, loosening the collar of his leather jacket and sliding the zipper down. “Mary,” he said. His level gray eyes were flat and steady. He and the girl were like two strangers looking at each other there—two people who had never met and known and loved each other.

Her eyes were blue, the way he remembered them, except for that new rain-drenched quality, as if there was a storm which had not quite passed. He sat down across from her and folded his hands on the table. She kept watching the light film of dew on his hair.

“How’re they biting?” she said with a smile, her eyes finally finding his.

Steel relaxed. The old gag—the fisherman and the lady. Things couldn’t be too damned bad if she had a laugh for him. He leaned back in the chair and let himself study her now the way he had learned to study everyone and everything.

Black, tangled, fine hair; tiny cream-colored ears that hid under the hair and kept the secrets they heard; wide, pleasant mouth with smoky, satin lips; smooth, up-turned nose; and a mocking, go-to-hell expression that always seemed to say, “I’m Mary Black; who the hell are you?”

“The fish are biting like they always bit,” he said. “When they damned well feel like it. Fish, I find, are a hell of a lot like people.”

“Joe, Joe,” she said, her voice quavering suddenly, as if she could have something to hang onto by saying his name twice. Her eyes were hot and dry and her fingers fumbled helplessly in her purse for a cigarette.

He lit one and handed it to her. She drew in some strength with the smoke and leaned back against the hard wall seat, her eyes staring up into the filthy, smoke-blackened ceiling.

“It must be something as big as television to drag you down here to see me,” he said quietly. “Or maybe you’re in the market for some nice fresh sea bass.”

“Please, Joe,” she whispered.

His grin was as stiff on his face as dried-out shaving lather. You need me like waterwings in the Mojave. This is Joe Steel, honey, with the stink of fish scales in his undershirt and the smell of brine in his stubble. Let’s not deal out the cards.
Sky Queen of the Wolf Pack

again. The game you play’s too rich for me—poker with a pinochie deck.
He said, “What’s it this time? Sympathy? Money? Or just blood?”
“Joe, it’s Pete. He’s in terrible, awful trouble!”

“Pete. Let’s see. Oh, yeah. That lousy little double-crossing kid brother of yours. Great guy. What pokey do I bail him out of this time? San Quentin?”

Inside Joe Steel something was sloshing around nastily. Mary Black’s sun rose and set in Pete Black. Pete Black, a spoiled, whining, two-bit sneak who had done everything low in L.A. from peddling reefers to knocking down protection dough. Pete Black, still a college kid only twenty one years old, but one of the shadiest of the new crop.

The same Pete Black who took classes in Westwood during the day, and drove Mary Black’s shiny new car up and down sorority row at night. Yeah, the same Pete Black—the guy for whom little Mary Black had piloted a patched-up twoseater almost around the world to win air prizes and coin jack enough for high school and college.

She had even tossed Joe Steel in the ash heap, because Joe Steel was only a sweating, sunburnt slob of a lobster fisherman, chugging up and down the Coast in his old man’s leaky-sieve sea skiff. Joe Steel would never amount to enough cabbage to start Pete Black in the big-time business that Mary wanted for him.

“I’d do anything for Pete Black,” said Joe Steel slowly, tasting the slime of the lie in his mouth. “Anything. You know that, kid.”

She could feel his hate swirling around her, but she was past fighting. She let the terror and the anguish and the despair carry her along in its liquid, maddening rush, and she spoke to keep the tears from coming.

“I’ll never forget his face, Joe. He came in last night, and he was sick inside. I’ve never seen his eyes that way. They were big and scared, and they made me cry when I saw them.”

“So ahead,” Steel said quietly, his eyes flat and fine and speckled with black anger.

“I don’t know much about what Pete’s been doing, Joe, but it must be something terribly important. Maybe he’s working for the police, or something, because he said ‘they’ were after him. Gangsters, or killers—the things that happen in the papers.”

Steel felt his mouth curve up in a tight grin. Working with the bulls. That was rich. That was priceless as uranium 235. Pete Black working for the law.

“He said there were gunmen tailing him, Joe. He said he couldn’t drive out because they had the road spotted. He went into the boathouse and got his speedboat. The little outboard.”

Steel looked up suddenly, startled. Hell yes, Pete Black did have a boat. Why the hell hadn’t he thought of that before? He had a boat, and he worked for Whitie Harlowe!

Mary Black’s hands were twisting and tearing her soggy handkerchief. She was watching the redness come and go in her fingers as she turned and crushed them in front of her.

“I heard him start it up out back. It was midnight then, Joe. I was standing in the front room, and I couldn’t move at all. I heard someone at the door. It was a man, dressed in a slicker and a felt hat. His hands were stuck in his pockets. I couldn’t see his eyes, Joe, but his face was gray and drawn and horrible.”

Her head went down into her hands and her handkerchief fell to the table. Steel gripped her wrists and pulled them away from her face and held her hard. Her tear-streaked, sick eyes watched him dully, and then she choked and nodded her head.
and closed her eyes. She kept talking.  
"The man told me to get Pete, and while he waited for me to say something, he heard the speedboat. He ran around the house and started shooting through the fog at the ocean, but Pete got away! I heard him laughing out there. He got away, Joe!"

Got away, Steel sighed. It was suicide to wander around in that thick soup. Some tug would slice him in two. Any damned thing could happen these days. Coast guard cutters, even the gun-runners who used the harbor for commerce might run into him. Pete Black was about as safe as a puppy in Death Valley.

But who, mused Steel, were the mugs after Pete Black? Was it the police? The harbor patrol? Or had Pete double-crossed Whitie Harlowe?

"He's been out there for twenty-four hours, Joe? And the fog won't lift. I don't know what to do. Joe, I've got to think of something. Think. Think. Think!"

Her face was gray and twisted and old. She was twenty-eight, and she looked like a middle-aged woman. She had missed everything a young girl should have—missed life and happiness and love. But for Pete Black, she would be married to Joe Steel now, and she would have no worry lines under her eyes, across her forehead, down her cheeks.

He said, "So you want me to go out and find him. You want me to chop my way through this mess and bring back a rotten plugged nickel." He grinned and rubbed his chin with his forefinger. "Great night out for the coast guard cutters. Fog. Mist. Visibility zero. They shoot first and drag the bay for the body later."

"What do you mean?" she said.

"MAYBE you don't know what's been boiling along the Coast here for the past six months. Guns, honey. Guns and ammo. Blockade runners. Ever read the papers? Listen, baby, there's more than one nice little war raging overseas. And who supplies the rods? That's right—Papa Sam's bad boys!"

"Pete's in danger, Joe!"

"Nights like this when the fog's so thick you can't even see the sweat on your palms, when your eyes climb out of your face trying to spot a pistol barrel you know is pointed at your guts, when your skin crawls all over your body like worms —why, that's the kind of a night you want me to play Sea Scout."

Her voice was death. "If anything happens to Pete, Joe—"

"It's suicide, baby, I'll tell you that right now. I haven't got one chance in a million of ever coming back alive."

Her chin came up then when she heard his voice, and she stared at his face. Her eyes went soft because she knew as well as he did that he would go. And he knew what her next words would be before she spoke them. They were two of a kind, he thought proudly. He and Mary Black.

"I'm coming along with you, Joe."

He chuckled her under the chin and stood up. "Let's not waste any of this death soup. It was made for a good fight. Let's do it up brown. . . ."

The fog reached through the car windows and pressed them in. It slid along the surface of the highway, and all Steel could see of the pavement was the bright white line directly under his headlights. His yellow fog lights cut into the swirling gray hell for several yards, but not enough to cut any sign. They crawled over the flat ribbon of highway and prayed every foot they went.

And being with Mary Black again, sensing her vivid, lovely presence, smelling the rich fragrance of her hair, listening to the quiet, even tones of her soft voice, all that played hell with Joe Steel. His lips tightened over his teeth and the black fury began boiling inside him like hot tar. His fists knotted around the wheel.
There were so many things he wanted to tell her—things he could never tell her. There were secrets and restricted facts and truths that meant life and death to more than one person, more than one group of people.

How can you tell the girl you love that you are not just a slob of a fisherman but an active Resident Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, working with it on the biggest all-time basis the Bureau has ever known, smashing spy rings, breaking gun-running cases? How can you tell her that, even if you know it’ll probably bring her around?

He had seen George Bliss eight weeks before—the dead hulk of Bliss—wrapped around the bedstead of a hotel room. Lead slugs all over the place—in the wood, in the mattress, in the dresser. Bliss hadn’t opened his trap, but someone had guessed. Someone who knew George Bliss a little too well.

A nice shiny-nosed kid with brown, shoe-button eyes, and a tiny waist. Where was she now? Sitting in a dive somewhere, with different colored hair, her shiny nose powdered over, laughing like hell down into a glass of beer, fondling a letter of commendation from the spy-boys in the hills. And every so often sneaking a quick sniff at the hot little roll of lettuce in her velvet sow’s ear.

It was a great game.

No, you don’t tell things like that even to Mary Black—probably the sincerest, finest, grandest girl in the world. You can’t tell that to her, because of her cheap, double-crossing brother, Pete Black.

Pete had left his fingerprints all over the shady side of L.A. It might be possible that Pete Black would someday come in handy—a chance remark, a chance fact, a chance name in all the swirling panorama.

It was an hour before they reached his place—a house set on a sharp rise from the beach. He turned into the driveway and drove through the streamers of heavy gray fog along the sea-cliff. The lights burst brilliantly on his white garage door suddenly, and the glare was blinding.

He opened the car door. “Sit tight, baby.”

“Joe—”

Out of the fog came a swift bird-like fluttering, and the sap crunched into Joe Steel’s skull. He heard Mary Black scream bloody murder, and he went out quick and caved in like an empty sack....

CHAPTER TWO

War Birds

The fog was still there. So was his head, after a fashion. The blood was sticky but the gash had tightened across. He pulled his muscles together and got to his feet, swaying dizzily. Inside his pocket he found a match folder and struck a light.

The flame sputtered in the wet air, and glowed orange for a second. He could see then that the car was gone. Kneeling over, holding his breath tightly to keep from passing out, he made out the tire tracks in the dampened dirt. The car had headed north again.

He let himself in the house and went to pour a drink. The memory of Mary Black’s blood-chilling scream knifed through him, and he wiped the sweat off his face and poured a stiff shot of rye into a glass.

What the trigger boys would do to Mary was pretty much of a toss-up. The waterfront had been a seething cauldron of slug-fests and beatings for over two years now—a strange mixture of good-hearted, big-fisted stevedores looking for a boost in wages, and a snaky-eyed, gun-packing crew of racketeers, looking for crooked dough.

The promise of big money for hot munitions had dragged Whitie Harlowe’s
syndicate into the mess. Keep the harbor tied up for legal traffic, and let the slaughterstuffs through to the hot spots of the world—that was the philosophy behind it.

Could it be, Steel mused, pouring more rye over a cracked ice cube, that little Pete Black was fingerman for the Whitie Harlowe gang—spotting a good route for through traffic? Could it be that Pete was even now radioing back information to Harlowe from the fog-bound bay, telling him to come on now while the mist was weaving an iron curtain against the coast guard prowl-scows? A cocky college kid, and kid brother of the fabulous aviatix Mary Black—he was a perfect set-up for a sleeper decoy.

Joe Steel had been alerted just three days before. Arms were coming through from the Middle West—smuggled in a string of freight cars in crates marked AUTO PARTS. A fed was on board the freight, casing the boxcars in question. Whether the shipment was headed ultimately for a port in San Francisco, Seattle, San Pedro, or San Diego, was hard to tell. They'd know only when they actually tabbed the destination.

Maybe the stuff had showed up. Maybe Mary Black knew too much to be allowed free breathing. Maybe she knew a hell of a lot more than she had told Joe Steel even.

Or, maybe Mary Black had been baiting a lovely poison trap with her pretty eyes and her fine black hair and her sad little mouth. Maybe this was all part of a gimmick—let Joe Steel go out in the fog-trap alone to troll for Pete Black, and get snagged in the coast guard's itchy flippers. Maybe Joe Steel was a fall guy to draw the coastal agents.

He sloshed the liquor around in the glass a moment, sighted it through the rays of the bright light bulb over the sink, and thoughtfully drank it down. He poured his second drink. The telephone rang in the next room.

He was halfway through the door when a crazy picture flashed through his mind. He thought, a phone's the neatest trick of the week, because when a man answers the phone, he usually answers it standing in a special spot. He thought, when a man answers a phone, he's concentrating in the receiver, and not on outside noises. But then he thought, why didn't they already kill me if they wanted my blood?

He laughed a jarring, flat laugh. The jitters. They were growing on him like barnacles.

Touching the Colt .38 in his jacket lightly, he edged through the door, snapped down the lamp, and leaned over the back of the chair. When he lifted the receiver off the hook and spoke into it, he was standing with his back to the wall, five feet from the phone stand.

"Hello."

The voice that came to him was low, muffled, and scared to death. "Joe! Oh, Joe! You're all right?"

"Mary! Yeah. What happened? Where are you?" Abruptly he pulled the Colt out of his pocket and stared about the room intently.

"I'm out at the airport—where my plane is."

"The Sky Queen? But, kid—" He felt a sinking, sickening lurch in his stomach. He knew what she had in mind.

"Listen, Joe. They jumped you and before they could get me I slammed the door and backed the car out. They shot at me three times, but they didn't hit me. I got all the way up to Long Beach before I stopped. I almost killed myself driving through that fog. But they didn't catch me."

"Do you know who they were?"

There was a long pause, and he could feel her trembling. He could feel the fear and the stark terror—the terror she felt not for herself, but for Pete Black. She was still covering for that cowering, yellow slob!
"Mary! Who are they?"

"I don’t know, Joe," she said, her voice false and flat. "I don’t know at all. I’m going up to look for Pete the only way I know, Joe. They’ve got you covered down there. I can fly over and find him. It’ll be dawn in an hour. The fog’s lifting out to sea. The reports are in here already. Joe, don’t you go out there at all."

Steel scowled at the receiver and then said slowly, "You’re doing a damned foolish thing."

"Joe, I’ve got to!"

Steel sighed. It was just like a damned little lady heroine. His skin tightened on his forehead, and he rubbed his chin philosophically with the hard barrel of the Colt. "Want me to come down there and give you a lift?"

"No! No!" Her voice cut through his ear like a blazing short circuit. "Don’t come down, Joe. Stay where you are. If you try to get out of your place, they’ll kill you!"

HE PAUSED a moment, feeling the cold gun metal in his right hand, shifting the weight of the rod experimentally. "Mary, they tailed you there, didn’t they? They’ve got you hot-boxed in there, and they’re making you say all that."

"No, Joe. I swear it. I got away from them. Please stay where you are. For my sake! I’ll go up and—"

The breath went out of him slowly and heavily. She was telling the truth.

"All right, Mary," he said. "I’ll sit tight."

There was another pause. Her words were low and final. "Thanks, Joe. For everything. Goodbye."

He hung up the receiver and removed the Colt clip thoughtfully. He studied the room and snapped on the lamp again. The hoods might still be hanging around. If so—what were they waiting for? Certainly not for Steel. They had him figured for a dumb lug of a fisherman, or they’d already have measured him for a wooden kimono.

Maybe they wanted Mary Black to go up in that soup and look for her brother. Maybe the publicity would cover their little finger game. Maybe it would save the whole caper with a sympathetic big-sister twisteroo. Maybe it would cover Pete Black’s finger work with a daring rescue gag. But how it fitted in with the actual gun-running job of the Harlowe gang was beyond Steel.

Steel zippered up his jacket, dropped the Colt into his pocket, grabbed up a box of shells, and turned to snap off the lamp. There were plenty things he could do out in that goulash before it lifted.

The shattering, insistent beat of the front door bell knifed into him, and he turned quickly, at the same instant snapping off the light. There was dead, empty silence for a short moment. Then the bell rang again.

Holding his breath, leveling the Colt in front of him, Steel slid along the wall to the window. With the barrel of the Colt he pulled aside the curtain noiselessly. He held the gun steadily in front of him, ready to shatter a pane of glass and fire through the hole if necessary.

But there was no one there. Once again the bell jangled, and Steel’s nerves jerked taut. Everything was so dark, so blurred, so evanescent. He peeled his eyes and peered through the murk and muck.

"Drop it pal," a deadly, oily voice said from behind him. "You’re boxed in."

"Cross-ripped," another voice, flat and nasal, spoke from the opposite side of the room.

Steel ground his teeth together and muttered to himself hotly. The dirty sons had pulled the oldest trick in the books. They’d laid a screw driver across the bell circuit in the kitchen and shorted it to ring.

The Colt slid out of his hands and clanked on the floor. A chuckle rolled out
of one of the gunsels behind him, and there was a visible grounding of the electric tension in the room. And then the light snapped on.

Steel reached and turned slowly around.

The two men were moving toward him lazily, and one of them reached down easily and hefted his gun off the carpet. They were both enormously pleased with themselves. Like a couple grave diggers with a pair of brand new shovels.

One of them was a huge, beefy, slab-faced pug with big freckles and a massive mop of red hair. He wore a slick black coat and a yellow tie with crimson spots in it. He wore his face in a sardonic greasy grin, and he was the most repulsive object Steel had ever laid eyes on.

His buddy was a tall, slim, dark man who wore his sideburns long and black, toreador fashion. Even in the fog-drenched night he wore a nifty orange silk muffler around his throat.

This customer's eyes were black as the smoldering fires of hell, and he wore a mustache to leer with. There was the quality of flashing bloody knives and long-eared pistols about him. But there was nothing medieval about the Police Positive Colt .45 he carried in his right hand. And there was nothing romantic about the way he waved it at Joe Steel and motioned him over to the edge of the couch.

Steel wet his lips and sat down.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

GENTLEMEN. He almost gagged on the word. The big beefy redhead was a gent named Pennies Pearson. And the tall, lithe puma was a gent named Jack De Soto. And both of them were spider-men for the Whitie Harlowe gang. Dangerous guns. Deadly shots.

"We was considering seriously the acquisition of a boat-load of fresh fish, pal," grinned Pennies Pearson. "We was getting tired of always steaks and hamburgers, pal. And what better place to come to replenish our larder, than our old pal Joe Steel."

The polar ice-cap moved into the room and nudged Joe Steel. How the hell had these apes tagged him so quick? Or had they taken his name off the mail box? No more sweat came to his face. He was as cold as a dead mackerel.

De Soto moved over in front of Joe Steel and sat on a stiff-backed chair. He juggled the Police Positive a moment, his dark eyes brooding as they studied the smooth blue barrel. Then he looked at Steel, his eyes ebon and on fire.

"You're a heavy-loaded bird for a fish-boy, Steel," De Soto said softly. "What do you carry a rod for—bait sinkers?"

Pennies Pearson sat down in the easy chair and heaved his bulk around to get it settled. "Wasn't figuring on cruising around the harbor popping out electric eels in the fog, was you, pal?" Pennies Pearson tittered and his big face jiggled like lemon meringue. "Or was it eels you was after?" The grin died and Pennies Pearson leaned forward in his chair.

De Soto didn't turn from Steel. "Shut up, Pennies. What do you know, Steel?"

"I know lots," Steel said airily. "Two times two is four—"

"Why, you—!" snarled Pennies Pearson, leaping out of the chair, his heavy bulk slapping along the floor like a seal on its flippers.

De Soto swung angrily on Pennies Pearson and he hauled his rod around. But Pennies Pearson had already waddled his hammy fist around a rolled-up cylinder of pennies and he drew it back to his shoulder. The fist lashed out past De Soto and slammed for Steel's face. But Steel had settled himself on the couch far enough back for action. When he saw Pennies Pearson coming at him, he shifted his weight swiftly back into the cushions and flipped up with his feet. The snap-flip ended the flimsy couch.
Pennies Pearson landed teeth-first on the bottom lip of the couch, and his face smashed into an iron caster. He howled and clawed at his face. De Soto wheeled back instantly to throw down on Steel. But the slug plowed into the carpet and furrowed the ash floor.

Suddenly the lamp went out, and glass splintered on the floor. A gun-shot rocked the room, and hot cordite burned the air. The blackness crawled over the three of them like the fog outside, and De Soto cursed. Pennies Pearson was spitting out teeth and howling bloody murder. Then another shot came from the back of the room, and a long orange flame reached through the air and a slug bounced from wall to wall with a whining screech.

"Damn!" yelled De Soto, on his feet again in the dark. "Hit for the beach, Pennies! The place is full of guns!"

But Pennies Pearson hadn't waited for detailed instructions. He was already staggering out through the rear door, clattering through the kitchen blindly, spilling glasses and cups off the sink. Like two plastered bulls, De Soto and Pennies Pearson plowed out into the foggy safety of the night, carrying with them splinters, blood, and curses. Steel lay perfectly still and his eyes finally made out the fourth party in the vague, indistinct light across the room.

She was a five foot, blonde girl with the brightest blue eyes he had ever seen, and she was pointing a gun the size of a cannon at him in her little fist. Her mouth was flat and hard. She wore a big heavy sweater and a thick gray skirt.

And somehow, the way she stood there as if she owned the world and all the planets in the galaxy, she was the grimmest thing Steel had ever seen in his life. He didn't know whether to laugh or scowl. He did both.

She wiggled the gun at him to stop and he stopped.

"What's so funny, you big dumb ape?"

the little blonde dynamo growled at him. "Paste your jaw on or you'll lose your lower plate."

CHAPTER THREE

Wings of Satan

"W"HO the hell are you? And before you answer that, you're trespassing on private property," Steel snapped. "And before you worry about that, put that rod down. Damned if I want to be perforated before breakfast."

"Boy, you're sure a clown for a job the size of this one, is all I've got to say," murmured the little lady, her bright blue eyes traveling over Steel's leather jacket and his pants and his thick high shoes.

"The fish don't give a damn, if the customers don't," Steel glared. "Will you lay that pistol down, or do I have to knock it out of your little mitt?"

Her eyes flared bright blue, and she lifted the Smith and Wesson up and blazed a shot about three inches from Steel's ear. The gun-flame passed by him, and it took a big cloud of smoke with it. His ear sang and screamed and burned. The sweat oozed out of him and he didn't say a word.

With a grin the little lady tossed the rod on the couch. "Glad to meet you, Steel. My name's Doris. Doris Dangerfield. And fine thanks I get for jerking you back over the Great Divide. Well, you're welcome, anyhow. Always glad to oblige a colleague."

She stuck out her little paw and looked up at Steel. Her eyes were level and wide and her mouth was edged in a grin. Steel figured it was a sign of friendship and he took her hand. She gripped it and pumped it up and down for a minute.

"Hi," she said. "Not a bad set-up you've got here." She paced about the room, and then she turned and looked curiously at Steel. "Your place?"
"Hell yes," said Steel, becoming slightly annoyed.

"Well, why don't you ask me if I want a drink?" She turned and picked up the gun and started for the kitchen. "The answer is, I do. For a big guy with a lot on the ball, you're sure a clunk," she added, sourly.

"I've only got rye," Steel said. "Dames never like rye. Dames are scotch-drinkers, or bourbon-suckers, but never rye-guzzlers."

"What the hell's wrong with rye?" the little lady said softly, and began to go through the doorway. Steel rubbed his chin with his forefinger and followed her. He hadn't bothered to ask what she was doing there yet.

She turned suddenly and stood up to him. "You're probably so dumb you haven't figured out who I am. I'm from Chicago. I was told to contact you on the M. case."

With that she turned around quickly and barged into Steel's kitchen. In half a minute she had ice cubes playing tunes in the tall glasses, and the rye was bubbling merrily. They slugged down a couple of fast ones to the U. S. Government, and then the little lady spoke.

"Like a damned fool I flubbed up the detail in Salt Lake City," she said, gazing at Steel over the top of the huge liquor glass. She lapped at the glass with her red tongue and smiled. "They switched us around and traded cars. I didn't catch the slight-of-hand until we hit Reno. Then it was too late."

Steel chewed on that a moment. "You pick up the trail again?"

"Sure." Her eyes softened and she smiled again. "I've got friends." She set the big glass down and leaned back in the couch, looking like a rag doll propped up on the cushion.

"They come here to L.A.?

"Um h'm," she said lazily "Outside Long Beach."

Steel's mouth tightened and his pulse galloped off ahead. "Long Beach!"

"On a siding," Doris yawned. "Gee, not a bad place you've got here, Steel. Rent it?"

"It's mine and it was my old man's and my grandfather came here in 1865. Now where the hell is this shipment tied up?"

She shook her head sadly at Steel and sighed. "It isn't just sitting there all alone. I've got two guys guarding it. Two of the best in the business."

"I should hope so. Got a car?"

"Where's yours?"

Steel scrubbed his head a moment and tricked a smile onto his face. "I seem to have had an accident with it. Can't place it right now."

"You damn one-cylinder jerk," she flared. Her fists came up and she rubbed her cheek with one of them. Then she opened her hand and said, "I've got a rented car out there about two blocks up the road. Lucky thing for you I parked down there and catted up on the place. How did you ever get boxed in by those big hicks?"

"It's a long-winded story," Steel said. "Grab your mittens and your gun and let's haul our freight. Plenty to be done yet tonight."

"Nobody's going to lift that stuff from the box cars. Let's wait for the fog to fade."

"Come on!" He grabbed her by the hands to pull her to her feet. She gave that impression, the little doll—she seemed to want to be shoved around. But she turned to tempered steel in his fingers and flipped him off balance with a quick twist of the wrist. Then she stood there laughing while he pulled himself up off the magazine rack.

"I'm a pretty tough little doll," she said softly, and she rubbed her wrists. "I guess you'll think twice before you try that again."
He grunted disgustedly. "I should have my head examined."

"If you're so damned interested in those rods and slugs, let's go."

As they crawled along the highway through the thinning fog, he told her the story. She shrugged her shoulders. "I figure Pete Black for some kind of fingerman, Steel," she said. "But what I can't figure out is this Mary Black. Why should she want to go out looking for her kid brother?"

"She's just nuts about him, that's all," Steel snapped.

Doris shook her blonde-thatched head stubbornly, and her chin came up. "It just sounds phoney, and I don't get it at all."

Steel shrugged his shoulders wearily. "She's a woman," he said.

They bounced over a long expanse of dirt road and Doris finally said, "Here's the siding." She grabbed up her Smith and Wesson and pushed the car door open. "Come on."

Steel stopped the car and jerked out the keys. He slammed the door shut and hurried after her. She was crossing a bunch of rail spurs excitedly. "See, over there," she called, pointing to a couple of box cars on a siding. "We figured nobody could get a truck or boat loaded from them at all. They must be going to let it loaf here for some time."

Steel followed her, taking long strides over the wet ties. The siding was a mile from the nearest paved road. A small dirt road led to the spot they'd parked the car, through a long stretch of beet fields and swamp rot. It'd be a rugged spot to load ammo and guns on trucks.

Beyond the siding Steel could make out an expanse of flat ground through the rapidly clearing mantle of mist. They were parked at the far end of a little jerkwater airport on the highway between L.A. and Long Beach.

Doris turned back and hollered to him. "Come on! Hurry up."

Steel ran ahead, loosening his gun in his jacket. Just in case.

But then his guts froze in him. A horrified, pained cry tore up from the girl's throat. He heard the breath squash out of her, as if she had been slammed in the body by a bulldozer.

He glanced up and saw her crouched over a clump of brush growing along the siding. She was only ten feet from the first box car. "Al! Al!" she was crying, and she was clawing down into the brush with her fingers, and her eyes were wide and scared. Every bit of energy in her body was directed toward the body lying back of the bush.

Steel ran up, chilly clamps binding his temples. He leaped over the figure and stood there beside her, looking down. The gorge rose inside him. The blood on the body was hardly dried, and it was spattered all over the rails, over the spikes, over the bolts, over the fishplates on the ties. There were choppy little bullet scars in the tie wood and in the soil. The face of the boxcar was nicked and scratched. One hell of a battle had raged there over the load that man guarded.

Steel jumped into the box car. Empty. Every stitch of munitions and ammo was gone. But in the corner lay the twisted form of the second man. Steel struck a match and approached wearily. Something went out of him as he neared the figure. Two down—how many to go? The match flickered and sputtered, but he could see clearly that the man was dead.

She climbed up beside him and he moved her back gently, his hand on her shoulder. She was soft and trembling under his touch. She was a small bundle of fury and rage and intense pain. "Both of them! I only left two and I should have left a regiment! It's my fault they're dead. Al and Brandy! How many of them were there? A swarm? A damned covey of gun-birds?" Her voice rose quaveringly, and broke in a tight sob.
Steel shook her by the shoulders. "It's not your fault. Stop it! Snap out of it, kid!"

She was punching her fist into her palm again and again, pacing back and forth on the freight flooring. She was shaking her head and mumbling to herself. She was on fire from her tiny feet to her big pile of golden hair, and she was magnificent.

"They killed Al Henry! One of the best. They shot him down like a damned dog. And they murdered Sam Brandywine, too! I'll get them! I'll cram this whole thing down their throats! You wait and see!"

Steel looked out the open freight door onto the airfield. Suddenly the girl stopped blazing back and forth and stared off at the airstrip too. After a stunned moment they turned to each other, their eyes wide and excited.

Across the way, past the stubbly brush by the siding, over the long expanse of airstrip, in formation against the four hangars like a squadron of big bombers—waited a line-up of converted C-47's, shiny and polished even in the dull foggy light of the a.m.

"That's the way they do it! They hold the stuff at a siding near an airport, and then they slip it through the wire and dump it into the flying freights. Then, bingo, they're off!"

The girl's eyes were hot liquid fire. She bit her lip and tossed the crop of golden wheat around on her head. "Why didn't I figure that angle! It was so simple. Here I had the tip-off right in my mitt, and I muffed it!"

"Don't rip yourself to shreds yet, kiddo," Steel mused. "We still don't know what kind of a gimmick they're using to get that stuff out off the ground. The federal government does a pretty close check-up on air freight."

She shook her head suddenly, off on another tack. "It doesn't make sense. Why would those gorillas try to freeze you up at your place, if the stuff is going out by air and not by sea? I don't get it. Unless there are two separate gangs working against each other."

Steel froze and turned from her. He laid a hand on her shoulder and said, "Listen."

In the distance they could hear the monotonous humming and thrumming of the big engines warming up. The planes were getting ready to hit the wind.

He grabbed her by her tough little shoulder and pushed her for the box car door. "Back to the car," he yelled. "It's too far to run across that airfield. Besides, we might get clipped off by some of the bright boys!"

"We can pull a check inspection on that stuff. Boy, I'll chew through that freight inspector like a buzz-saw once I get hold of him!"

Steel jumped down and turned around to catch her. She slid into his arms. For a moment she stayed there, breathlessly, and she turned into a real live girl and her face was only an inch from his. Her eyes got a startled, scared look in them and she pushed away quickly. Her breath jerked out and she said icily:

"Kindly let me down, Mr. Steel. I am not in the habit of mixing business with pleasure." Her eyes were deadly. She was muscle and bone and police-dog again.

He grinned and said, "I assure you, nothing was further from my mind, Miss Dangerfield."

She spluttered as he dropped her with a jolt. She turned her fiery little face to him and her cheeks were hot and the blood raced in under her smooth fair skin. "You big lunkhead! The world could go to hell, and you'd still nurse your damned silly ego!"

He started loping for the car. "Come on! Those planes are getting ready to fly."

They slammed the car into gear and tore
out over the bumpy, rugged back road. The dust flew and mixed with the wisps of fog that were gradually fading to nothing about them. The car pranced and leapt over the washboard roadbed and the humming and thrumming of the engines grew louder outside.

Then the girl gave a little screech and beat her knotted pint-sized mitts on her lap. “Look!” she cried, her voice a howl of wounded frustration and rage. “There they go!”

Steel gripped the steering wheel and ripped out a string of curses. He jammed his foot on the gas and the car surged ahead. “We’ll catch them, if we have to fly this car!”

And one by one the graceful, silver carriers moved down the runway and rose into the air, lifting their cargo of contraband murder as easy and gentle as death itself.

CHAPTER FOUR
Mission to Hell

THEY screeched to a stop in front of the tiny administration building and bounced out of the car before it stopped moving. Overhead the silver death-carriers were moving along the sky, one after the other. Ten aloft, eleven, twelve. They were all up.

Steel shoved through the glass door and both of them whirled into the waiting room. A long glass-paneled wall stretched across the back, going out onto the field. The glass was still misty and foggy, and they could see no planes moving.

A group of pilots had been hanging around the far end of the glass panel, staring out after the last ship. They turned around and moved off one by one. A guy dressed in a gray suit and gray hat and a crummy green necktie spotted Steel.

Before Steel could cross to the receptionist, the guy in gray grabbed him by the arm. He had bright eyes and he was unshaved. His tie was unknotted and his shirt collar was frayed but clean. He wore his clothes as if he’d had trouble sleeping in them. His shoes were shined, and one of the shoe laces was undone.

“Cricky!” yelped the guy. “Joe Steel! How’s the old barracuda-battlin’ buzzard these days?”

“Dan Tierny,” said Steel, turning to Doris. “Boy, do we need him. He’s a reporter on the Star, kid. But listen, boy, mum’s the word until we give you the green light. What’s up that brings you down here?”

Doris was sizing up Tierny, taking in his tie and his shirt collar and his shoes. Apparently he passed the test.

“What do you think?” Tierny asked curiously. “Mary Black of course. Hell, you used to go with her, didn’t you? I remember I covered that solo hop of hers to Guam. You were down there to see her off. Gave her a lei or something.”

Mary Black. Steel felt funny prickles rising along the nape of his neck. What about Mary Black? Had something gone wrong? Why was the press nosing in? Had she—Then he remembered. This was the little jerkwater airfield where she kept her plane, The Sky Queen. And she had been up an hour now, easily. Looking for Pete Black.

Steel suddenly found himself shaking Tierny by the coat, bouncing him up and down to jar the story out of him. Tierny dragged himself away from Steel, laughing, hoisting himself into his jacket again. “For Pete’s sake, Joe, take it easy. I thought you knew. Otherwise, why’d you come down?”

Then Tierny’s gray eyes darted to Doris Dangerfield, and his face froze. “Oh,” he said flatly. “I didn’t get the picture at first.” Then a frown crept across his face. “Why the hell did you show up?”

Steel was already talking, and he was moving toward Tierny, slowly, heavily.
“What happened to Mary Black? She went up, didn’t she? What happened? And what about those C-47’s? Is that what you’re covering here? Where are they headed?”

“Look, I’m trying to tell you. She went up to look for her brother. The kid’s out there in that soup in the speed boat. I didn’t get the full story on that yet. But the point is, about an hour ago, Mary Black comes hot-footing it down here, screaming her eyes out, waving her arms around, yelping to the greasemonkeys to wheel out her ship.”

Steel nodded, glancing at Doris Dangerfield. The little blonde grenade hadn’t flicked a muscle, but she was listening and she was thinking and she was way ahead of Steel and Tierny.

“So they got her ship out, and she took off. She’s sailing around up there trying to spot that damned jerk of a brother of hers, but she can’t find him, and then her radio kicks out and nobody’s heard from her since. That was fifty minutes ago.”

“Well, a hell of a lot of the fly-boys around this town like Mary Black pretty much. Word gets out to a mob of ex-army pilots hanging around, and a couple of bright boys talked old man Johansen into taking up a fleet of C-47’s to find her. There aren’t any other recon ships available right now, and the C-47’s have been okayed for overseas shipment.”

Steel turned quickly and stared at Doris. “I’ll be damned,” he muttered. “I’ll be damned all the way to Texas and back!”

Tierny plodded on. “So naturally, I thought you had come down to wait for news. Or maybe to take off, yourself. Me, I’m content to sit by the clicker over there and pull the reports off the machine.”

Tierny shrugged his shoulders as he spoke, and started moving for the radio control tower. He turned and stared at Steel. “Coming, pal?”

Steel shook his head, his eyes flat and lidded. “No, Tierny. See you later.” Tierny stared at Doris and then looked at Steel. “Sure,” he said coldly. “So long.” And he turned and shuffled across the room to the stairway.

“It’s too late now to stop them, kid,” Steel said, grabbing Doris by the shoulders. “I can see it all a lot better now. Why didn’t I think of it before?”

DORIS was chewing her lip grimly. “What can we do? How can we stop them? It’s such a beautiful cover, we can never convince them it’s a frame. Not if we flash all the badges in the world.”

“I know,” mused Steel. He dug at his chin with his knuckle. “I don’t know if you go along with me on this, but this is what I’ve got figured out. Listen.”

“Shoot, doc. I’ll let you know if you’ve bull’s-eyed it or not.” There was a warm flicker in her eyes.

“Pete Black is spotting for those blockade runners. He cruises around in the soup, locates the freighter out beyond the breakwater and radios the location back to the runners in code. At the same time, to cover his moves out there, he and some guns of the Harlowe combine fake a chase for Mary Black.”

Doris shifted restlessly. “Well done, doc, but listen—”

“Then Mary comes to me, knowing I’ll help her. The Harlowe gang tails us and blacks me out and holds me. They let Mary get away.”

“Why? Why don’t they hold her?”

“They figure she’ll go home or crawl in a hole somewhere to sweat it out. These fake fly-boys are supposed to round up the C-47’s and take off to look for Pete Black—because he’s Mary’s brother. They don’t need Mary at all.”

“Makes decent sense,” Doris nodded her blonde head.

“But what bollixes it all up to hell is this—when Mary Black takes off to look for Pete, there’s no excuse for these box cars to take off and hunt too. So they
sabotage Mary’s plane and it drops like a
dead duck onto the pond. The freight
pack takes off to look for Mary. All they
do now is drop the hot stuff near the ship
and it’s picked up.”

“So what do we do, doc? Melt down
our badges for carfare home?” Doris’
eyes were warm and amused, and some-
how soft. It was funny, because she was
merely standing close to Steel, and there
was no reason she shouldn’t be cold and
efficient and stern. Steel grinned when he
looked at her, trying to cover his amuse-
ment at her open interest in him.

He suddenly wondered what would
happen if he leaned over and kissed her
on her gabby little mouth.

He let his eyes harden, and then he took
her by the arm. “You contact your agents
to get a fix on any freighters loafing off
the coast—it doesn’t matter what flag they
fly. Find out exactly where they are lo-
cated, and get either our men or the coast
guard to close in for a routine check-up.
Got that?”

“Meanwhile what do you do? Worry
about your old flame?” The girl’s eyes
were hooded now, and behind her smile
there was a half angry self-hate. She was
too tough to care what this slob thought
about his old girl friend, but somehow she
did care.

Steel grinned. “I can’t live without her.
Sometimes she means more to me than a
big haul of sea bass.” He watched her
eyes but he could see nothing behind them
now. She mumbled something about, the
hell with you.

Steel went on. “I’m going back to my
place and take to the water. I’ve got a
shotgun in my skiff and I’ve got ammo.
I’m going out myself in the Mary B. and
do some scouting. I think that kid’s in
trouble splashing around in the brine. I’m
going to find her, and to hell with the gun-
runners.”

---

Country Doctor

Mild...as spring!

The Pipe Mixture

with the KINDLY disposition

Country Doctor Pipe Mixture has the warm hearted
glow of friendliness and the unfailing goodness of the
famous country doctor for whom it is named. A delight-
ful blend of the finest, rarest tobaccos. Cool — slow-
burning — satisfying. A wonderful flavor that finds favor
with pipe smokers, young and old.

TRY IT TODAY...

If your dealer does not have it — write Phillip Morris & Co., Ltd., Inc., Dept. M29, 119 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, N.Y.,
enclosing 25c for full size package
“The damned thing would be called the Mary B.” the little blonde kid mumbled.

“Got your orders?” He pushed her ahead of him and they left the administration building.

“Sure. I drive you home and then I contact the old man and find out if anything else’s cooking. I’ll have the F. B. I. pick up those C-47 pilots when they come back in.”

They climbed in the car silently and drove back. The fog was still thick along the highway, but the sun was moving up into the sky, sopping up a little of the mist.

Steel’s house loomed up on the cliff. He drove the car up the winding drive along the sea-cliff and got out again at the same spot he’d parked it the night before. The mists were swirling about the house, whipped in by the ocean breeze. He hadn’t even closed the car door when it happened.

_Crack!_

It was a rifle shot, clear and sharp—from out of nowhere. The girl spun around in the seat and stared at him, startled. The mist covered any clear view about him. He dropped to the grass that covered his land. The girl slid out her big Smith and Wesson and crawled over in the seat toward the steering wheel.

“Where did that shot come from?” she hissed at him.

He stirred a second, craning his head around. “Damned if I know. It didn’t hit the car. I judge it came from in back of us down the drive, or from around the back of the house.”

He slid out his own Colt and cleared a little path in the thick grass around him. “I’ll find out in a second.” He wriggled through the grass toward the front porch.

_Cr-r-r-ack!_

Steel felt his hair stir. He craned his head up then and he knew where the shot had come from—the roof of his house! Someone could cover the whole area.

He couldn’t possibly get to the boat house without barging through a fusillade of lead. He’d have to smoke that sniper out before he could chance moving down to the beach.

“He’s on the roof!” the girl hissed. “I’ve got an idea.”

Steel heard the motor roar up, and the car started slowly back down the driveway.

_Crack!_

The windshield shattered into a million dissolving slivers, and a web of criss-crossed death hung across the front frame. The car kept on backing.

_Spang!_

_That damned little fool!_ Steel thought. _She’ll get herself killed._ Then he realized that she was fainting with the car to cover him. He snaked through the grass to the corner of the house. The car was bumping back down the winding driveway, faster now. _Why the hell didn’t she slam on the brakes?_

From the corner of the house Steel glanced back over his shoulder, and saw the car careening crazily for the edge of the ravine down into the cove. _That damned fool kid! Was she hurt?_ Steel felt his blood suddenly run cold at the thought. _She was a smarter kid than that! She could have worked it smoother than that! Crack! Crack!_

Both shots smashed through the mesh of windshield, and the car bounced toward the lip of the cliff. It screeched and twisted and edged shakily along the rim. Steel slid almost to the back of the house, and the sweat was clammy all over him.

Two more shots lashed out from the roof, and the car spun up away from the rim finally. Steel’s stomach let go and he gave a big sigh of relief. She had it under control, all right.

_THEN_ the car paused, tottered on the edge a moment, as though balanced on a razor blade. With a sudden, sickening,
lurching thrust, it slammed forward and lunged over the edge, twisting and turning. Two more shots followed it, and as it crashed and snapped and bounced on the jagged rocks below, Steel heard a sudden raw, savage laugh from the roof of the house.

It was De Soto’s laugh!

Steel’s fists knotted, and the cords along his back twisted into nobbed ridges. His gun came up in his hand, and he turned back for the front of the house again.

Fantastic, blinding pictures rolled through his brain—pictures of the little blonde doll trapped inside that maddened, lurching beast of steel and glass; pictures if her flat little smile and her golden pack of curls, and her mouth and the way it looked soft when she didn’t know anyone was watching it; pictures of that tough kid he had only known a few hours, a kid he suddenly wanted to live.

“I’m a tough little doll,” she had said. She had fought like a wildcat to the last, and now she was gone, and Steel owed it to her to blast that gun-monkey down from his perch.

The man on the roof suddenly reared up, and his head made an outline against the foggy swirls. Steel stepped from the edge of the house, sighted along the Colt and leveled it at the head. But he never got the shot off.

*Splat!*

Steel threw himself to the ground instinctively. From behind him, down the slope a ways, came the howl of lead, zinging half an inch from his shoulder. One on the roof, and the other waiting down the slope for Steel to cross back. Damn it! Damn it! That would be Pennies Pearson. They had Joe Steel in a tight pincers now.

Two more shots blazed out, and the line of chipped paint bit down the wall, closer to Steel’s neck. He lay there, trying to pull himself into the soil. Oh, for an acre of muddy, muddy marshland!

Above him he could hear the snarling laughter of De Soto.

“Burn him down!” yelled De Soto.

“Burn him down!”

The sweat rolled off Steel’s face.

*Splat!*

The lead eased across the back of his shoulder and the sting came vicious and intense. The slug bounced off the wall beyond him, and he knew for sure he wasn’t plugged. He tried to wriggle somewhere, but there was nowhere to wriggle. One more slug, following the pattern down, would cut Steel’s life out like a paper doll.

Then there were two quick, short shots from close by, from a different model rod. Immediately a hollow curse rolled up from the slope. It was Pennies Pearson’s last curse.

And now through the grass, just half a rod away, Steel could make out a wildly waving, triumphal banner of blonde hair moving toward him. Doris Dangerfield had hopped out of that car before it backed down. She had circled around and picked off Pennies Pearson, who would have chopped Steel down for mince-meat in half a second.

A roar of rage thundered down from the roof and De Soto ripped off a shot. A flying splinter tore from the edge of the roof.” She edged through the grass toward him, and her mouth was tight and her eyes hard blue.

He scowled at her. “You gave me a bad scare there. Damn you tough women. You’re a pain in the neck.” She was close by him now, wriggling through the grass. Suddenly she lay still and turned her face up to his. She smiled and her eyes danced and her mouth was soft as silk.

“Surprised hell out of him, didn’t I?”

Steel leaned over and kissed her suddenly and the two of them looked at each other surprised. Her eyes were wide and clear and his face was a mask of shock. It was brotherly kind of a kiss, that didn’t make his toes tingle or anything. But
he found himself reaching out for her hair and her cheeks to kiss her again.

"Get lost, Romeo," she snapped. "You've got work to do. And don't come back without those damned gun-runners. I'll take care of Tar-Baby up there. Now beat it."

He snaked through the grass toward the back of the house, and he was grinning to himself. As he made the stairway, he heard her wing a shot up into the roof.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sea Monster

JOE STEEL'S sea skiff was a neat little dory, powered with a 115 horse-power inboard, and it cut hell out of the Pacific swells. It was ready, willing, and purring now. He flipped open the sea gates and climbed in the boat. He gunned it, cut it down, and started up. The fog and mist was a thin, gossamer veil over the choppy sea.

Spang! Spang!

Lead slugs yipped into the ocean, throwing salt water in miniature geysers about him. He ducked down into the boat and edged a shot or two at the madman on the roof. He could barely make out the outline of De Soto's head.

Crack!

Lead tore into the hull. Steel blasted three shots at the roof, and De Soto's dark head disappeared. Immediately two more shots came singing down at him, and one nipped the prow.

"Damn!"

Then he heard a roar of rage and pain from the roof. Steel leaned forward and saw De Soto twitching to his feet, staggering around like a crazy thing. He heard the quick, fast shots from inside the house—muffled, echoed, distorted.

Doris Dangerfield had moused up on him from inside the house while De Soto was blazing away at the Mary B. She'd punctured De Soto, all right. He was screaming and yelling like a crazed bull now, holding his chest and staggering around on the roof.

There was one more shot, and then De Soto gave up his life for a damned bad job, slipped to his knees, lurched forward heavily, rolled past the edge of the roof, did a beautiful forward one-and-a-half, and pitched into the rocky surf at the foot of the cliff.

Steel wiped the sweat from his face. The girl appeared on the roof, looked over at the body of De Soto sloshing about in the suds below, and then she turned to Steely and waved.

Then the mist swirled in again and Steel was alone. . .

The pattern Steel followed was haphazard, accidental, and plenty lucky. Even at that, it was an hour and a half before he came on the strange little white flag bobbing in the sparkling water, the sun catching the edges every so often with a diamond-like glitter.

He cut for the flag and fished it out of the water. It was a small cork float, and inside was a metal box. The float was attached to something deep in the water, by a delicate, tough wire. And it didn't take much imagination to spot that gadget.

It was a direction finder—one that sent out automatic signals on a given frequency to guide anyone to it. And attached to the wire, on the bottom of the ocean, lay one of the big bundles of guns jettisoned from a flying box car.

The mist was gone, and Steel scanned the horizon anxiously. Where the hell was the freighter? Where the hell was anyone? The sea was deserted as a Sunday morning ballroom. He cruised on another fifty yards, and found another one. And another. A fourth. Five of them—all within a radius of a hundred yards.

But no one was in sight doing any harvesting. Damned odd.

With a grating, angry jar, his skiff
shuddered under him and lurched to one side, throwing him on his face. Immediately a loud blasting shot came—seemingly from nowhere. Then there was another hard, battering smash and the gasoline-powered inboard conked out. Steel poked his head up over the edge and looked around.

His breath froze in his lungs, and a tight iron hand gripped his throat. His mouth twisted down at one corner and he drew himself backward involuntarily, his grip tightening helplessly on the Colt in his hand. His first thought was—even the damned shotgun won't get me out of this one!

An armed, baby submarine had risen suddenly from nowhere, and a man was standing on its small deck, manning a huge mounted gun zeroed directly on Steel's neck. The man staring at Steel and wagging a Colt .45 in his left hand.

"Okay, fisherman. Drop your rod. This ain't a good day for fish."

Steel shrugged and dropped his Colt.

"Lay off the tricks while I'm coming at you. You're joining me on board this diver, and we're going back to mama."

"Sure, Jack. Anything you say."

"Mama's about a mile from here plenty deep down in the water. She's a powerful big undersea freighter, boy. Don't try any cute cut-ups, hear me?"

The man reached out a hand to pull Steel over onto the splashed catwalk of the sub bracing himself on the gun mounting. Steel put out his hand and stepped to the edge of the Mary B. The man pulled and Steel slipped to one side jerking down hard and twisting over at the same time spinning the man head over heels into the Mary B. Steel threw a swift, deadly rabbit punch to the man's neck and the body twitched and lay still.

Swiftly, Steel juggled the unconscious man, but there was no sign of activity left in him.

The sweat was rolling off his shoulders as Steel screwed down the hatch of the sub and faced the strange bizarre collection of dials and instruments. Even with his fabulous instinct for mechanical gadgets Steel had a hell of a time getting the baby sub in motion. There was barely enough room to experiment in. Once the sub was moving Steel spotted the dial that led him back to the mother ship.

Ten yards from the big hulk drifting about under water like a spawning sea monster the loudspeaker over his face blared out.

"Hold it a minute will ya, Hickman? For Pete's sake something's jammed on the damned valve."

Steel grinned flatly and wiped the sweat off his face. Somebody else was new at this stuff too. Hickman. That would be his name—until someone saw him face to face.

"Okay. Move her in. I was messing with the wrong dial. I wish they'd give us a better set of maps for this screwed-up job. Ready Hickman?"

"Yeah, yeah," Steel mumbled, his face half away from the mike.

"Lock her in."

Steel drove the sub in through the yawning valve directly ahead of him and felt her scrape into place through a series of narrowing steel rib plates. Then she stopped moving and the power cut off automatically.

SOMEONE spun the hatch around above head, and he grabbed the Colt and climbed up until his face almost pressed against the revolving plate. The plate lifted and water dripped down on him.

"Boss wants to see you, Hickman," the big chunky blond guy started to say, glancing carelessly down into the hole. The big guy drew back with a gasp and yelled, "Hey!"

Steel flew out and at him, and ripped his temple open with the barrel of the Colt. The big blond sank to the steel
mooring planking and lay still without
even a groan or a thank you.

The boss. That must be Whitie Har-
lowe. This thing should be a Harlowe
caper. But neither the blond nor the man
in the baby sub were Harlowe men—at
least none Steel knew. Maybe there was a
new boss.

And then Steel saw the picture.
The boss was Pete Black. He’d pulled
out of the Harlowe gang, and that’s why
Harlowe’s men had been gunning for him.
He’d double-crossed Harlowe the way he’d
double-crossed everyone, and he’d picked
up this renegade wolf pack from some in-
ternational racketeers to pull off the big
business deal all by himself. No wonder
Harlowe’s gunnies were hot on his tail.
And an odd ironic twist was the fact that
he had caused his sister to get messed up
in this smooth operation. Even a slob like
him had pride in his own blood. It was an
interesting situation.

Steel slipped down the blue-lighted
companionway. The boss. Which door
led to the boss? Suddenly he heard a low
mumble of voices down the straightway.
He moved along on silk feet until he
came opposite the half-open door.

“Okay, okay! Take it easy, will you?
I can’t be responsible for every damned
little thing!”

That was Pete Black’s irritated, weary
voice.

“Please, Pete. It’s just one small thing,
and you’ve got to promise me.”

And that was Mary Black’s smooth,
sweet, tearful voice.

Steel smashed open the heavy door
and stepped into the cabin. He slammed
the door behind him quickly and waved
the Colt. Pete Black was sitting behind a
desk in one corner, and Mary Black
was on a low bunk across from him. She
was wearing a heavy mackinaw and her
hair was bunched up over her head. It
was wet and glistening. Her eyes were
red-rimmed and tired.

Pete Black was a nice looking guy
with curly brown hair, a couple of
freckles still on his nose, a boyish grin,
and a pair of sober, fine black eyes.
Damned odd that the stamp of his actions
hadn’t branded his face and his person-
ality. But then, that was how the most
dangerous killers of them all operated—
they could twist anybody around their
dirty little fingers. And they did.

Pete was the first one to speak. He
cried, “Holy Crow! Joe Steel! How the
hell did you ever get out here to the sub-
marine?”

“Lift ’em, Pete-boy. Get ’em up over
your head. Like you were picking pome-
granates.”

Pete stood and flipped up his hands.
Steel frisked him for iron, but he was
clean. Steel turned to Mary Black then,
and she came to him, her eyes tear-
filled and wondering, her mouth open.
“Joe, Joe!” she cried over and over, and
she was in his arms, clinging to him, as
if they were the last two people in the
world.

He ran his hands over her wet hair,
and he said, “Easy kid. It’ll be all right.
Easy now.” And his voice was husky
and slow in his throat.

“Oh, it was awful!” she sobbed, shak-
ing her head with a shudder. “My en-
gine conked out, and I went in the icy
water. I shouldn’t have gone. You were
right, Joe. I shouldn’t have tried at all.”

He pulled her away from him and held
her by the shoulders tenderly. “Look,
pal, you’re safe. Better sit down, huh?”

She sniffed and looked down at her-
self. She rubbed her palm wanderingly
over her cheeks, nodding her head slow-
ly. “I guess you’re right. I never was so
glad to see anyone as you, Joe.”

She went over and sat down on the
bunk, huddling in the big mackinaw
and an army blanket, staring dazedly out
at Joe Steel and her brother.

Steel turned to Pete Black. Pete
hadn't moved from behind the desk. He was sitting there now, an icy, arrogant expression on his face. His eyes were bright, and his fine eyebrows were raised inquiringly.

"I've got the drop on you, Pete," Steel grated out. "Don't forget that for one minute. I'm the type guy who'll blast your guts through the back wall if you try anything funny. And brother, I've had about every funny gag in the death book pulled on me. I know what they look like, what they smell like, and what they feel like crawling around in a rat's brain.

"Friend Steel," mumured Pete Black, pursing his lips. "You've got guts, that I grant. But if you'll pardon any offense, right now methinks your guts are a trifle misplaced—maybe in your socks somewhere. Or in your hip pocket. You're playing tin hero in an underwater coffin, without benefit of waterwings. It ain't healthy, Steel."

"I've got the gun, Pete. I want facts. Some simple, mighty important, dynamite facts. Who's head man, Pete? You?"

Pete shrugged. "If I said I wasn't, you wouldn't believe me, and you'd play drums on my scalp. Forget it, and beat it. That's my advice to you, Steel."

Steel turned to Mary Black. Her eyes were dark and big and scared. She huddled in the blanket like a sick puppy, her mouth a red slash of fear.

"So you can feed your sister to the sharks, eh, hot shot? To hell with that!"

Steel moved across to the desk behind which Pete Black sat. "What do you do with your sister, rat? Let her go free? What did you do when you trolled her in out of that ice water? Did you tell her your rotten dirty stinking plans? Did you tell her you were going to sell your own flesh and blood down the river? Did you do that?"

With a crash Pete Black snapped up out of his chair and hurtled around the corner of the desk. He stood in front of Joe Steel, gun and all, erect and cold. "Shut up!" he snapped, and the sweat glistened on his lip and on his forehead. He was shaking, but somehow he was calm and intensely commanding. A fine, delicate tremor edged the pupils of his eyes. He watched and he waited, and the pulse in his temples beat steady and dark black.

"What now, Pete?" cried Steel. "Drown her? Kill her? Throttle her? She knows now, Pete! She knows everything about your miserable, black-market soul! She hates every drop of blood in your veins, Pete! Why don't you oblige her by slitting her throat so she won't have to stay in the same damned world as you! And make one move toward her, Pete-boy, and I'll tint this cabin with your double-crossing blood!"

Pete's hand lashed out and smashed across Steel's face. Then it snapped back and raked knuckles and fingernails across Steel's other cheek. And Pete Black stood there, his face drained white, as Steel carefully lifted the muzzle of the .38 up to his stomach.

"Get wise, Steel," Pete Black rasped out. "Don't be so damned simple all your life. Can't you see it yet? It's been shoved in your face a hundred times, and you can't see it! No wonder the whole world's going to pot! No wonder it's in such a rotten, sad, stinking pickle—with watch dogs like you!"

STEEL smashed the Colt against Pete Black's neck and threw it to the floor in revulsion. He pinioned his right arm around Pete's throat and ground him into it like a walnut into a cracker. Pete Black exploded and he was a roaring fury of jiu-jitsu, commando tricks, and raw flaming hate. He cursed Steel savagely, lashing out at him with heavy cast-iron fists, unbalancing him with his tough, raw up-thrusts, and going hammer-and-tong on Steel's rangy frame.
“Get out, Mary,” snarled Steel, and tasted blood on the words. He slugged and drove his weight into Pete’s young, stringy frame, but the weight and force of his blows was easing up. Pete was younger, and he kept pummeling Steel’s face and stomach mercilessly. “Get out, and run like hell, kid!”

Then Steel felt the iron-like claws of Pete Black’s fingers closing in on his windpipe. He twisted and strained, but he could not tear loose. Fine, tiny specks of black spun about him in this new world of yellow and red.

He smashed blow after blow to Pete’s face and neck and heart, but Pete would not let go. Doggedly, insistently, he clung to Steel’s throat, and a great spasm of pain twitched through Steel’s chest.

The black was closing in, running all over his vision like ink spilled from a hundred cosmic bottles. He wrenched himself desperately backwards, then sunfished suddenly, flipping Pete into the air. With a wrenching, fierce effort, Steel whirled Pete about off the floor, and brought his body crashing down on the edge of the heavy desk.

And his sight roared back at him, and the room was blindingly present, and there was no feeling in his neck but the hot throbbing pain of warm blood racing through it again.

The sweat in his eyes, he staggered to the bunk, trying to draw himself erect, feeling about on the floor for the gun he’d thrown there. He saw the limp hulk of Pete Black lying in the corner near the big desk and somehow he felt only bitterness and pain. There was no lift in him at all that he’d beaten the dirty two-bit punk to a pulp—even though the kid was a rat, a double-crooser, and a triple loser.

“Come on, baby,” he gasped to Mary Black. “Let’s dust the joint. I didn’t mean to hurt him, but I had to. Can you understand me? I didn’t mean to.”

He stood there, staring at her, trying to make her comprehend the words he was saying, the emotion he was feeling. But there was something big between them now and he could sense it in the air. He had half-murdered the only thing Mary Black ever loved in her life. He had killed any love she might ever feel for him.

The gun looked heavy in her hand, but she didn’t seem to mind. Her eyes were staring and they were bright with anger. Steel gazed down into the big, dead eye of his own gun muzzle. He looked at Mary’s face and back to the gun, and then back to her face again. He thought, love is a funny damned thing with a woman. Handle her with care, Steel. Handle her with plenty of care.

But when her voice came, it was triumphant and excited, not at all as he thought it would be. The spark came alive in her; she was the old Mary Black. The heroic, unselfish little girl who loved her kid brother above all else in the world. The wonderful, lovely kid that the whole world worshipped for her determination, her courage, her strength of character.

“Good!” she laughed. “Now I don’t have to kill him, myself!”

Now I don’t have to kill him, myself!

The hot rush of blood surged up in Joe Steel’s head, and he caught himself spinning dizzyly. The roar in his ears came and went and came again, and then it left forever, and he could feel the emptiness inside him, and he could hear the sound of nothing at all in the cabin. He and Mary Black were there alone in an endless void and there was nothing about them but the bare essence of black, hideous, poisonous truth.

He got it. He got it in the guts and in the heart and in the knees. It came to him all over and he could hardly keep himself standing, wearing that frozen, chipped-ice smile and that frosted stare.

He saw the act she’d been putting on all the time—the dress rehearsal of pay-off that she’d been playing all her life. He
saw the smooth business from the start—the years she'd spent hammering together a reputation so she could someday pull jobs like this one. The long, tricky pattern of double deals and deception.

It wasn't Whitie Harlowe's caper. It wasn't Pete Black's whizzeroo. It was Mary Black's headliner—and it was a dilly. The sky-queen of the wolf-pack. The murder-mistress of world-wreckers, incorporated.

"Thanks," she was saying softly, her lisping little adder's tongue tripping out the words lovingly. "Thanks for taking care of Petey. I hated to mess him up myself. Too bad Petey didn't work out, but you can't say I didn't try, can you?"

"YOU used Pete as a red herring, all your life, didn't you, kid? Forced him into that slimy pattern so you could cut out your own little treason cookies, and no one'd suspect you." Steel's mouth was sour and his words were halting and sometimes they shook when he spoke them.

"Petey tried," smiled Mary Black, her bright little eyes pinpointed at him. "But he just didn't work out. I had to drag him out in that fog myself, last night. I almost drowned, Joe. Isn't that awful? And then I paid De Soto and Pennies Pearson to tail you—to throw you off the trail." She stared at him and then her tongue lashed out with an uncontrolled and deadly fury. "You're an agent, Joe, aren't you! Answer me! You're a dirty, sneaking State Department Operator!"

Steel thought a moment, and when he spoke, he had trouble with his words. "You're working for somebody else, aren't you, Mary? Not racketeers, not petty crooks, not gangsters. A man could excuse a woman falling for the glamor of gold and adventure. But you, Mary, you're working for the deadliest leeches in the world! The damndest covey of assassins in the universe. You're a traitor, Mary Black! Say it! It's true! Admit it! A traitor!"

"Sure," she said softly. "I'm a traitor, Joe. That's what they call me." She walked back and forth nervously and she waved the gun at him, her eyes bright and fixed. "But what I'm fighting for is a better world than this around us now! With your dying breath, call me traitor, Joe! Say it! Say it so I can kill you, Joe Steel! I've got to do it! Quick!"

She was shaking and her voice was sobbing. But she did nothing with the gun. She was frozen, tricked into a strange
trance by the fiery force of her voice. She stared at him wildly and then she moved away from him and leaned against the desk, relaxing suddenly.

"Listen, Joe. I go back, and I stage a beautiful return from the dead. Headlines, Joe. And you and Pete? Oh, the papers'll sob over you two like nothing in a million years!" Her eyes burned hot and her hair was loose around her ears. She lurched across to Steel and tapped him on the chest with the gun barrel.

"Our broken romance," she glowed. "How I can play that tune on their heart strings! It's a natural. Isn't it lovely, Joe? Doesn't it appeal to your sense of dramatics!"

Her face froze suddenly and she backed off, her eyes pinpoints again. She saw the body lying on the floor and she choked down a sob. She turned her terror-stricken eyes up to Steel and for a long instant she stared at him and the tears glistened fine and silvery in her eyes. It was almost as if she had broken apart inside in that instant, almost as if she were going to hand the gun to Joe Steel, and go over and hold her brother's unconscious body in her arms and chuck the whole lousy game down the drain.

Then the tempest inside her broke loose and fury and hate lay black and heavy on her. She moved toward Pete's body.

"Get up, Pete! Get up, damn it! It's time to die!"

Steel leaped across the room and twisted the gun from her. She fired a shot and the lead tore a furrow across his cheek. She gasped and cried and struck at him with violent, cat-like movements. He lashed at her with the gun, and then shot her three times through the heart. She turned and screamed at him, but no words came out at all. Then she twisted into a crumpled limp hunk and sagged to the floor.

She still wanted to say something to him before she went under and she fought it and fought it, but it never came out. She braced herself a long time on her weakening forearms, and dropped to her elbows. Once again she tried to lift up her head but it seemed to weigh a thousand tons and it was getting dark and the wind was beginning to blow in the trees and she knew she had to go home before her mother made dinner and she ran down the slope, down, and down, and down into the warm, quiet, never-ending valley of darkness and silence and peace.

The little blonde doll punched out a couple more pages on Steel's typewriter and then she slapped them out and dumped the finished report on the table. She picked up her rye and water and gulped down a mouthful. She turned to Steel and smiled.

"It's all there. The case of Mary Black, sky-queen of the wolf pack, is finished. Fifteen alien agents in the clink. Three manufacturers indicted. One wolf pack, undersea, impounded and turned over to the U.N. Security Council for proper disposal."

"What about us?" Steel asked.

"Detailed account of the case of Peter Black; request for acquittal. Subpoena for Whitie Harlowe and ten members of his gang to appear before the county grand jury."

"And one caulking job on the prow of my skiff," Steel scowled.

"A detailed account of the activities and exploits of Mary Black."

"You done?" growled Steel. He moved in back of her chair and looked down on the mad swirl of honey dumped on top her head. He put his fingers in her hair and stirred it around.

"Now cut it out, damn it!" she growled. He didn't. She spun up out of her chair and came to him with her claws and her fists and her heels and her bright flashing eyes.

THE END
Detective-Lieutenant Harry Nailer had to teach the international cloak-and-dagger baby a little more cooperation with the metropolitan boys in blue.

He noticed her, of course, when she got aboard the giant transport at La Guardia, but he tried not to make a project of it. Habit warned Harry that he must keep his mind on the job, and the hell with everything else. But the girl made it tough, because she was blonde and young.
The tailoring of her gray flannel suit was not severe. Resembling as it did a cupcake come to rest upon her golden head, her tiny hat lent just the proper bit of spice.

Halfway to Washington, he found himself wishing that Bannister would give him a case once, just once, where he could work with a blonde like this one. It would be nice, all right. Detective Lieutenant Harry Nailer thought about it. Finally, he got up and went to find the stewardess, to ask her for a drink of water that he really didn’t want.

When he got back to his seat, the blonde girl had a cigarette in her lips and was fishing in her handbag for a light. Harry struck a match for her, and dropped the book of matches in her lap. “Here y’are,” he said as gravely as his husky baritone would permit. “Keep ’em.”

That did it. Ten minutes later, he knew that her name was Haila Garson and that she was on her way to the Capitol to join her parents and that was her first plane ride. He’d reached the point of telling her that he had kicked hell out of Europe from the bomb bay of a B-29 so that flying was old stuff to him, when that inner voice of his warned him again and he cut it short.

Carefully and abruptly, he sat back in his seat and pretended fatigue. Resolutely he closed his eyes and his mind firmly to the lovely distraction across the aisle and thought, as he was paid to think, about General Vasilesov. The general was a self-styled refugee who had come to the States to do some singing for the benefit of Uncle Sam.

As far as Harry had been able to learn, both the State and Defense Departments didn’t like the music or the lyrics. Somewhere along the line they had grown suspicious of Vasilesov; their questions embarrassed the truth of his assignment into clearer focus; it was believed that the general had come to obtain as much information as he had promised to divulge.

At that point, the general started screaming he’d been kidnapped by capitalist tools and took a powder, looking for his Embassy. The night before, the general, powdering in a borrowed car, had run down a New York City traffic cop, and kept running.

So now Harry Nailer had extradition for manslaughter papers in his pocket and orders to pick up the general, if he showed himself in Washington, seeking sanctuary at his Embassy.

Harry was especially conscious of the time when the big ship touched down at the Washington airport. According to the schedule the airline had supplied, the flight was twelve minutes early. He looked across the cold, wind-swept strips of cement for the police car that was to meet him, found nothing, and went into the field restaurant for a warming cup of coffee. He was sitting there, watching the car ramps outside, when Haila Garson came in.

She took the stool beside him. Her lovely face worked into a frown. “Rotten night, isn’t it?”

He felt that she was more than passably interested in him, but it was a hunch that facts would not support. The girl was strictly upper Fifth, and he was Roughhouse Harry Nailer, the Tenth Avenue Tornado, with flatfoot written in his young, but pushed-in face, in his dark, quiet clothes and his guarded conversation. Her continued scrutiny made him squirm a little on the stool; he threw a coin down on the counter and made to move away when the girl said, “Got a match?”

He lit her cigarette for the second time while the small suspicion grew in him. He looked at her, annoyed by the fact that he was attracted by what he saw; then he turned and walked away, towards the men’s room sign. Inside, he felt conscious of the fact that he was avoiding her. Probably just a girl who liked to talk. Maybe she was lonely. . . .

He was fixing his tie in the mirror
when it happened. The knob turned; the door swung inward. There were two of them, Harry saw; about the same height, with dark overcoats, dark hats and scarves. Both of them had their hands in their pockets, bulging in a way that Harry didn’t like.

In the mirror, Harry caught their actions. Deliberately, he removed his tie completely. The men were young, and from the look on their faces, Harry didn’t think they’d blast right away. One of them stood with his back against the door, whistling softly. The other one smiled in the mirror at Harry Nailer.

“Put it on again.” He motioned to the tie.

Harry put it on. He had, now, firmer ideas about that second match.

“The blonde tipped you, didn’t she?”

When neither of the young men replied, Harry Nailer turned to face them, his own eyes veiled, his fighter’s face set with bitter resignation. He sighed, and brought his open hands sharply together, pointing with one hand after the minor explosion like a side show magician, focusing the young men’s attention—and ended the experiment in criminal psychology with a sudden rush.

His flying shoulder upset the first fellow. Then Harry bullied his way to the other, sweeping with his arms. His fist became a vicious battering ram against the man’s neck and face. The youth went down. Harry ducked in time to catch the first man’s arm across his shoulder. Working furiously, and without a sound, he used the lower bone of the arm as a fulcrum to propel its owner head-over-heels against the wall. A chopping motion with the side of his hand and the man stopped squirming.

HE FOUND nothing of importance or identification on either, save for their weapons which he dropped in the empty towel chute. Obliquely, Harry wished that he had time to wait around for them to come to life again; more of the tactics that made him famous in Hell’s Kitchen would have brought forth all the information he wanted about the blonde and this set-up. But, he was pressed for time.

He went out of the men’s room, looking for the girl. It did not surprise him to see that she had gone.

He asked the counterboy about her. The kid’s eyes went wider when Harry flashed the badge.

“Why, out there, somewhere. She just left.”

“There’s a pair for the local police in there.” Harry jerked a thumb back at the door. He spelled his name carefully, and made the kid write down his badge number. “I’ll swear out a warrant later. Call the cops and tell them I said to book ’em on a. and b. Thanks.”

Outside he saw that his escort had not
yet arrived, he checked his watch again and was surprised to discover he hadn't been off the plane for more than five minutes.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, and the surprise really began to grow then, because he saw Haila Garson walking quickly toward the administration buildings. His practiced eye did not detect any of the alarm he imagined would accompany her flight.

Moving with a speed that seemed alien to his large and heavily constructed frame, Harry started after her. She checked her wrist watch and started to run. So did Harry.

He had gone only a few yards in her wake when he heard the savage roar of a nearby motor. Instinctively he stopped, turning to the sound—and the burning breath of excitement bubbled into his chest. A silver-winged monoplane was cutting across the field through the great squares of shadow cast by the buildings; its prop was churning ground speed that increased steadily.

Like a giant monster, the plane was heading for the girl in front of him!

Harry yelled a warning, but the words were lost in the noise of other plane motors being warmed in the nearby hangars.

"Get down!" he screamed again into the blanket of sound, then drove his feet hard against the oil-stained gravel, running, diving for the girl. One arm fumbled for her waist as his hip-block caught her; they hit the ground together, bruisingly, in the briefest breath of time, before the undercarriage got to where they'd been. He rolled with her, desperately, to avoid the path of the lowered tailskid which would have cut them like a giant sword.

The monoplane streaked out into the night, the orange-blue exhaust spitting back at them. Harry lay beside the trembling girl, biting in fat chunks of atmosphere to fill his burning lungs, watching the plane grow smaller. It wore no lights as all planes should; he guessed it wore no markings either. He wondered how much the girl could tell him about it.

She had not said a word, but he could feel the tenseness in her. Rising, Harry helped her to her feet. He retrieved her handbag, which had fallen several feet away from them. Nervously, she accepted it, her dark eyes full of him, her lips trembling with unspoken words.

He didn't rush her; patience was a necessary tool of his profession and he had learned the value of a pointed silence, where information-getting was concerned. He grinned, to fill the little void between them and leaned down to pick up his hat.

From that point on, he did nothing consciously. He heard the sharp, intaken breath, the sound of the girl's movement as she went into action above and slightly behind him, and felt the brutal blow take him just above the back of his neck. The ground rushed upward, swimming at his face, as the pain mushroomed into an explosion of darkness.

Black nothingness faded gradually into gray, aching waves of pain, emanating from the back of his skull. He was lying, Harry learned to his dismay, face down in what seemed a shallow puddle of oil and water, and his head felt as if a troupe of bell ringers had taken residence there. The noise, the ringing in his ears was loud, painful, and continuous. By shaking his head, he found that he was able to focus his eyes.

Walking was the problem, it developed. Twice, his legs buckled under him, and further sets of bombs went off within his skull. Back in the restaurant, he ignored the wide-eyed nervousness of the counter clerk and asked some questions of his own.

No, said that bug-eyed young man, he didn't know what had happened to the blonde girl. And those two guys—

"Yes?" said Harry. "Did you call the police?"
"Sure thing. But those fellows musta got out when I was phoning. They wasn't there when the cops came. They musta—"
"Sure, sure. Was there anybody looking for me? Detectives?"
The clerk frowned. "Nobody at all. Gee—"

Harry left him to his wondering and went to the phone booth. His annoyance was reflected in the way he viciously dialed the phone. He thought he had put those two babies on ice, but he must have been out longer himself than he had imagined. His wrist watch, he found, had been smashed to a stop at 9:12. The clock outside on the wall read 9:26.

WHEN the voice at the Detective Bureau answered the phone and Harry identified himself, he caught the small whistle of surprise. There were some of the usual small, half-hearted attempts at needling himself and the New York Police Department as well; all good fun, but nothing Harry could appreciate at the moment. He said to tell Monaghan—the detective who had been assigned to work with Harry—to get over to the Embassy. Harry would hustle over there himself, as fast as a cab could take him.

In the men's room, a fast job with a towel and comb made him somewhat more respectable and the lump behind his left ear, where Haila Garson had conked him, responded a bit to a cold water application. But the pain of it still nagged as a cab rocked him through Washington's traffic.

Waiting in the cold and windy street for Monaghan, across from the darkened Embassy building, Harry thought less about Vasilessov than he did about Haila Garson. There was a gal for you, all right. Two matches, two pats—too bad.

It galled him to think that he might never know what reasons prompted her to use his head as a target for her fury. Detective that he professed to be, he had not the slightest idea why she should conk him. That she had marked him well, he had no doubt. But beyond that it was a puzzle. Well, one of these days; sometime, someplace, when he was done with the general, perhaps.

He heard the rush of footsteps and looked up to find a quickly-moving figure across the street. The man came into the cone of light cast by a street lamp, and Harry threw his cigarette away and started after him.

It was the character from the men's room, the one whom he had thrown head-over-heels. In the absence of Monaghan, Harry thought he might use some empty minutes for personal investigation. He went swiftly, running down the street after the young man.

The young man increased his speed. He cut around a corner, running hard. Harry made the turn successfully, but with a considerable loss of distance. He cursed softly. The side street led toward a park-like plaza into which his quarry plunged.

Harry went after him, lost him in some shrubbery, and came to a halt searching for any sounds that might betray the other's presence. Circling the bushes, he caught a flurry of movement to his right, and then the sudden cough of a heavy revolver blazed the night. A flame flash seared the darkness just ahead.

He came upon the young man lying sprawled, slack and unmoving. It did not take a detective's special talent to determine that he was dead, but it did call for an agent of the law to find and stop his killer. Gun in hand, Harry moved quickly through the low-hanging shrubs. Out on the cement path, he advanced more slowly, seeking sound to guide him. There was nothing. The sudden silence struck him like a blow, tightening his stomach muscles with chilling apprehension.

Then he felt the back-stiffening pressure just above his kidneys as a gun dug into his back.
“Drop the weapon!” Softly came the voice, taut with indecision. A shade of resistance, Harry knew, and the gun there behind him would blast again.

He dropped his own revolver and held his arms outstretched.

Standing that way, in the narrow path facing the entrance, he was directly in line with the headlights of the car which came racing down the street. The man behind him grunted in satisfaction at the sight of the limousine.

Above the whine of the car’s braking stop, voices reached out from its darkened interior, the words incomprehensible but commanding. The gunman made Harry get the body from the park and stuff it in the rear trunk of the car. Then they both got in the back seat.

Up forward, beyond the glass partition, the dark and sinister silhouette of the driver was of similar cut to the man with the gun, who sat now in the bucket seat facing Harry and the other passengers.

“Well,” Harry said, looking at the occupant of the seat beside him, “it’s a small world after all.”

Haila Garson said nothing.

She still wore the silly little hat and a fur garment that looked suspiciously like mink. The hat was just the slightest bit awry. Her blue eyes were wide as saucers.

“Is Ted—?” She looked helplessly back over her shoulder in the direction of the car trunk.

“Dead, my dear,” said the fourth occupant of the car.

He was a small but solid creature, and from the way he sat crowded next to Haila, Harry guessed he had a gun in the pocket of the leather jacket which he wore. The man’s age he put somewhere in the middle forties, his nondescript trousers part of an attempt at an anonymity in which he sought refuge.

As they purred along the quiet streets there was light enough for Harry to see the man’s face, the dark beady eyes, the thin patch of whiteness on his upper lip, where a mustache had once reposed. In Harry’s pocket still rested the pictures of the general, and this disguise did not survive close scrutiny.

RELAXING on the cushions Harry said, “How are things, General?” He grinned. “This is a break—saves me the trouble of looking for you. Do you want the whole routine: ‘In the name of the law, etc.? ’ In short, you’re under arrest and can consider yourself my prisoner.”

Vasilesov laughed. “Your humor amazes me.”

“It helps.” To the girl Harry added, “You have the damnedest playmates, baby,” and closed his eyes. He leaned back against the cushions.

He had no clear idea of what there was for him to do, now that he had caught up with the general. That worthy promised to be a problem, present circumstances what they were. The girl confused things admirably, as far as the simple deductions of Detective Lieutenant Harry Nailer could make out.

That she was a part of this night’s pattern of violence there was no doubt. If, as her reaction indicated, she had been in some shade of affiliation with the corpse from the park, that meant she was as much of a captive as himself.

He said, “Did you have to clout me so hard, back there at the airport? I thought I was doing you a favor, you know, pulling you out from under that plane. Were these the boys who were trying to make mince meat of you?”

Haila Garson looked from the little man to Harry. “I’m sorry about that,” she said softly. “But I was informed you were coming down here to arrest the general. I couldn’t afford to have the New York police gumming things up. I had to get you out of the way, to get him first.”

“So you were looking for our pal too.” Harry sighed. “Too bad we couldn’t
have worked together on this, baby. We
might have been all finished now, enjoy-
ing ourselves somewhere else.”

The general chuckled from the depths
of his jacket collar. “The young lady
has been schooled quite badly. She is
much too new at our little games of in-
trigue.”

“Take note, Haila. Learn something
every day.” He asked, “What now, Gen-
eral? Do we have to drive this fast?”

“They have a plane waiting,” said
Haila.

“The one that tried to stop you at the
airport?”

“Probably. They intend to get him out
of the country as fast as possible, before
we can question him further.”

“Popular fellow, aren’t you, General?
We have some questions to ask you, too.
About running down a New York cop.”
He snapped his fingers, startling the fel-
low on the bucket seat. “I’ll toss you
to see who keeps the general, Haila.”

Harry reached for his change pocket.

“Don’t!” snapped Vasilev.

The girl shook her head in annoyance.

“Okay, okay,” Harry said. “But you
State Department people stand in danger
of becoming dull. Or am I wrong about
the tag? Army Intelligence? Or Civilian
Intelligence Agency? No matter—you
fumbled the ball for sure.”

The general nodded. “We knew all
about Miss Garson’s plans. Though we
missed her at the airport, she and her
companion made the mistake of trying
to surprise me at my hotel.”

“Wasn’t there another one?”

Haila nodded. “He’d gone to check an-
other tip we had. Ted—Ted and I were
alone, outside the hotel, when these three
came out. They spotted me. Ted ran,
trying to get help—”

Harry nodded. “Looking for a cop, I
suppose, after it was too late.” He did
not have to pretend anger; his own cap-
ture could be traced to the girl. It was
his firm conviction, and the Department’s
as well, that all these undercover, cloak
and dagger babies would be better off,
if they’d learn a little cooperation with the
boys in blue, instead of trying to work all
by themselves.

The car was moving swiftly into the
more deserted areas on the outskirts of
the city now. While the gunman watched
him, Harry watched the scenery.

The general might have been reading
Harry’s mind. “Just a bit more, my brash
friend, then your worries will be over.”

“Too true.”

He seemed surprised. “You are not
afraid?”

“Would it do any good?”

“None, of course.”

HAILA’S face was white with terror,
and Harry tried his best to will her
all the courage that he could. It must be

---

HATE TO SHAVE YOUR UPPER LIP?

Make the TOUGH SPOT TEST

Try a Star Blade on those tough stubble patches
—those spots where whiskers are wiry and skin
tender. Feel the smoother, better shave you get.
Sturdier Star Blades are precision-made to take
and hold a sharper edge. Try better shaving at a
real saving.

STAR

SINGLE OR DOUBLE EDGE BLADES 10¢ and 25¢ Pkgs.
rough for her all right. Probably her first assignment—and a stinker.

They were moving much more slowly on this side road and the ride was far less comfortable. Bouncing on the seat, Harry heard the whine of tires racing too quickly for good traction; the car was digging into the road made treacherous by recent rain. When the machine settled, sliding into position across the road, the general cursed at the driver to be careful.

The motor snarled, sputtering, then stalled. Harry couldn't help laughing when the driver was unable to get the limousine moving again.

Vasilesov barked further orders. The fellow up front got out of the driver's compartment with the speed of an energetic orang-outan, lifting the forward seat. Harry heard the clanking of tire chains.

Vasilesov said, “Never mind,” opening the door on his side and motioning Harry and the girl to follow. “We can all walk to the plane from here.”

They were going that far, then. Harry had a vision of a plane, winging the general away, with Harry Nailer and Haila Garson as well as the dead man's body going along as excess baggage, to be dumped somewhere, beyond the coast probably. Neat and final—

“After you,” he said to Haila, watching the driver who was still playing with the car chains in the muck beyond the car door. Harry reached for the door handle on his side, very carefully, his eyes locked on the gunman who faced him.

It was in that half moment of suspended action, as the gunman followed, that Harry made his break. He dived for the car chains that lay there in the mud, slamming the front door on the kneeling driver's back.

Harry came erect with the chains gripped firmly, swinging them with wild abandon in the direction of the big guy with the gun. Glass shattered as the chains crashed against man and car window; the shot, ringing almost in accompaniment, fanned the air over Harry's shoulder as the chains bit into the other's upper arm.

The words of pain were lost in the ensuing screams that broke the night. The tire chains, swung by Harry in a vicious arc, whistled again, dangerous as a sword, cutting deeply into the big man. The driver, still seeking to rise, was hammered next.

Then Harry was rushing around the back of the car, calling to Haila, telling her to get down and out of the way. Vasilesov was crouched against the car door, tugging at his jacket pocket.

Haila's scream cut off as Harry swung the chains another time.

He dropped the chains and caught Haila before she lost her legs.

Holding her that way, the soft smell of her hair against his face, he heard the other cars arriving, growling up around them. He had a sudden hunch that it would be Monaghan seeking them, trailing the night's action from its source.

He remembered etiquette enough to shake hands with the little bulldog-looking man who was Monaghan. “There's a plane and a pilot somewhere up ahead,” Harry said. “They figure in.”

“You take it easy,” Monaghan told him. “We'll get it from here on in.”

Harry didn't argue. Vasilesov was his boy, and that character was on ice.

So he stayed there with Haila who leaned against the police car and shook her blonde head from side to side. Monaghan and some of his men, guns in hand, were fanning out.

Harry watched them go. “Well, that's about it. Sorry I couldn't tip you off faster, but I didn't know what I was going to do until it happened.”

“To you it's just part of the night's work.”

“Hoods are hoods, no matter where you run into them,” Harry told her. “They get behind a gun and try to push
you around. The only thing to do is take
the guns away and slap them down to size.
In this case, Vasilessov killed a cop. I'd
have got him one way or the next, if they
didn't get me first. I'm sorry you had to
get caught up in it. But you'll be okay
now, em?"

"I guess so. But the CIA wanted the
general for further questioning. I didn't
get him. This will probably be my first
and last assignment."

"No work for a girl anyway—danger-
ous. But if it will make you feel any
better, whatever we sweat out of Vasilessov
and his pals will be turned over to the
Central Intelligence Agency. All in due
time, and as quietly as the Agency wants
to work. We cops aren't as dumb as you
people seem to think. We just have to
train you folks to think more highly of us."

There was a sudden burst of noise off
in the distance; shots and voices inter-
mingled. "Some more John Does to enter
on the docket." Harry grinned at the
gasp of fright which had escaped her.

"This looks like a good enough time as
any," he said. "To start training you to
think more highly of us cops."

When he took her in his arms, she didn't
argue. . . .

---

YOUR NEXT ISSUE . . . .

Come on, all you G-man fans—and
watch your FBI matching wits with
diabolical criminals. Take a look at one
of the dramatic scenes in Wallace Um-
phrey's novelette—"G-Heat" . . . .

* * *

"Don't make it tough on yourself," I
said. "My name's Pete Hudson. I'm not
hard to pick up."

The girl who had climbed on the bar-
stool beside me blushed to the roots of her
honey-blonde hair. "I'm not trying to
pick you up!" she snapped.

"Okay," I told her.

Suddenly she smiled. "I'm not used to
this. I want to thank you for what you
did for my brother. He admitted the
fight last night was his fault. I'd like to
pay you for helping him."

"Why?"

Her hand darted inside her purse. She
said, "Here, maybe this will help—"

"I have some money," I said. "I'll buy
you a beer."

Her face cleared and she laughed soft-
ly and relaxed.

"I'm in town looking for work, I said.
"I've been waiting for my sidekick."

She looked interested.

"He's about six feet tall, red-headed—"

Her face went blank. She knew Joey
Sellers, all right.

She took out a cigarette, her hand shak-
ing.

"Have another beer."

"No thank you." She slid off the stool.

"I'd get out of town right away, Mr.
Hudson."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. Just trust me."

"I don't trust anybody," I said. "Do
you know a man named Lee Christmas?"

Her face got white. "It's dangerous for
you to stay here longer."

I grinned and she knew my answer.

"You won't go," she said.

"No."

She sighed. "I'll have to give you a
boost." She began slapping me with her
leather purse. "I'll teach you to paw a
lady!"

The bartender came over with a sawed-
off billiard cue. I just slid off the stool
when the billiard cue wallop ed my head.

The girl was yelling. A crowd was
gathering. The bartender's face wavered.
The last thing I remembered before black-
ing out was a lovely mop of honey-blonde
hair.

* * *

You'll find out more about the beautiful
booby trap in the action-packed "G-Heat"
in the big August issue . . . published
June 17th.
MAKE MINE MURDER!

Steve Archer, dilettante of death, crashed into the Federal case of the dipso doll—who dealt his GI buddy from the bottom of a stacked deck.

“Back the way you came,” the guard said.
Exciting Vengeance
Novelette

By JOHN D.
MacDONALD

CHAPTER ONE

Call Me Mister

TO GET around the rocky point
he waded out to where the surf,
smashing softly against his legs,
dashed spray up onto his bare shoulders.
The noon sun of the Mississippi Gulf
Coast bit hard into his deeply tanned skin.
Once around the point he moved back
up to dry sand, hot against the toughened
soles of his bare feet.

A hundred yards ahead he saw the long
concrete pier of the Chez Shirley, standing
tall above the reach of the storms, saw the
tiny basin beside it, the brass fittings of the
twin power launches glittering in the sun.

Except for the ceaseless wash of the
sea, the day had a dead hot silence. On
the pier he could see the glass enclosed
area where they danced when the weather
was bad, the open portion, green with
plants, for the mild evenings when it was
good to dance under the starlight over
the sea.

The pier was arched where it crossed
the beach and in the black shade it cast he
saw the man sitting on a kitchen chair,
tilted back against the heavy concrete
column.

He walked slowly ahead, seeing the
man stare at him, get up from the chair,
come walking with heavy spread-legged
stride toward him, sweat staining the blue
shirt.

Archer walked steadily toward the pier.
The man stopped directly in his path and
said, "Turn around and go back, friend."
Archer stopped, gave the guard a long cool look, weighing the man. The guard’s eyes, sunk in pads of flesh, were squinted against the sun glare. He carried, strangely, a riding crop, but as he swung it, Archer saw by the way it bent that it contained a lead weight, a leaf spring.

“Back the way you came, friend,” the guard said.

Archer made his voice apologetic. “I’m just going up the beach.”

“Not this way, junior. This belongs to Logun.”

“But these beaches have always been open.”

“This one isn’t any more. Not to ragged-pants bums.” As he spoke the man moved closer, prodded Archer’s bare hard diaphragm with the butt of the riding crop.

Archer had been carefully shifting his weight. He slapped down at the crop, tore it out of the man’s hand. The guard staggered in the soft sand, grunting with surprise. Then, grinning without mirth, he reached toward his hip pocket.

As Archer saw the deep surly glint of the blued steel he moved lightly to his left, slashed down with the weighted end of the crop, felt the lead strike bone.

The guard yelled then, a hoarse bellow. He dropped to his fat knees, clamping his right wrist with his left hand. The gun lay on the sand. He released his wrist, grabbed for the gun. Archer stepped on the man’s hand, raised his bone-hard knee flush into the man’s face. The guard went over, his face screwed up with pain, his hand clamped to his nose, a thread of scarlet running down his lip.

Archer leaned over with a lazy, effortless ease, picked up the automatic, glanced casually at it and tossed it off into the surf.

A tall man was walking down across the sand from the ledge on which the main building of the Chez Shirley was built. He was big, vaguely soft, with powerful shoulders, a tanned face, dark receding hair, hairline mustache. His long head was set squarely on the heavy shoulders, with but the slightest suggestion of a neck. The man wore a brilliant sports shirt, faultless sand-colored slacks and leather sandals.

The man did not speak until he was face to face with Archer. “What happened here?” he asked mildly.

“Who are you?” Archer asked, matching his tone.

“Logun. Gerry Logun. You are on my property.”

“So your man said. But I didn’t like the way he said it.”

The guard had gotten slowly to his feet. He held a white handkerchief to his nose. Over the handkerchief his eyes looked steadily at Archer, a hot glow in their depths.

Logun said, “Relli, I gave you a gun and a sap and told you to keep bums off this beach.”

Relli’s voice was muffled. “But he—”

“He jabbed me with his stick,” Archer said. “So I took it away from him. I threw it in the surf. Like this.” He threw the crop out. It spun in the air and landed forty feet out among the breakers.

Logun in the same amiable tone said, “You must be a very hard boy.”

“You put somebody here to tell me politely that I can’t walk down the beach and I won’t. I’m not unreasonable.”

“Your accent doesn’t match your pants,” Logun said.

“And your manner and your personnel match very nicely,” Archer said. “They both stink up the seashore.”

Logun stood without movement and without expression. Suddenly he grinned. “Okay, lad. Sorry this happened.” He turned to Relli and his voice snapped like a whip. “Go up and clean yourself up, Relli.”

“But, boss, I—”

Logun took one quick step and slapped Relli. It was like the movement of a big
cat. The slap made a wet sharp sound in the stillness between waves.

Relli turned without a word and walked toward the path.

Archer shrugged and turned away.

"One minute, lad. What do you do? What's your business?"

Archer turned around. "Do you have a good reason for asking?"

"I thought you might want to go to work for me. After I've checked on you, of course."

"After you've checked on me?"

"Damn it! Take that chip off your shoulder."

"It's off. I'm not working. What kind of a job?"

"Relli is a good man. He isn't handled often. I can use another one."

"Doing what?"

"Drifting around during business hours. Handling drunks and trouble-makers. This place of mine is for drinking, dancing and gambling. I don't advertise the last item on the sign out by the road. Business is getting better. I need another man."

"What would it pay?"

"Room, meals and fifty a week. Why aren't you working?"

"I've been in a hospital. For nearly five years."

"For what?"

"Take a good look," Archer said. He knew what Gerry Logun would see, the multiple network of hairline scars half hidden by the tan of his face, the scars running up into his crisp brown hair, the faintly distorted contour of the skull itself.

"War?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Stephen Archer."

"Report tomorrow. Around noon. One thing understood. No drinking and no gambling."

Archer gave the expressionless face a long look. "During my working hours I'll do like you say. After those hours my time is my own, Logun."

"Mr. Logun."

"If I come to work for you, I'll call you Mr. Logun."

He turned and walked away, under the arch of the pier, out along the beach, his stride long, loose and easy, the muscles of his shoulders and back long and fluid under the deeply tanned skin.

IT HAD been easier than he had expected. Of course, the timing had been carefully worked out. A day when Logun would be there. He smiled tightly. Logun had covered up his real reason for needing a new man. One of the Kister twins was in the hospital and would remain there for a good two weeks more. The knuckles of his right hand were still sore from the encounter with Ben Kister in the heavy darkness of the alley in Biloxi.

women prefer men who prefer

WILDROOT CREAM-OIL

It grooms hair - relieves dryness - removes loose dandruff!
A mile down the beach he turned to the right, went up through the brush to the highway. The countryside was exactly the way Johnny Jermene had described it so many times. Moist and hot, with narrow asphalt roads, lush vegetation, the sea booming softly against the curving beaches.

This time he walked on the shoulder of the road passing Chez Shirley, the white posts marking the entrance to the wide parking lot paved with crushed shells, the small bronze sign which at night would be discreet green neon, highlighting the polished metal of the parked cars.

The convertible, acid-green body, black top raised against the sunglare, roared up the road toward him and the tires moaned softly on the asphalt as the car swung over toward him. Too close. He jumped back.

Then he stepped angrily toward the car but the girl stopped him quickly by asking, "What do you want?"

She was a creamy blonde with a faint pattern of pale freckles across the bridge of her nose and level contemptuous green eyes.

"What is that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"I saw you in Amira and you were watching me. I saw you twice in Biloxi. You're a stranger here. I can tell by your accent. And now I find you here. What do you want of me?"

"It's against the local laws to look at a blonde?"

Her eyes were stormy. "No. But why are you hanging around?"

"You'll see more of me."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed, yes. Your husband just hired me an hour ago."

"You can be fired."

"Your husband looks like a man who'd have to have a reason, Mrs. Logun."

"Have I known you before? What's your name?"

"Steve Archer."

She tilted her head slightly, frowned. "That rings a faint bell somewhere. But I don't place your face."

"You wouldn't. They built this one with a scalpel."

"Gerry hired you as one of his trouble hounds? I thought so. For that work you need muscles, not sense." She let her glance travel across his broad tanned chest.

"Logun buys different people for different things in different ways," he said softly.

She paled then, and narrowed her eyes and leaned closer to him. "Did you ever hear of a man named John Jermane?"

she asked.

He kept his voice casual. "Should I have?"

Her eyes searched his face for long seconds. "Never mind," she said, a hint of viciousness in her voice. He looked steadily into her green eyes until at last she looked away, glanced back and was suddenly flirtatious, husky-soft voice saying, "We'll get better acquainted."

"If Gerry approves."

She slammed the convertible into gear, her mouth ugly. The rear tires screamed against the asphalt with the speed of the start.

He watched the car turn between the white posts. And she wasn't as Johnny had described her. He had described another person, a softer, sweeter, more honest person. This one, this Shirley Logun, had fire and depth, but he guessed that at the core of her there was the hardness of gray, lava rock.

In another twenty minutes he came to his car. He put on his shirt, shoes, socks, got behind the wheel and drove slowly to Biloxi, eleven miles away from the Chez Shirley.

He had a room in a boarding house a block inland from the plush hotels along the beachfront. Walking down the hall
by the entrance to the shabby livingroom, he reached the foot of the stairs when a man's voice said, "Mr. Archer?"

He turned, saw a slight gray man in wrinkled rayon suit, a faintly soiled panama hat in his hand.

"If I could speak to you for a moment—"

"Start speaking then."

"In your room."

Archer shrugged. "Come on up."

The room contained a sagging bed, a new maple bureau, frayed curtains that hung lifeless at the open window. Steve Archer gave the man a cigarette, lit his own and the stranger's and lay back on the bed, long and relaxed and yet vigilant.

The man said, "My name is Taen. I am beginning to understand what you may be trying to do."

"About what?"

"About Logun and the Chez Shirley. I know your reasons and I know that you have no real personal interest."

"I don't get it, Taen."

"It is a very noble venture, young man. But the world isn't like that. Certain organized groups will accomplish what you aim to accomplish, and do it with a good deal more efficiency."

"Just who are you?"

Mr. Taen handed Archer a wallet. Archer flipped it open, glanced at it, handed it back. "What do you want to do? Slap Logun's wrist for income tax evasion?"

"And other things. We've been concerned about him for a long time. We were working on that case eleven years ago when he ran a club in Jersey. He stepped on some of the wrong toes up there and had to leave. He brought the Kister twins and Relli with him when he came down here and bought into this place with the money he took out of his Jersey City safety deposit boxes."

"You're still talking over my head, Taen."

"I doubt that," Taen said quietly.

Archer snapped his cigarette out the open window. "Pop, all I know is that today a man named Logun offered me a job as a muscleman in a nightclub he runs west of here. And I'm taking the job."

"Jermane had a bad deal, Archer. Lots of people hold a bad hand."

Archer didn't move but his lips tightened. Taen continued, "And, since I happen to know the status of your bank account, Archer, and know that you could go for the rest of your life without working, I can only assume that you are going into this because of childish boredom. I don't want my plans upset. And so I'm warning you off."

Archer faked a yawn. "Mrs. Logun said something today about a guy named Jermane. Never heard of him."

"John Jermane? Ward eight, bed four? With a Stephen Archer in bed five?"

"Oh, you mean that Jermane! I guess he did come from around here at that."

"Would you consider working with us?"

Archer glanced at his watch. "I have a shower to take, Taen. And then I have to do something about packing. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

Taen went to the door. He turned with his hand on the knob and said, "If you kill Logun it won't be hard to show motive."

Archer made a sad clucking sound. "Stay away from those movies, pop. They're getting you."

When Taen had silently closed the door behind him, Archer came off the bed in one quick motion. He paced back and forth between the window and the door, a fresh cigarette between his lips. Things were working out exactly as he had expected. Shirley was vaguely suspicious of him. And Taen had gone right to the heart of the matter.

No, no part of this was due to boredom. It was due to other things. The sound of a man's voice in the dim night of the

CHAPTER TWO

Sucker-Punched

THE pride and satisfaction was evident in Logun’s voice as he showed Steve Archer through the Chez Shirley after Steve’s bag had been put in one of the small rooms in the east wing of the main building. “On the ground floor here, Archer, we have the main bar on the left and the game room on the right. That is the foyer and check room back there.

“Those glass doors you see ahead lead out onto the pier. The glassed-in portion is used in bad weather. There’s a small bar there. Come on along and we’ll walk out through and I’ll show you the open pier where we have the floor show on good nights. Revolving band platform.”

Beyond the glass doors Logun looked over toward the small bar and stopped. Archer saw the muscles at the corner of his jaw tighten. Shirley Logun, dressed in a pale yellow two-piece bathing suit, sat on the high bar stool in the corner, a glass half raised to her lips.

Logun went over with that same cat-like speed Archer had noticed before. The glass smashed against the wall.

In a soft tone he said, “I’ve told you before, darling. Liquor spoils your voice. You have to sing for the people tonight. They won’t like it to have to listen to a sloppy drunk, you know.”

Her eyes were green flame, her mouth loose, her cheeks flushed. In a faintly slurred voice she said, “Not in front of the help, Gerry.”

Logun turned to Archer. “One of your additional duties, Archer, will be to take any liquor away from Shirley when you see her drinking.”

“She’s your wife. That’s your job.”

Logun regarded him steadily. “You may be right, Archer. You may be right.” He turned back and smiled at Shirley. “For a man who likes to live nicely, a drunken wife is a sad, sad thing. Go to your room.”

“No.”

“I don’t want to mark you, my dear. The people have to watch you.”

Archer instinctively turned away as he saw Logun move in close to her. He heard the sound of the blow, heard Shirley gasping and coughing. The stool fell over and she leaned heavily against the edge of the bar.

“Go to your room,” Logun said sweetly.

Shirley walked by Archer with dragging steps, her face averted. She pushed through the glass doors. Archer followed her with his eyes.

“Come along, Archer,” Logun said briskly. “Forgive the way my home life intruded just then. She’s a good girl, but not quite bright. And with a strong taste for liquor.”

“People usually have a reason,” Archer suggested.

Logun gave him a quick, keen look. “Indeed?” he said politely. “Ah, here comes MacLayt. Mac, meet Archer. MacLayt is my accountant and general business manager. Local boy who made good. Right, Mac?”

MacLayt was a rawboned man in his forties with hollow cheeks, very dense black eyebrows, a dirty shirt and poorly fitted false teeth. He had discolored puffs under his eyes and walked with the careful mannerisms of a man accustomed to poor health.

“Hello, Archer,” he said in a soft drawl.

“Mac, Archer is on the books at fifty a week.”

“More overhead,” MacLayt said moodily.

They found Bob Kister out at the end of the pier. Like his twin brother, Kister
was a husky young man with crisp golden hair, a puffy red mouth, a thin voice, and tiny gray eyes.

"Relli told me about you."

Archer didn’t answer him. Logun said, "Bob and Ben Kister are just like little children. They’ll have to know if they can lick you, Archer."

"Do they try at the same time?"

"Ben is—away for a while."

"We’ll settle that some time," Archer said gently. He put his hand out. Bob Kister met the handclasp eagerly. His face slackened as he put his strength into the grip.

"Through?" Archer asked politely.

In response Bob Kister suddenly yanked hard without relaxing his grip, pulling Archer in toward the straight left. The sun and sea spun dizzyly around and the pain of the blow was like a torch held against Archer’s lips. Staggering back, his right hand released, he dimly sensed Kister coming in, fast.

He covered up to give his head a chance to clear, took a thumping blow over the ear, another near the nape of his neck.

His vision cleared and, from his doubled up position, he saw Kister’s feet. He swooped his long arms down, yanked up hard on Kister’s feet, fell onto the man as he tumbled, smothering the blows by his closeness. He grabbed Kister’s throat, lifted him a few inches, smashed his fist in Kister’s face.

Kister was as relaxed as a rag doll. Supporting him with an arm around his neck, Archer jolted two short, right hooks against Kister’s glazed, half-open eyes.

Logun pulled him away. "Hey, he has to work tonight!"

"I want him to look as though he took a beating."

Archer walked over and looked down at the sea.

He went back, and with a long heave, grunting with effort, he threw Kister off the end of the pier.

Kister smacked flat against the water, went under, came up sputtering and coughing.

Logun said quietly, "You don’t play, do you?"

"I don’t like to be sucker-punched."

"Kister will try to get even."

"I don’t think so, Logun. He hasn’t got the guts to kill me and he knows that if he doesn’t there’s a good chance that I’ll kill him."

Gerry Logun’s eyes widened. "Would you?"

"I think so. Tell him to try me again and then you’ll both know."

"Did you have a brain injury?"

"Does that matter?"

Logun gave him a long look. He said softly, "I’ve been looking for someone like you for a long time, mister. I play with no holds barred, too."

"Do you?" Archer said without inter-
est. "Is there any more to this place?"

"Our association might become very profitable to you, Archer."

Archer gently touched his swollen lip. "These handmade lips cut easy. First aid set around?"

"Mac's office. Ask his girl. The little door to the left of the inside bar."

As Archer reached the beach end of the pier he saw Kister walking across the beach, his clothes clinging to him.

"Kister!" Archer said loudly.

The man stopped and peered up, blue eyes squinted against the sun. His face was full of hate.

"You try anything else, Kister, and the next time I'll put you out for ten minutes and throw you off the end of the pier at high tide. That's a promise." His voice was low and steady.

Without waiting for the man to answer, Archer walked on into the main bar and pulled open the door Logun had mentioned.

MACLAYT'S office was bright and sunny, and outfitted as a business office. The filing cases and executive desk looked odd after the shoddy day-time splendor of the rest of the night club. MacLayt was at his desk. A slim, dark girl moved quickly away from MacLayt's side, her pale cheeks covered with an angry flush.

"Didn't you ever learn to knock?" she demanded.

"Sorry I spoiled your fun. Logun sent me for the first aid kit."

"This is a new one, June," MacLayt said. He didn't seem particularly annoyed. He watched June as she walked over to her own desk, yanked open the bottom drawer.

"They seem to get stronger and dumber," she said. She handed him the kit in its white enameled box. Her brow and nose were finely modeled, her mouth too wide for beauty. Her dark dress, matching her eyes, accentuated the small waist. "Through staring?" she asked.

"Now, Junie," MacLayt admonished softly.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Archer." He went to the door. "I'm taking this up to my room for a few minutes. You can get back to your games. I'll knock next time." The contempt in his tone was clear. He was out the door before she could retort.

When he brought the kit back MacLayt was out of the office. June's typewriter clacked busily. He did not stop typing or look up when he said his thanks.

Logun was not around. Archer went back up to his room, stretched out on his back on the bed, the door half open. Logun had said that the rest of the kitchen help and the night bartenders arrived to take over around 6. Gambling wouldn't begin until 10.

Reli would be on the door, Kister in the game room and he was to keep on the move through the place, keeping an eye out for trouble. He was to watch the bartenders. Whenever he saw a bartender with a towel over his shoulder, he was to stay around as the bartender was expecting one of the customers to become annoying.

The walls of the small room were flat white, too much like the ward, too much like the rooms where, after the last brain operation, he had to laboriously learn to talk all over again. He lay there and it was easy to imagine Johnny Jermale's voice in the silence of the night.

"Yeah, Steve. I planned it and built it. For Shirley. It took every dime I had plus everything I could borrow. I wish you could have seen the place when we opened. Built with most of it on a pier out over the water. I thought I could get it over the hump all by myself. But I had to take in a partner with some dough to meet the notes. An experienced guy. He gave free drinks to the lushes from Biloxi,
the ones with the big cars. Those big cars in the lot drew in the other customers. We started to get business all the way from New Orleans, and when you can drag 'em away from there, you're really operating."

At last he went to sleep but even in sleep he retained the wariness of an animal away from its natural environment. He drifted just below the edge of sleep, with the hidden springs of his body coiled tightly.

* * *

The long evening which stretched out until 3:00 in the morning was a jumble of conflicting impressions. Shirley in a strapless dress which made the enamel on a refrigerator look like a loose drape, standing on the darkened pier, swaying and singing in the light of the baby spot; the sea wind in her hair, the stars remote above, the tiny lights near the tables, the people silent—caught by the husky sorrow in her voice, caught up in their own dreams and disappointments.

Logun in white mess jacket, elbows hooked over the edge of the bar, staring out across the tables to where Shirley swayed and sang, hands clasped in front of her. The filled stools at the bar. The crunch of tires on the crushed shells as the cars arrived.

He walked through the people, tall and slow and easy-moving, and he saw the richness of it and the profit of it, the shallow glasses and the ice-cold croupiers and the nervous laughter, all under the warm night of the Gulf Coast.

After the last of them was gone, after the last car had pulled out, Logun called him over to the bar. "You're off, now, Archer. Drink?"

"Thanks. Brandy."

The bartender filled the glass. "You can take off now, Bill," Logun said. "I'll lock the backbar."

The tables had been stacked and a sleepy janitor slowly mopped the dance floor.

"How do you like it?" Logun asked.

Archer shrugged. "It looks profitable."

"It is. Relli told me about you and the little redhead. You don't have to get that fatherly about the trade, Archer."

"Her boyfriend got drunk and passed out. That guy who picked her up could have been her father. I scared him off her."

"He might not come back, Archer. A month ago he dropped three thousand on the tables in one hour. We're not running a charitable institution."

Archer spun his glass on the bar, tilted it and drained it. "If you want me to work here, you'll give me a free hand. And you're not as smart as I thought you were. Suppose the redhead's people have influence. They could cost you more than three thousand."

Logun laughed. "Boy, I butter the local politicos. It's a hell of a lot less than it used to cost me in Jersey, but it is considerably more than they ever saw before. Nobody can cause me any trouble."

"And if the boyfriend came gunning for you?"

"I have you and Relli and the Kister twins, and some boys you haven't met yet."

They walked out to the end of the pier. The tide was in. The low moon slanted against Logun's face. Archer tightened up and his breathing was faster. So easy. There were good ways. One way would be to break Logun's arms and throw him into the sea. That would be a slow way. But somehow it wasn't good enough.

The man would die, yes, but it wasn't good enough. Too quick. He would die while he was on top of the heap. He would die in the midst of success. It would be better if he were broken first. Archer faked a yawn. "With your permission, I'll turn in."
"'Night, Steve. Your time is your own until six tomorrow night."

As he pushed through the glass doors Archer glanced back. Logun still stood alone at the end of the pier. Archer heard it then, the distant high whine of powerful marine engines. He looked out to sea.

Whatever it was, was coming closer with great speed, without running lights. He saw the tiny flashlight in Logun's hand, beamed out to sea. The motors were throttled down to a heavy, pulsing beat. The moon outlined the hull of the fast ocean-going speedboat. As it nosed toward the tiny protected basin, Archer turned and went up to his room.

In the morning he carried a breakfast tray out onto the open pier.

Shirley sat at a table for two in the shade. There was an aging puffyiness about her face, a fullness under her chin, a sagging of her body. She glanced up at him without enmity, waved toward the vacant chair opposite her.

He sat down, curious about her. She said, "Thanks, Archer, for refusing to be a watchdog over me."

"I didn't think you needed a watchdog."

He looked at her eyes and saw that she had had a few drinks.

"Archer, there are many things you don't understand. You don't understand how the angles can go sour, and how people don't know when they're well off."

"Aren't you well off?"

"I'm not talking about Logun, stupid. Does he look as though he thought of me as a princess? What a laugh that is!"

"Then where does Logun fit in?"

"Oh, I used to know him. I stayed in touch. I wrote him about the chance for him here and he was in trouble up north so he came down." Her voice had a blank hopelessness in it. "You see, Archer, I asked for it."

"Yes, you did," he said softly.

She gave him a penetrating look.

"Something about you, Archer. You act like a man with a pat hand. Aces full. I've felt that about you for a long time."

"A long time?"

"Living this way, brother, a week is a long time." She stood up, pressed down firmly on his shoulder as he tried to rise. She looked down and her eyes were surprisingly soft. "You're not as hard as you want to make out, Archer."

"No?"

"In the next few days I'll have proof."

"Proof?"

"Yes. Something's coming up that I don't think you can stomach. And I don't think I can either. See you around."

She walked away. Archer took his time over his coffee. Before he had finished three new men came out onto the terrace, stared at him curiously as they walked by. They had the look of sailors, hard-eyed defiance, a wariness, a light-stepping caution.

Archer guessed that they had come in on the speedboat the night before. And, watching their manner, he guessed that the trips were not exactly for pleasure. It would not be a long run to Mexico. He remembered reading of the new tariffs, of the enormous profit in items not generally smuggled. Locks, small electric motors, precision hand tools.

He got into his car and drove the mile and a half into Amira. The village square was torpid in the morning sun, filled with a dead lethargy. The second floor of the
court house was apparently let out to lawyers and accountants. Their names appeared in peeling gilt on the dusty windows.

One window bore the name MacLayt. Even as he wondered if it was the same MacLayt, he saw the girl named June come out of the courthouse. She carried a brown manila envelope. She did not notice him until she was ten feet from his car.

"Want a ride back?" he asked.

She stopped and, when she recognized him, scowled and said, "Not particularly. Why?"

"Get in. I'm going right back. Have to buy some blades."

The sun was hot. She stood uncertainly for a moment. "I won't bite," he said.

She got in. He walked to the drugstore, hurried back to the car, half expecting her to be gone. But she still sat there, a girl with the rare ability to retain a crisp look even in the most deadening heat.

"MacLayt has two offices?" he asked.

"And two secretaries. He sent me down to get some documents."

"I wasn't pleasant to you yesterday."

"You had reason, I guess," she said without interest.

"You just don't seem to be—the type." She turned a smile on him. "It's a good job, Archer. I want to keep it."

"How about a swim when we get back? Or is it against the rules?"

She shrugged. "Too busy. Maybe at five I can."

As he drove into the driveway he glanced up and saw Logun at the apartment window. Logun beckoned to him. The girl went off to MacLayt's office. Archer went up the stairs. Logun met him at the head of the stairs. There was no warmth in his eyes. "Come in here, Archer."

Logun shut the door behind them. The room was clean, well furnished. "What's with you and the Daley girl?"

"Who?"

"Don't play dumb. The girl you were with when you drove in."

"I didn't know her name. I met her in MacLayt's office and again in the village. I went in for razor blades and met her there."

"Show me the blades."

Archer reached slowly into his pocket, took out the blades, displayed them on the palm of his brown hand. "What goes on?"

Logun finally grinned and clapped Archer on the shoulder. "Forget it, boy. Nothing at all."

"How long do you have to be one of the family here, before you can take a boat ride?"

"It's a long trip. You wouldn't like it." Logun did not betray himself by the slightest change of expression. It was one of his characteristics.

"Let me be the judge."

"Sit down a minute. I want to check over an idea I just had."

Archer sat down, lit a cigarette. Logun paced back and forth, his hands locked behind him. He paused in front of Archer. "Can I trust you?"

Archer grinned. "You don't trust anybody. Don't soap me."

"Will you do something without asking questions?"

"You wouldn't have to answer the questions, would you?"

"Try this for size. I want you to make a large rough pass at June Daley. And I want it made in front of witnesses. Customers."

"I'm assuming there's a reason for doing that."

"There is."

"It will humiliate me, Logun. About a hundred dollars worth."

"Cheap enough."

"When do I do this little thing?"

"I think tonight would be a good time, Archer."
CHAPTER THREE

Clay Pigeon

LOGUN told him the approximate time that June would be coming out of MacLayt’s office. The early evening crowd was light, but the bar was well tenanted. When she came out of the door, Archer pushed himself away from the bar, caught up with her from behind. “Hello, baby,” he said, spinning her around by the shoulders, taking her into his long arms.

He kissed her, as she fought him, struggling, kicking, her angry shouts smothered by his lips. When he turned her loose, she swung her pocketbook at him. It grazed his cheek. She spun and walked out, indignation clear in every line of her body. Logun moved over and said loudly, “Why don’t you leave that girl alone, Archer?” He glared and hurried off after June. Archer smiled at the indignant faces along the bar, sauntered out onto the pier.

Alone in the dusk he tried to guess what it was all about. Logun had acted as though it were a matter of importance. Logun had been setting up witnesses. For what? Adding the little incident to what Shirley had said at breakfast, it seemed that someone was being set up as a clay pigeon. He wondered if he had slipped somewhere along the line, if Logun had found out his true motive.

It made him restless and nervous.

Dusk had been the time of day when Johnny Jermane had liked to talk of things past. Of dreams that were over.

He remembered the sound of Johnny’s voice. “Yeah, Steve, I was the wide-eyed innocent. He had the dough and the experience and when Shirley kept needling me, I took him in as an equal partner. He had the bucks all right. Green stacks of it. He was getting the joint on its feet when I was drafted. All very lovey dovey. Come back soon, Johnny.

“I was alerted for overseas duty when I got the letter from the lawyer. I hadn’t checked the partnership agreement too carefully. There was a clause in it which said that if I was absent from the business for over three months he could buy me out at half the inventory valuation. That was tough. It upset me.

“But then, by the time I got out of the service, I’d have a nice hunk of dough so I could start all over again. He paid the money over to the joint account I had with Shirley. Two months after I got overseas I got the note from Shirley asking for a divorce. Then I got the bank statement. She’d cleaned me.

“I got hit two days later. And after I was here I got an anonymous letter. I think it was somebody who used to work at the place. He wrote that Shirley was drinking and she had bragged how marriage to Logun was her price for letting him in on the deal, talking me into it, cleaning out the bank account and turning it over to him.”

Johnny had told the story over and over again.

Afterwards the doctor had said, “There was no really good medical reason why Jermane died of the after effects of his wounds. But there was a good psychological reason. Something or somebody took the heart out of him. Who ever did that to Jermame, killed him just as definitely as if they’d walked in here at night and cut his throat.”

The week before he had died, Johnny had said, “Steve, if I don’t make it out of here, go take a look, will you? Find out why they rigged it on me the way they did. Find out if Shirley has a heart.”

When you spend a few years of pain in a bed beside a man who talks of his life to cover his own pain and sickness, you learn a good deal about him.

And Steve Archer had vowed that Logun and Shirley would pay.

Night settled over the sea. The din of voices in the Chez Shirley was increas-
ing. Shirley came out and stood beside him. "Deep thoughts, Archer?"
"Deep as the ocean, Mrs. Logun."
"You and I have a date tomorrow."
"How nice for me!"
"Don't waste your sarcasm. I'm not bright enough to appreciate it, Archer. Besides, boss' orders. We're going swimming."
"Today I went swimming with Miss Daley."
"That I saw. Very cute, too. But I heard that you spoiled the good impression later."
"What were you trying to tell me this morning about something I won't be able to stomach?"
"Forget it," she said. "I was wrong. You won't have to. I will. And I can do it. It won't be as hard as I thought."
At 3:00 in the morning as he went up to his room, he heard the sound of a man groaning in Logun's apartment. He paused by the door. The groans continued. He knocked.
"Who is it? Oh, come in, Archer," Logun said.
Shirley sat on the couch, her face slack, her eyes dulled by liquor. Logun sat on the arm of the couch, smiling down with interest on MacLayt. Kister, his eyes still puffed and purpled, squatted on his heels next to MacLayt. MacLayt groaned constantly. His face was the shade of putty.
"A little more," Logan directed.
Kister pushed MacLayt back into the couch, cracked his fist along MacLayt's face.
MacLayt screamed thinly, without strength.
Logun said, "Mr. MacLayt has been rather stupid of late. We're showing him that stupidity can be a painful affair."
Kister moved over to one side, still smiling.
"Can you hear me?" Logun said loudly to MacLayt. The man nodded.
"Another bull like this last one and you're going on a boat trip. Do you know what I mean?"
Again MacLayt nodded. Kister yanked the man to his feet, pushed him toward the door. Archer moved aside as MacLayt stumbled out.
"Fortunately," Logun said smoothly, "his mistakes can be rectified. You'd better go to bed, Archer. You have a date with Shirley at nine."

* * *

Shirley was waiting at the end of the pier. Her back was turned. She wore a white bathing cap. Archer gasped as she turned. Her suit was such a perfect replica of the one June had worn that he had thought it was June.
She had a tense look on her face and her lips were compressed. Logun stood forty feet away.
"Good morning, Archer," Shirley said.
"Gerry has his movie camera with him. He's a great one for trick shots. He wants us to clown a shot for him."
She spoke rapidly and tonelessly.
"Sure," Archer said. "How funny can we get?"
Logun backed up. Archer turned and said, loudly because of the distance, "You won't get any detail from way back there, friend."
Logun called, "Do like Shirley says."

Shirley turned. "Here's the script. I'm standing looking out to sea. You come up behind me and waver as though you were drunk. Stagger around a little, but sneak up on me. You got it?"
"So far."
"I'll turn and see you and then you throw a punch at me. Just barely miss me. Won't that be funny?"
"Like a crutch," he said. Her voice bothered him. It was thin, somehow lifeless. As though she was hurrying through something while her courage held up.
Archer frowned. He couldn't figure out what bothered him about the setup. Both Logun and Shirley seemed tense. He shrugged. Okay, if they liked slapstick.

He did as he was told. When Shirley whirled, he was startled at the whiteness of her face. He clumsily threw the punch, just missing her chin. She threw her head back, crumpled and fell loosely from the end of the pier into the ocean. Archer gasped, peered down, saw Shirley, with a strong crawl, heading toward the shore.

He turned and looked at Logun. "Very funny," Gerry Logun said. He turned and began to walk back toward the high glass doors.

Suddenly the unrelated fragments clicked into a clear pattern in his mind. The tide was running out. The door swung shut behind Logun. Archer stood, breathing heavily, trying to plan.

Kister came out the door where Logun had disappeared. The muzzle of the revolver was aimed steadily at Steve Archer's middle. Kister said in his high voice, "Stay still for daddy. Stay still until the cops come. The boss is phoning."

That confirmed it. Nicely. From the corner of his eye he saw Shirley walking up the path from the ocean toward the side door of the main building. She looked back, a look heavy with fright. In the basin one of the powerful motors grunted into life.

There was no answering the blunt question of the revolver aimed at him. In a toneless voice Archer went carefully and thoroughly into the antecedents, the habits, the probable future history of the Kister twins. He watched the sudden flush and then the pallor. He saw the indecision, the fear of actually pulling the trigger, and still he talked on.

Kister's control finally cracked. He moved in and slashed at Archer's face with the revolver.

Archer moved in so quickly that the arm holding the gun wrapped around the back of his neck. In close he made sudden, violent movements, utilizing the twisting strength of his whole body. A spasmed finger yanked the trigger, the slug going harmlessly out to sea. Kister's eyes rolled up out of sight and he sank down onto the concrete floor without a sound.

Archer snatched up the gun, jumped up onto the railing, high over the power boat moving cautiously down the narrow channel parallel to the dock. Relli stood on deck with one of the sailors.

It had to match. It had to be part of it. He poised, judged the distance, and, just as Relli gave a startled upward glance, he dropped. His bare feet hit with stinging force against the mahogany deck planks and he rolled onto his back. The revolver skidded out of his hand and spun over the side. Relli dropped and, as he dropped, Archer got his legs up. He planted his bare feet against Relli's chest and shoved violently upward. Relli gave a shrill cry of alarm, teetered wildly with his heels against the foot high rail and went over the side.

The sailor gave a wild yell and seconds later the motors stopped. But already there was a spreading stain in the sea. A wave washed the launch sideways and it jarred against the sand, tilted at an angle.

"The screws caught him," the sailor said flatly.

Archer darted by him and went down into the cabin. She was on the padded bench on her back, her ankles and wrists tied with soft strips of material. As he reached for her ankles, the sailor jumped onto his back. The impact carried Archer over, his head striking the bulkhead with sickening force. The waves slapped against the hull and someone was shouting in the distance.

Archer, through red waves of pain, rolled over to one side, fighting at the hands which clutched his throat. Suddenly the other man yelled hoarsely and the hands were no longer around his throat.
Archer struggled up. He braced his feet and, as the sailor came up off the floor, he smashed him full in the mouth, feeling the bitter jar of the blow, feeling a bone in his hand give.

The man dropped onto his back and was still. As Archer, ignoring the pain in his right hand, fumbled to untie the soft knots of fabric, the girl giggled hysterically and said, "I bit him."

Above the sound of the sea, above the slap of waves against the hull, he heard the rising, growing wail of a siren.

The other crew member stood near the cabin hatch and said sullenly, "I don't know a damn thing about any of this."

Archer looked up as he sensed movement above him. Logun, his face distorted with rage, his mouth ugly and twisted, aimed carefully down at them. Archer spun and carried the girl with him over the far side of the small craft into the sea.

The sound of the shot was flat and brittle above the deeper roar of the waves. He could no longer hear the siren sound. "Stay here," he yelled into the girl's ear. He took a deep breath, went down as far as he could and struck out for the shelter of the pier itself. When he came up he was under the arches of the pier. He swam rapidly to the far side and then in to the beach, utilizing the breakers to push him along. His hand throbbed and his wind was nearly gone. He staggered as he came out onto the white sand.

As he did so, Logun dropped from the pier onto the sand at the other side of the arch, appearing with startling suddenness, his back to Archer. He started to walk over toward the basin, toward the remaining launch, and Archer guessed his plan.

His feet made little sound on the sand.

He caught Logun in five running strides, hitting him across the backs of his thighs, spilling him onto the sand. Logun twisted under him, trying to bring the gun to bear. Archer got the wrist, twisted until the gun dropped, drove his left fist down at Logun's face. But his fist hit into the sand and Logun spun out.

Logun was frighteningly quick. He caught Archer's left wrist, threw him heavily. Archer blocked the heavy kick with his shoulder, snatched at the foot and missed. He came up with a handful of sand, flung it full into Logun's face and, as the man cursed and backed away, rubbing at his eyes, Archer hit him with an overhand right that dropped him to his knees. But the pain of the blow against the broken bone made the sky reel darkly.

He fought back the pain and said, "This is for Johnny Jermane." He smashed Logun in the mouth with a hard fist.

"That will be enough!" a hard voice said. "Joe, bring 'em both up here."

The three men from the Amira force stood in a sullen half-circle. Logun sat on a chair with the back of the chair.

---

**AT LAST! A DRESSING AMERICA'S BEEN WAITING FOR**

**KREML KREME Dressing**

**MADE ESPECIALLY FOR STUBBORN HAIR**

**IMPORTANT:** KREML KREME never leaves any white flakes or sticky residue on hair as so many creamy dressings do.

You can't beat this sensational new KREML KREME to control hair that won't stay put. Marvelous after shampooing — a real test. Also has added advantage of relieving dryness of both hair and scalp — removes itchy dandruff flakes.

---

**49c** bottle lasts for week+.
against the bar. He held a pale blue handkerchief to his mouth. His eyes were venomous.

Mr. Taen in his wrinkled rayon suit, his soiled panama hat in his hand, said, “I realize that Mr. Logun has done you local gentlemen certain favors. However, I wish you to ignore his pointed hints for you people to arrest him on local charges. My young men are on the way here and we will put him under federal arrest.

“You have heard Mr. Archer’s statement. Mr. Archer did a very fine job of analyzing the events here. He guessed rightly that Miss Daley was working for me and that Mr. MacLayt over there very foolishly allowed Miss Daley to obtain certain confidential data which we need for a conviction of Mr. Logun.

“The evidence of conspiracy to murder Miss Daley will appear on that roll of movie film in the camera on the table. It will show a closeup of Miss Daley walking toward the end of the pier. Then it will show a supposedly drunken Mr. Archer knocking what appears to be Miss Daley off the end of the pier.

“You will note, gentlemen, that the bathing costumes now worn by both Mrs. Logun and Miss Daley are identical in every respect. I rather guess we will find the film just sufficiently out of focus to further the illusion.”

Steve Archer said, “I came here to pay back some favors those two did to a friend. A friend named Jermane.”

He saw Shirley’s eyes widen.

Taen said quickly, “But I persuaded Mr. Archer that he should give up the idea of personal vengeance and work for me on an unofficial basis. Isn’t that right, Mr. Archer?”

Steve glanced at the sour expressions on the faces of the three men from Amira. He licked his lips and said, “Yes sir.”

He looked at Logun. “Why frame me?” he asked. “What reason did you have?”

The voice was thick. “You were too smart and too hard. I took this place away from Jermane. I didn’t want you taking it away from me.”

Shirley said softly, “Archer, like I told you, a girl never knows when she’s well off, does she?”

She spun between the two men, yanked open the glass doors and ran down the pier beyond the band platform.

“She can’t get away,” Taen said.

“She’ll get away,” Archer said heavily.

They had to stand and watch her. The tide was out too far for either boat to be launched. She swam powerfully. They stood and watched the glitter of the white cap against the blue of the sea. They watched it until it was gone.

“What are you going to do?” June Daley asked.

Steve Archer lazily stirred his coffee. He said, “I’m a balloon without air. A doll without the sawdust. I thought of killing Logun for so long that it was the only aim and purpose I had.

“This sort of a death is a harder one for him to bear. His gray suit won’t be a good fit and he won’t like marching in line and eating when the big bell rings.”

“Are you sorry you didn’t kill him?”

“No. I was wrong. I know it now.”

They were silent for a long time. It was a comfortable silence.

At last she said, “You could buy the Chez Shirley cheap. You have the money. You ought to be busy until you find out what you really want to do. Set up some sort of a foundation. A lot of kids could live there. Make it a memorial to that friend of yours.”

He slowly tasted the idea and found it good. He said to her, “Why couldn’t Johnny have tied up with a girl like you instead of . . .”

She gave him a long look, so direct and level as to be almost insolent. “Why couldn’t you?” she asked.

THE END
THE .38 was black and cold. Quill Smith's hard fingers clenched the plastic handle. He clicked the trigger twice at the young guy in the full-length mirror. It felt good. Comfortable even. The balance was right and the trigger was fast.

From his coat pocket Quill Smith took a copper-shirted slug. He inspected it carefully, tapped off a bit of lint and in-

The agent-in-charge figured that G-man Quill Smith was too young for the dangerous job—until the flint-hearted babe found that chivalry was dead.
serted it into one of the revolver’s chambers. Five more times he did this. He worked quickly but expertly, trying to ignore the below-zero sensation in his belly, the keen tingling of his nerves.

A glance at his watch told him it was still only 11:30. An hour and a half to go. Dammit! Waiting around in this hotel room was worse than doing the job.

He eased the gun into its shoulder clip. Then he let his hands fall to his sides and studied the mirror image again. The new gray worsted suit was okay—just a slight swelling below the left shoulder. They wouldn’t be able to spot him. He winked at the character in the mirror. Button-nose, lively blue eyes and healthy pink cheeks—hell, he didn’t look twenty-nine. He looked more like nineteen. “That’s why we’re picking you for the job, Quill,” the boss had said. “You can stand around looking like an office boy—”

Abruptly, Quill’s hand shot inside his coat. He yanked out the .38 and aimed it at the ivory-painted door. And then he grinned. A boyish grin, but it had a certain case-hardened toughness. Well, anyway, the shoulder clip wasn’t too tight.

He was still pointing the revolver at the door when a key turned in the lock. The door pushed open—and a girl was standing there. Her brown eyes went huge with fright and her red lips quivered.

“Oh, my gosh!” she shrieked, staring at the gun. She dropped the bucket she was holding. A geyser of soapy water splashed up over her faded pink uniform and into her long black hair.

She gasped and sputtered. Quill took one of the fresh towels off her shoulder and wiped the suds off her smooth cheek.

“Do you always take a shower with your clothes on?” he grinned, raising his dark eyebrows.

The girl rubbed her soft mouth on her sleeve. Even with her lipstick smeared, she was still pretty. “The gun!” she blurted finally. “You scared me!” She looked ready to bolt down the long hall. “It’s okay,” Quill assured her. “Come on in—I only shoot homely girls.”

She blushed, stuck her keys in her pocket and picked up the bucket. “I have to scrub the bathroom,” she said. She marched across the rug and Quill could see she was watching him from the edge of her eye.

Water splotted her nylons, but her legs were still the trimmest Quill had seen in Derrick City. She vanished into the bathroom and he heard her filling the bucket. He’d have to see what he could arrange with her for this evening.

Quill walked over to the room’s single window. Over on the hill, in the heart of the city, was the untidy forest of oil wells. Black fingers poking up against the skyline. They spelled wealth. Lots of it—green bills, silver—resting in the vaults of the Derrick City National Bank. And how long would they stay there?—that was the gold-plated question. How long after 1 o’cl—

There was a clunk like a piece of lead smashing wood and suddenly Quill Smith was falling; falling into a sticky, black lake. He was sinking into oil and overhead bells rang and rang. Their shrieking reverberated crashingly through all the dark hallways of his mind and the pain was fierce and sickening. . . .

It was some time before Quill realized that the bells were the phone ringing. He was sprawled on the rug and it tasted of old ashes and mud. He dragged in his tongue and stumbled to his feet. Pottery crackled underfoot as he wobbled across the unsteady floor. That damn girl! She’d brained him with a vase.

Fingers shaking, he held the receiver to his ear. A voice snapped at him. “Quill! A carload of trouble!” It was Ralston’s voice. “Trample just held up the bank! Erased the head cashier and got away with armfuls of dough! Brother, will you get chewed out!”
Ten minutes later, Special Agent Quill Smith knelt on the hard, smooth floor behind the brass cages in the Derrick City National Bank. His head still hurt, but he wasn’t thinking about that now. He studied the face of the dead cashier.

The cashier’s green bow-tie was still neatly in place beneath his second chin. From a distance, the bullet holes looked like two red camellias lying on the chest of his starched white shirt. The eyes stared up sightlessly at the huge brass and crystal chandelier.

Hard heels came cracking along the floor. They belonged to Hewitt, the bank’s president. Hewitt’s thinning hair was rust-red, combed straight back from a broad, bony forehead. His shirt collar was wet and more sweat filmed his scrawny neck. The blue serge suit fit his skinny frame better than it deserved.

Quill stood up slowly and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"See here, Mr. Smith!" Hewitt shook a finger under Quill’s nose. "You should have prevented all this!"
</p>

He pointed at the cashier. "That man’s dead because of you! I thought you were too young for the job. I’m going to call the FBI at Washington—I’ll tell them how you bungled, how—"

"How much did they get?" The words whipped out of Quill.

"Get? Eighty or ninety thousand. How should I know? We’ll have to make an accounting of—"

"All right then!" snapped Quill. "Get over there and start counting!"

The bank president’s gnarled Adam’s Apple suddenly worked up and down like a little elevator. There was surprise and then respect in his eyes. Without another word, he turned and began to walk toward the open vault where a number of bank employees were clustered.

"Hold it a second!" The sharpness in Quill’s tone made Hewitt stop immediately and turn around. "When you’re reading off guys, Mr. President, don’t forget you told us they were due at one o’clock. And your word was all we had to go by!"

Hewitt spluttered. "But that’s what they said. One o’clock was their plan. It wasn’t my fault they came an hour earlier. I told you—"

"All right, all right," said Quill wearily. "Forget it." He turned, walked through the cashier’s cage and across the main floor to the huge front doors. Ralston was standing there talking to three tan-shirted Derrick City policemen.

"Nothing new, Quill," Ralston said. He was a tall man with a ship’s anchor for a jaw and hard gray eyes. "The getaway car—a blue coupe—just vanished, that’s all. The local boys and the State highway patrol are watching every alley in the county. There may be—"

Ralston’s voice trailed off as a teller

Will You Try a 25c Box of
NoDoz Awakeners at My Expense?

If you have trouble keeping awake when you have to, try a NoDoz Awakener*—America’s famous wake-up tablet since 1933. 25c at all drug stores.

* (T. M. Reg)

They’re harmless as coffee! Send me 10c to cover handling and I’ll mail you a full 25c package by return mail.

Hugh Harrison

Harrison Products Inc. Dept. PG2, 45 Second Street, San Francisco.
hurried up to Quill. "Long distance calling, you, Mr. Smith. Los Angeles."

"Brother, I know who that is." Ralston shook his head. "And I wouldn't want to be in your shoes, Quill. They're going to pinch."

Quill took the call in the privacy of a vice president's office. It was the chief. McCartney. Hotter than a smokestack.

"What the hell's going on down there!" McCartney's voice nearly shriveled Quill's ear. "You're in charge of that job, Quill! Completely responsible! I just got the flash on the radio that they made a clean get-away. And for your sake, I hope it isn't true!"

"It's true, all right," said Quill. "And that's not the worst. Two blocks from the bank they vanished. We haven't picked up their trail yet."

McCartney's purple profanity made the receiver quiver in Quill's fist and he heard operators gasp all the way down the line. "Quill! That was our chance! Maybe our only chance. This makes five jobs in a row for Trample. One in Arizona, one in Nevada and now three in California. That damn ex-shamus and his buddy are making every law officer in the country look like billy goats!"

"I know, chief, but—"

"You listen to me, Smith! You get those men! I don't care how you do it—but you get them. Use a fish net, if you have to!"

McCartney's receiver slammed down and the line went dead. Anger whooshed up inside of Quill. Muscles bulged along his boyish jaw and there was ice in his blue eyes. He wanted to phone McCartney back and yell facts at him. He wanted to pound the desk and kick over a few chairs and get all the frustration out of his system. But those were luxuries he couldn't afford. He strode from the office toward the vaults. He told Ralston he planned to investigate some things at the hotel and left the bank.

The hotel was on Magnolia Avenue, two blocks from the bank. Back in his small room, Quill was examining the pieces of vase on the rug. And then he heard the scream. A hall-scorching scream, from a woman with strong lungs. Twice more she screamed, but by that time Quill had raced down the corridor and into the room two doors away where all the noise was coming from.

An elderly woman in a pink maid's uniform was standing beside the unmade bed. She stared down at the body of a girl on the rug. She was getting ready to scream again, but when she saw Quill she slapped her hand against her plump lips. He flipped open his leather key case and let her see the bronze badge pinned to it.

"Margie!" the woman cried. Tears drenched her cheeks. "It's Margie! I wondered where she was and went looking for her and—"

The woman's hysterical voice went on and on, but Quill wasn't listening. His eyes traveled swiftly around the room and then settled back on the girl. He dropped down beside her and lifted her wrist. It was cool, but not cold. She hadn't been dead very long.

SHE was young. Not terribly pretty, but she had a fine firm mouth and a trim nose. One flat brown shoe had been kicked off. A rivulet of crimson had traveled down to the rug.

Quill got up suddenly and went over to the elderly woman, who had fallen across the untidy bed, moaning, her wrinkled hands writhing. He pulled her to a sitting position.

"She works here?" he demanded as the woman's moans subsided. "She's a maid?"

The woman managed a jerky nod.

"Who rented this room—d'you know?"

"A girl—"

Quill let the woman fall back across the bed. He'd learned all he needed for the moment. Back down the hall he strode, pushing past the mob of curious guests
who choked the narrow corridor. He ignored their breathless questions, entered his own room and locked the door. He needed a minute to think.

There could be little doubt about it. The girl who had tapped him with the vase was the same one who had killed the maid. Dammit! He’d like to run into her again. An icy customer she was—conk a G-man, slit a throat, help rob a bank. All in the day’s work for her. Obviously, she had stolen the maid’s uniform and keys so she could enter his room and keep him out of circulation while Trample and his assistant knocked over the bank. Trust Trample, an ex-private eye, to pick a gal with a Colt .45 for a heart.

But how had they known that the FBI was working on the case? Who had told them which room he was staying in? Quill frowned and lit a cigarette. Somebody had tipped them off.

Could it have been Hewitt, the bank president? Quill shook his head. Hewitt was a puffed-up pigeon, all right, but the old guy had guts. Soon as Trample approached him with that holdup plan, Hewitt had phoned the law. He’d run one hell of a risk doing something like that.

Still, it was a tricky case. It wouldn’t hurt to check up on Hewitt. Quill dialed the bank’s phone number. He asked for his assistant.

“Hello?” said Ralston, after a few moments.

Quill gave him a quick fill-in on the maid’s murder and told him to send over the local authorities. Then he asked, “Anything new yet on your end?”

“No?” said Ralston bitterly. “That damn get-away car vanished like steam on a hot day. All I’ve found out is that one hundred and ten thousand dollars are missing and that somebody left the rear door unlocked to one of the vice president’s offices so Trample and his side-kick could get away easier.”

“Swell.” Impatiently, Quill blew ciga-

rette smoke into the phone. “I’m beginning to wonder about Hewitt. What all do we know about that guy?”

“Nothing more than before,” said Ralston. “He got himself into a pot of hot water back in the thirties playing hopscotch with a blonde secretary at the bank. But that’s all history.” Ralston paused. “By the way, I guess the noontime festivities were too much for the old guy. He left for home a few minutes ago complaining that his ulcer had suddenly gotten big as a house.”

“Where’s he live?”

Ralston gave Quill the address. “He lives out there by himself. His wife divorced him. Anything else?”

“No,” said Quill. “I’m going out and look around. You keep after things over there.”

Ralston agreed and they hung up. But as Quill left the room, the phone rang. He returned and picked up the receiver again. “Los Angeles calling Mr. Quill Smith,” said the operator. Quill growled deep in his throat and waited.

“Quill!” exploded McCartney’s voice after a second or so. “We just got word there’s a gal working with Trample now. A hot brunette—and watch out for her because—”

“I know!” snorted Quill. He dropped the receiver back on the hook, cutting McCartney off. Feeling much better, grinning a little, Quill left the room. There’d be hell to pay later for his whimsey, but right now it was worth it.

He drove his dusty, three-year-old sedan fast, but skillfully. As he rolled down palm-lined Los Altos boulevard, his mouth was a hard tense line. He was doing a lot of thinking, going back over all the things which had happened the last few months in connection with the case.

It had started when Trample, the smooth San Francisco private dick, had lost his license for stepping outside the law once too often. A neat operator,
Trample. He’d turned to the deeper shades of crime with a vengeance. Teaming up with a longshoreman from the Frisco waterfront, he’d knocked over those four banks and that factory as if they were made of greased cards.

And why not? Every damn one was an inside operation. Snoop ing around for a few weeks in advance of each job, the sensitive-nosed Trample had sniffed out the dirt. Vice presidents, tellers, office-boys. Somewhere in every business organization there was a man with a past. And each time Trample had found him and dug out the background. And then he’d turned on the heat.

Sometimes it didn’t work and he’d left town two jumps ahead of the lads with the stars on their chests. But five times it had worked. Once an Arizona vice president, rather than have his little weekly embezzlement exposed, had gladly met Trample at the bank after working hours and helped him load two satchels with loose bills.

Another time a teller saw to it that his foot-button didn’t ring the alarm and Trample got away with $15,000. In return, Trample didn’t reveal the teller’s San Quentin background. But the Bureau had found out anyway.

With Hewitt, it had been different. Trample confronted him with letters—the 2000° Fahrenheit kind—which the bank president had written his blonde secretary. Hewitt had pretended fear and agreed to help Trample ease a few sacks of cash from the vault. Actually, Hewitt didn’t give a hoot about the letters.

The story of his romance with the secretary had been in all the Derrick City tabloids during the thirties—a little fact Trample had overlooked. So Hewitt went to the police. And they notified the FBI. Trample had planned the job for 1 o’clock and Quill arranged to station his men inconspicuously at 12:30. But, of course, Trample and his big-shouldered buddy had walked in a few minutes after noon.

Quill parked the sedan two blocks from Hewitt’s house and approached via the alley. It paid to be careful. Snooping on Hewitt couldn’t do any harm. If the bank president had deliberately misled everybody about the time of the robbery, this would be the way to trap him.

Quill halted a moment beside the clean white service porch. There was a slight prickling across the back of his neck. Reaching inside his gray coat, he tugged at the butt of the .38. It slipped free easily and its cool weight felt friendly. He pushed it back into the clip and went up the steps quickly.

The porch door and then the kitchen door gave him no trouble. He stepped lightly across the gleaming linoleum over to the door which led to the other rooms. Beyond it, he heard the indistinct sounds of several voices. Working slowly, he pushed past the door and edged his way across the thick dining room rug, thanking Hewitt for the fact that the floor didn’t squeak. French doors separated the dining room from the living room. Quill moved up to them and pulled the frilly curtains slightly apart.

What he saw made the muscles twitch across his lean shoulders. His throat went dry, but sweat sprouted on his palms.

Hewitt was at home, all right. He had guests and his ulcer was taking a terrific beating. Trample and his beefy-shouldered friend had backed the bank president up against the Chinese junkers in the smart scarlet wallpaper. They were quietly threatening to shoot the buttons off his shirt.

Elation, refreshing as a shot of good Scotch, burst through Quill. A break! After weeks of waiting and hunting, weeks of taking McCartney’s insults—now this! And there they stood, their backs to him. If they refused to drop their guns, he ought to be able to wing them both before
they could whip around. If he couldn't do a simple thing like that—well, he'd wasted an awful lot of FBI money taking those marksmanship courses at Quantico.

Quill eased his .38 from its clip. He was preparing to yank open the French doors when abruptly something small and hard pressed against his sacroiliac.

A familiar feminine voice said harshly, "Drop it, friend! Or do you want me to kiss you again on the top of your cute head!"

Quill's spine felt like a long, quick-frozen icicle. For an instant, he was tempted to ignore his better judgment, spin around and try to knock her gun aside. But too many guys, he knew, had caught coffin-itis attempting that trick.

His .38 thumped to the rug and it was like losing his right arm.

The girl picked it up. "In there!" she ordered. Then, more loudly, "Hey, look what I just found!"

Trample turned away from Hewitt as the girl and Quill entered the living room. New lines bit deeply into the ex-private investigator's thin face and his dark eyes glittered sharply as they swept over Quill.

"The big G-boy, himself," said the girl. "He was all set to tip you two over!"

"Nice going, Ethel!" snapped Trample. "And you, Marchy?" He poked the big-shouldered man in the ribs. "Take a quick look-around and see if any other law came with him!"

A tenseness heavy as sand filled the room as Marchy went from window to window. The thickness of it constricted Quill's breathing. He stood there, fingers bunched at his sides, feeling helpless. He'd had them in the palm of his hand like bits of candy—and he'd loused it up. Even if he lived through this, he was finished. McCartney would have his scalp and his badge.

They watched Marchy step out on the front porch. Then he went to the back of the house and returned. Marchy wasn't a tall man, but he was immensely broad. Tailors doubtlessly had given up trying to make the tan gabardine fit his shoulders. There was intelligence and cunning in his large blue eyes.

"Okay," he said with obvious relief. "Looks like he came alone."

"We'll still have to make this fast," replied Trample. "His buddies'll turn up sooner or later." He faced Hewitt again and added softly, "Take your choice—tell us where it is, or my finger—" His eyes went down to the snout of the heavy .45 which was six inches from the bank president's gold belt buckle.

Hewitt's back was still up against the Chinese wallpaper. His arms stretched overhead and his hands were tight, leathery claws.

"You're crazy!" he coughed. "I'm not holding out on you."

"We got the money you left for us in

---

**Warning! Act fast on PIN-WORMS**

Pin-Worm infection is highly contagious and usually spreads rapidly...often through whole families. And these ugly creatures, living and growing inside the human body, can cause real distress.

So don't take chances. And don't suffer a needless minute from the tormenting rectal itch or other troubles caused by Pin-Worms. Because science has found a remarkable Pin-Worm remedy that gets real results.

This wonderful remedy is Jayne's P-W Vermifuge, developed by the famous Jayne Co., specialists in worm medicines for over 100 years. P-W contains a special, medically-approved ingredient that kills Pin-Worms and expels them from the body. And the small P-W tablets are easy-to-take, even for young children.

So if you suspect Pin-Worms, act fast! Get P-W from your druggist and simply follow the directions.

**P-W Tablets for Pin-Worms**
the cashier's box," said Trample. "And the key got us out the back. That was very kind of you. But we just heard on the radio that one hundred and ten thousand is missing. You think I didn't go to kindergarten?" Trample smiled bitterly. "I can add, Mr. Hewitt. Where's the other seventy-five thousand dollars you took, figuring everybody would think we got it. Where is it?"

"I didn't! I'd be a fool to try something like that!"

"You are a fool!" hissed Ethel. "Trying to play both ends against the middle. We've known every move you made. That afternoon after the boys talked to you, I hid in the bedroom and listened on the extension when you phoned the cops."

Her spike heels clacked across the hardwood floor. She strode up to Hewitt, her long black hair dancing against her wide shoulders. Gripping the blue-black .22 by the barrel, she smashed it against the bank president's jaw. His face went white.

"Thought you were smart," Ethel added, her red mouth twisting wickedly. "Calling in the cops so they'd think you were on the level. Telling them the wrong time for the holdup. We knew you were up to something—and that's why we went ahead. We figured there'd be more in it for us. And there is, isn't there?" She raised the gun again.

"You're wrong! I didn't."

Ethel drew back for another blow, but it wasn't necessary.

"No!" yelled Hewitt, shielding his face with both arms. "In the fireplace! The money's up the chimney!"

Like a wet paper sack, he collapsed onto the davenport, holding his head and moaning.

"THAT'S more like it," said Trample. The corners of his thin-lipped mouth tipped up sarcastically as turned to Quill. "I think it would be swell if you got it for us. Thoughtful of Uncle Sam to send us a messenger boy, wasn't it?"

He waved his gun at the fireplace. "Move!"

Quill walked slowly to the yellow tile hearth. The fire had gone out. He pushed his hand up into the chimney, brushing his fingers over the soot.

Two objects were hanging off nails stuck between the bricks. One felt like a briefcase. He touched the other, but before he could make certain what it was, Trample said brusquely:

"Quit stalling!"

Quill brought out the briefcase. It was fat as a turkey. He handed it wordlessly to Trample. The narrow-faced man opened it and ran his fingers briefly through the packs of new, green bills.

Relief settled heavily on Hewitt's features as Trample put away his gun. The bank president got off the davenport and walked over to the fireplace. He wiped the blood off his mouth and tried to smile.

Trample handed Ethel the briefcase. "Trade you," he said, grimly. "Yours is quieter than mine." He lifted the .22 from her slim fingers and in one smooth motion trained it on Hewitt's chest and squeezed the trigger.

"That," said Trample softly, handing the .22 back to Ethel, "will be a lesson to the next man who tries to outsmart me—"

Marchy nodded. "And what about the Hoover boy?" His blue eyes ran impersonally over Quill. "Do we drop him now, too?"

"No," said Trample. "Later. He'll be very handy to us the next half hour or so." He started toward the kitchen. "Let's get out of here."

Quill walked between Trample and Marchy and his mind was a raceway for a dozen rushing ideas. Got to escape! he thought. Got to figure out something! A half hour, that's all. And then they
throw Hewitt and me in the same hole.

He touched the shoulder clip, longing to feel the familiar friendly weight of the .38. He swore and kept walking.

They entered the garage from the kitchen. And Quill saw why the Derrick City police hadn’t been able to find the blue get-away coupe. It was parked between Hewitt’s cars, a small sedan and a long black town car. Obviously, after robbing the bank, Trample and Marchy had driven the twelve short blocks to Hewitt’s house, hidden the coupe and waited for the president to arrive.

“We’ll take the little sedan,” announced Trample. “Less conspicuous.” He nudged Quill. “You do the driving—and don’t get gay!”

Carrying the briefcase, Ethel got into the back of the sedan. She waited while Quill and the other two men remained standing beside the sedan.

“Here’s the pitch, Marchy,” explained Trample. “Ethel and I’ll get out at the corner of Gaviota and La Playa. You have him drive you out of town and—”

Trample kept talking, but Quill listened with only one ear. Under his breath, he swore again. He glanced anxiously around the garage. He noticed a broken packing crate near the sedan and felt a slight spark of hope. The top of the crate had been removed, revealing part of a gleaming new washing machine. Several boards had fallen near the sedan. Two big nails stuck out of one—and a gentle kick could slide it under the left front tire.

Quill fixed the position of that board firmly in mind. Then he gave Trample’s conversation his full attention.

“...the cops have got road-blocks all around the city limits,” Trample was telling Marchy. “It’ll be risky, but it’s your turn. I took the big risk on our last job. You have him drive you through the blockade. Don’t go on Highway 101. Take something smaller. Okay?”

Marchy hunched his large shoulders nervously. “Guess so. Then after we get into the next county, I knock him off.”

“You can try!” growled Quill, feeling the hot ball of anger swelling again in his chest. “But I don’t think you’re big enough for the job”

“He is!” snapped Trample. He turned again to Marchy. “They’ll find Hewitt’s body here and his car missing. Then they’ll find the dick’s body in Hewitt’s car in the next county. They’ll figure we all got through the road block. That’ll take the heat off Ethel and me. We’ll leave town quietly in a couple of days. Got it?”

Marchy nodded. He tapped Quill’s shoulder with the barrel of his revolver. “In!” he said.

Quill didn’t move. His mind was spinning, trying to figure how he could kick the board under the tire without being seen.

“I said get in!” Marchy’s heavy arm slammed across Quill’s back, driving him up against the door. There was no chance to nudge the board. Angry and frustrated, Quill opened the door and got behind the cream-plastic wheel. Marchy climbed in beside him and kept his gun resting on his knee.

Quill booted the starter savagely. As Trample raised the garage door, Quill twisted the wheel hard and the front of the car swerved widely as it backed into the alley.

“What the hell you trying to do!” demanded Marchy. “One more stunt like that and I’ll put you on ice!”

Quill said nothing. He wondered if he’d managed to swerve the left front tire over the nails. There was no way he could be sure.

Trample shut the garage door and got in the back with Ethel. Quill drove down the alley and then along Castro Avenue. He held himself rigidly—waiting, wonder-
ing, hoping to feel the steady bump-bump which would tell him the tire had gone soft. *If it would only happen now,* he told himself, *before Trample and the girl get out!*

But nothing happened. Eight blocks later, at the corner of Gaviota and La Playa, Trample ordered Quill to stop the sedan. He took the leather briefcase from Ethel as they stepped to the curb.

“Good luck, Marchy,” Trample waved as the car started forward. “See you in Reno!”

**BLOCK after block the car rolled smoothly on.** Quill was convinced that he’d missed the nails. His brain was in turmoil, straining over a thousand things at once. The tire—the gun in Marchy’s hand—that second square object hanging in Hewitt’s fireplace—Ethel and Trample’s hideout—the tire—the gun—

Finally, as they were climbing Oil Hill, it happened. Marchy swore as the left front wheel began to throb and thump. Relief flooded through Quill. Better late than never! And now, at least, he had a chance.

He pulled over to the side of the road. Marchy kept the gun in the pocket of his tan gabardine coat as they went back to the trunk for the spare and bumper jack. The sun was beginning to set and the afternoon was cool, but perspiration gleamed on Marchy’s broad forehead. Nervously, he watched the passing cars and the men at work under the high steel oil derricks in the dusty field a hundred yards away.

Quill removed the flat. The tire wrench felt good in his hands as he began to tighten the lug nuts on the spare. From the tail of his eye, he watched Marchy, who was standing near the bumper, hand and revolver bulging his pocket. Marchy’s large blue eyes watched him carefully most of the time, but occasionally they turned away a second or two to regard a passing car or truck. *A second or two,* thought Quill, feeling his leg muscles grow tense. *That’s all I’ve got!*

He waited till the blue eyes turned again to the traffic—and then he sprang. He brought the heavy tire wrench up in a sweeping arc from the pavement and it caught the point of Marchy’s jaw. He felt the seams rip in his gray coat as he swung the wrench again. Marchy’s big shoulders dipped toward the ground.

Quill took the gun from Marchy’s pocket and slipped it into his own. Then he dragged the unconscious man to the ditch on the other side of the car. He returned, quickly tightened the rest of the lug nuts and released the jack.

Leaving the tools and flat tire behind, he swung the sedan in a tight U-turn across the road and started back down the hill. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that the oil men were running across the field toward Marchy’s leather heels, which stuck out of the ditch.

The speedometer needle quivered at seventy, but Quill scarcely noticed it. He was wondering what the odds were on finding Trample and Ethel. There were hundreds of houses in the neighborhood where he’d left them off. It would take hours—maybe days—for police squads to locate their hiding place and by that time they’d probably have fled elsewhere.

Wrathfully, Quill scraped his palm across his lean jaw. Something kept teasing him, dangling just outside the reach of his mind. And then he remembered. That other thing in Hewitt’s chimney! It might be! If it held what he thought it did—there was still a chance to nab Trample and the girl! Greed, that’s what it depended on!

He hurled the sedan through a red signal, narrowly missing a laundry truck which skidded to a stop behind him. It had been nearly half an hour since he left them off. Maybe he was too late!
Five tense minutes later, the tires yelped as the sedan halted beside Hewitt's garage. Quill drove it inside and slammed the garage door shut.

Hewitt's body was still slumped against the yellow-tile fireplace, his head resting stiffly on his chest. Quill leaned against the mantel. His fingers probed up the chimney and they found it—another briefcase. It wasn't as plump as the first one, but it was filled with the same kind of crisp green paper. Quill estimated it quickly. At least twenty thousand dollars. Which meant Trample and the girl had about fifty-five thousand in their briefcase—instead of the seventy-five thousand they thought they had.

A dark walnut desk stood beside the fireplace. Quill went over to it and phoned the police. He told them where to find Marchy and hung up. Then he stepped onto the spongy cushions of the sky-blue davenport and dropped to the hardwood floor behind it. Crouching there in the corner, he was in a good position to observe anyone approaching the fireplace.

Just as he was convinced he'd been a fool to wait, he felt a draft on his neck. In a few moments, Trample and Ethel walked in. Quill sucked in his breath.

"All clear," said Trample. Their backs toward Quill, they went over to the fireplace. Trample poked his arm up the chimney. A grin creased his thin face as he brought out the sooty briefcase. He opened it and handed a pack of bills to Ethel. "What'd I tell you, baby. Wasn't it worth the risk coming back?"

"No it wasn't!" said Quill, standing up quickly, the automatic tight in his fist. "Take out your gun, Trample. Slowly. And drop it on the floor. No tricks. You shell out, too, Ethel!"

Trample's hand went inside his coat. He cursed. Holding his gun carefully by the barrel, he dropped it to the rug.

Ethel turned around. Her red lips were crooked with rage. Her hand went into the plastic bandbox which was her purse. The little target pistol came into view.

It turned deliberately toward Quill. "Don't!" he warned.

It moved another inch. Quill ground his teeth together. The .32 abruptly was a live thing jerking against his fingers. The first bullet cracked a brick in the fireplace just above Ethel's arm. The second one struck her elbow and the pistol slipped to the floor.

Quill vaulted over the davenport. He scooped the two guns off the rug and crossed to the phone. He dialed headquarters and gave the police Hewitt's address.

"Better send an ambulance, too," he added, his eyes flicking coldly at Ethel. "A gal just found out chivalry is dead!"
Deadline For Homicide

Private-eye Rod Randall got death for dessert when he called on the racket prince's lush mate.

"They'll have their body," said Mona.

DR. GOLD came out of the sickroom slowly. An invisible weight bowed his thin worn shoulders. There was quiet pity in his dark eyes. "She'll have to take a drug cure. It will

By LARRY MARCUS
be utter torture—every nerve in her body on fire—every muscle stung by a million needles.”

I could see now why his patients loved him. Not only because he ministered to them in their poverty, not worrying about whether the bill would be paid—if it ever would be. But also because he had a heart and great respect for their dignity—because he suffered with them.

I said, “But she will live?”

“If you want to call the next six months living,” Gold conceded.

I stood to go. “Send me your bill.” I had reached the door before his voice stopped me.

“What is your interest in Ellen’s case, Mr. Randall?” he asked.

I couldn’t answer that.

“I understand,” he persisted, “you knew her brother.”

Embarrassment flushed my face. “We were in the same outfit until—”

It was his turn to keep quiet.

“I’ve been meaning to keep an eye on her. I guess I haven’t done so well.”

“The past,” he said softly, “is over.

“What do you intend to do now?”

My lips twisted. “It’s up to you now, isn’t it?”

He said, “Mr. Randall, look at her picture.”

It was on the bureau. She’d changed since she was a leggy kid who used to visit us at camp. But her eyes were still the same, gay and laughing and looking for something to joke about. And her face still had the same young eager freshness.

I said, “I’m looking.”

He opened the bedroom door and stepped aside. “Look at Ellen now.”

Her skin was sallow and scaly. Her eyes were dull and vacuous. She looked more like eighty than eighteen.

Dr. Gold said, “Mr. Randall, you’re a detective, aren’t you?”

“A private détective.”

“And you know Ellen wouldn’t have gotten the drug habit—if someone hadn’t led her into it?”

The question hung there. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, he was still staring at me.

He said, “It’s a dirty thing to happen to any kid of eighteen. Any kid.”

I turned abruptly and walked out.

At closing time, 4 a.m., the Canary Club did not look swank. Tables were filthy—chairs overturned—and the bartender was hoisting himself out of the sodden hurricane they called a good night’s business.

I crossed to the bar. The bartender snapped, “Closed, buddy. We ain’t serving.”

“I’m looking for Gardner.”

He wiped his moist pink skull. “Who’re you?”

I told him.

“Whaddya want. Gardner for, Randall?”

I told him that was my business.

He looked at my head, hefted a bottle, then put it down regretfully. “The office is back there.” He nodded at a door.

I moved toward it. A blue-bearded tough barred my way. “Goin’ somewhere, Mac?”

“Inside.”

“Got an appointment, maybe?”

I said, “I’m going inside.”

He leaned his arm against my chest.

“Run along, Mac. We ain’t receiving.”

I knocked the arm aside. “I’m going inside.”

His eyes met mine, measured me, then scurried away crookedly. Without saying a word, he stepped aside.

I walked in. A dirty puddle of light seeped across a sill at the end of a corridor. I threw the door open but, instead of going in, leaned against the wall out of range. The bartender, I knew, had already phoned ahead.

After a moment of dead silence, I called, “It’s Rod Randall, Gardner.”
The answer came in a husky contralto.
"Come in, Mr. Randall," it purred.
I breathed deep and walked in. The voice belonged to a tall shimmering blonde. I looked past her. The rest of the office was empty.
I said, "I wanted Mister Gardner."

HER glance flicked another door which led to an alley outside. "My husband should be back soon." She wore a low cut, dazzling white gown. Her eyes were deep, smoky pools of violet.
I said, "He needn't have run away. I wouldn't have hurt him. Not tonight, anyway."
"Discretion, Mr. Randall—" Her lips pursed bitterly.
"I'll wait for him."
The smoky eyes weighed me. "Perhaps we can discuss your business in the meantime," she suggested.
"I'll wait."
"At least you can sit down." She didn't like my attitude.
I took a seat on a yellow leather couch. She set fire to a cigarette. A sound outside made me stiffen. A moment later, the door from the alley opened.
The newcomer was Artie Gardner, flaxen-haired specimen with flat yellow eyes. His shoulders weren't nearly as wide as the dinner jacket made them.
He ran a curved little finger along the line of a thin blond mustache and said softly, "Ah, Mr. Randall, my wife's been entertaining you. You haven't missed me then."
She said curtly, "One of us had to face him."
Gardner flushed. "Your sense of humor, my dear—" He turned to me. "Why do you want to see me, Mr. Randall?"
I said, "Let's keep it private, Gardner."
The woman's eyes narrowed. Gardner said, "But my wife—"
I said "You and I. Alone. Period."
He stared at his manicured nails. "Would you, my dear—"
Her lip curled. "If you're sure you don't need my protection." Her smoky eyes smoldered as she left.
"And now, Mr. Randall," he said, after she'd gone, "what is this pressing secret?"
"You'll have to give up the junk business."
His eyebrows jumped. "My dear sir—"
The little finger went back to the mustache, only now it trembled. "Suppose you explain yourself," he said tightly.
"All right—you run dope on the east side. Milt Schmidt has the west. Right?"
His smile was ghastly. "Assuming you were right—why do you come to me?"
I let him have it. "Because you're yellow. I want to scare you out." I pointed my finger at him. "But if I can't, I'll run you out."
His yellow eyes avoided mine. "Mr. Randall," he said, "may I say you don't begin to make sense."
"I don't give a damn what I make. I'm warning you to lay off. Quit. Retire."
"And if I don't?"
"Then I'll retire you." I leaned toward him and he shrank away, his weak lips parted. "You don't worry me, Gardner. You're just dirty dishwater. I want Schmidt."
The yellow eyes widened. "And what have I to do with Schmidt?"
"Wise up. Let your mouth run. Give me the lowdown. Schmidt'll do a long stretch."
The yellow eyes slitted, gleamed. "And what happens to me?"
"You get a start out of town—a twenty-four-hour start."
For a moment I thought I'd put it over. Then fear shadowed the yellow eyes. He was thinking of what happened to rats.
"Okay," I said, and stood. "You had your chance. You kicked it. One bad break—and you're a bird in a cage."
He looked up at me. "Mr. Randall,"
Deadline for Homicide

he asked meaningfully. "Do you remember Officers Johnson and Melinsky?"
I remembered them. They used to be plainclothesmen. Johnson was supposed to have been killed trying to break up a holdup, Melinsky by a wild hit-and-run driver.
I said, "What about them?"
"Both of them," he said softly, "threatened me just as you have."
A chill crackled down my spine. I reached over, grabbed his lapel and lifted him to his feet. I put everything I had in a straight right cross. His head rocked back to his shoulder blades, then bobbed limply. I let him sag back into the chair.
"That's for Johnson and Melinsky."

I HAD a surprise waiting for me when I got out into the street. Mrs. Gardner was sitting in the front seat of my car. "I thought you'd never come," she babbled gaily. "You're taking me home, you know."
I said, "If you're that anxious to know, why don't you ask your husband?"
She bit her lip momentarily. "Your eyes, Mr. Randall, are the coldest I've ever seen."
The last thing I wanted to do at that moment was to play conversational patty-cake. I was about to invite her to leave me to my worries when it occurred to me she might be able to convince her husband I was right.
I picked up the ball. "And your eyes, Mrs. Gardner, are so—warm."
The smoky eyes teased me. "Not Mrs. Gardner—Mona."
"Mona, then."
She sighed. "I don't know what to make of you."
"I always notice obstacles."
"I'm not an obstacle, Rod?"
A traffic light stopped me. "You're Gardner's wife, aren't you?"
"Ye—es." She drew the word out.
"Then you're an obstacle."
Her smile was arch. "But I'm a woman, too."
"That makes you double danger."
She frowned. "I'm trying so hard to understand you."
"Is that good, Mona?"
"I know people who think so."
"And are they still healthy?"
The thought had occurred to me, too.
Following her directions, I turned off into Forty-third and followed it down to the East River Drive. In front of a skyscraper apartment over the river, I parked. "You're home now—Mrs. Gardner." I emphasized the name.
Abruptly, she asked, "Tell me—what did you want with my husband?"
She might help him to see things my way. I told her about my talk with Gard-
ner. I didn’t mention the right cross, though.

She said, “You’re so set—who stubborn about this. It’s more than just a job.”

That was shrewd. I was glad she couldn’t see my face in the dark. I said, “I’m always like this.”

“And just what are you after?”

I ticked them off on stiff fingers. “The racket must end. Schmidt to go to jail. Your husband—out.”

“All those things—just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“And you expect to get them, too.”

There was a hint of fright in her voice. “Very well—I’ll make a deal with you.”

“Strictly business?”

“Strictly business.” Her manner was crisp. “Come to our apartment tomorrow night at seven. I’ll give you my husband’s resignation.”

“And you’ll leave town?”

Amusement gleamed deep in her smoky eyes. “My husband will leave,” she said softly. “I will stay for a while.”

Smiling, she slipped out of the car and disappeared into the house.

Dr. Gold’s bill came in the mail next morning. But it didn’t ask for any money. It said: “I knew her brother, too.”

The day limped by slowly. The clock seemed to thumb its nose at me. But finally, 7 o’clock came and I was at the Gardners’. A doorman with enough gold braid to merit burial at Fort Knox directed me to the penthouse. A jet-propelled elevator whooshed me up to the nineteenth floor. I pressed the mother-of-pearl button and heard golden chimes inside.

But no one answered.

I rang again. Still no answer. I rattled the knob. The door swung open. I thought of Melinsky and Johnson—and waited out in the hall. Finally, I stepped inside warily.

No one shot at me. No one tried to stab me.

Nothing happened.

With my pencil flash I found a wall switch. The light showed me I was in the foyer. I went through it into the living room. The swank of it lifted my eyebrows.

The panels were dark oak—neatly hung with sporting prints—with finely carved horses’ heads sitting on gold-tooled end-tables. Two half-empty highball glasses waited forlornly for someone to finish them. The place was elegant—and very empty.

I moved on to a bedroom. It looked as if it had just been through an earthquake. The purple satin spread was ripped to shreds. A bedpost was split; jagged splinters of mirror lay on the floor. Only the walls had escaped. All over the destruction were the rusty stains of drying blood.

There were more rooms but none of them had been disturbed. I went back to the living-room, looked at the half-empty highball glasses. They showed fingerprints. Fingerprints—but no lipstick.

I closed the apartment door behind me and rang for the elevator. As I stepped into it, I showed the operator a dollar bill.

“Seen Mr. Gardner tonight?” I asked.

Disgust wrinkled his nose. “He left about six, sir.”

“Alone?”

He eyed the dollar. I gave it to him. He said, “There were two men with Mr. Gardner.” He hesitated, then added, “To be frank, sir, Mr. Gardner smelled quite—alcoholic, sir.”

I said, “Come, come—let’s be charitable.”

“Sorry, sir.”

I fished out another buck. “Did you know either of the men?”

“No, sir.” He thought a moment, then brightened. “But one of them addressed the other as Schmidt.”

He was so busy stashing the second buck away that he didn’t hear my,
“Thanks.” Outside, I called the law from a public phone and invited my friend, Lieutenant Vetrano, to look into the situation.

I didn’t mention Schmidt, though. He was my personal baby.

I turned the nose of my heap toward the crooked streets of the lower East Side—and a visit with one Milt Schmidt, alleged fence and dope peddler.

He was shooting pool in the hustle hall that was his headquarters. I tapped him on the shoulder and he looked up, pretending it was a pleasure. “Rod Randall—what a surprise!”

I said, “Let’s talk, Schmidt.”

“I’m listening.”

“Alone.”

He gave his cue to a hanger-on. We went to the rear of the poolroom and up the stairs to a little two-room flat above. He poured good whiskey into dusty tumblers and handed me one.

The room was a kitchen. A cracked, dirty oilcloth covered the table. Overhead hung an unshaded bulb. He downed his drink and said, “What gives, Rod?”

I looked him over. The thin lips, long nose and hooded predatory eyes made him look like a vulture. He smiled and his yellow teeth looked rotten in his pale face.

I sipped at the drink. “Gardner’s dead. Sliced up.”

The hooded eyes veiled themselves momentarily. Then he said, “Tough.” He might have been talking about the weather.

“I heard you were there, Schmidt.”

“You heard wrong.”

“Somebody saw you,” I said. He began to pour another drink. I said: “Your fingerprints are on a glass in Gardner’s flat.”

He stopped pouring, put the bottle down. “Prints!”

I said, “Prints.”

He said, “I been here since five-thirty.”

“How’d you know it was five-thirty, Schmidt?”

He shrugged. “Five-thirty. Six-thirty. Any thirty. I got a dozen witnesses who’ll swear—”

“You always have.”

“Why should I carve Gardner?”

“If you found out he was going to rat and louse up the snow trade, you’d cut his tongue out.”

His bloodless lips writhed. “You’re crazy.”

I snapped the automatic out of its nest under my coat, motioned him to his feet. “Sure I’m nuts. But let’s look inside.”

The thin lips pressed to a knife edge. The cold eyes were burning now. “You won’t get away with this muscle job, Randall—” He stopped suddenly when I prodded the gun at him.

He led the way into the bedroom. I put the bed between us and dug into his bureau. In the middle drawer, something caught my eye. I pulled it out and spread it so he could see the stains.

“Is that ketchup, Schmidt?”

He sucked air, deadpanned professionally. “It’s a frame,” he snarled.

I jerked my head at the door. “Let’s ride downtown.”

He stiffened and his eyes froze. “I ain’t going.”

I shoved him. “Move.”

He braced his legs. “Make me.”

I didn’t waste words. I hammered the barrel of the gun along the side of his jaw. He sank to the floor, tried to say, “Okay. Okay.”

I said, “Move.”

We went down slowly. In the poolroom, I prodded him to stop. All I had to do was take him through his assembled mob.

“All right,” I yelled. They looked up at me. “Rack the sticks. Line up along the other wall.” I waved the gun to show I had backing.

They put the cues away sullenly, then backed to the wall opposite. I started Schmidt down the rack-lined wall. The
bums hissed angrily when they saw their boss's mangled face.

We were halfway out when Schmidt began gesturing with his left fist. I heard the shuffle of a slinking step. But, if I turned to face it, I'd have my back to my prisoner.

I shifted the gun to my left hand and chopped it down on Schmidt's dome. He fell like a steer. With my right fist, I grabbed a cue and heaved it in the general direction of the mutiny. Somebody stopped it with his nose. They fell back.

"I'm taking Schmidt out," I warned. "If it's over someone's dead body, that's okay, too." To prove I wasn't kidding, I snapped a shot at one of the lights. Jaws dropped as it splintered.

**LEUTENANT VETRANO** was overjoyed to see us when we got downtown. The white teeth shone like beacons in his dark face as he ushered us down to the lab where the boys took Schmidt's prints; then they sampled his blood for comparison with the stuff on the shirt I'd found in his bureau and also the rusty stains in Gardner's wrecked bedroom.

Schmidt parted puffed lips long enough to snarl, "I ain't talking. Get my mouthpiece," then clamped them shut.

Ordinarily, Vetrano wasn't the type to rough a prisoner. But this was Milt Schmidt, a thug with a record as long as your arm.

Nor, for that matter, would I have stayed around to watch. But the thought of a gray-eyed girl who'd been robbed of her youth held me there.

But Schmidt didn't crack and finally Vetrano had to cache him in a cell. By the time we got back, the lab report was in. Vetrano scanned it intently, then beamed a smile at me.

"We're hot, Rod," he exulted. "The prints on the glasses at Gardner's were Schmidt's. The blood in the bedroom was Type A."

I waited for more.

"By more than a coincidence," Vetrano went on, "the blood on the shirt you found at Schmidt's is also type A. But Schmidt's blood is," he paused dramatically, "Type O."

I said, "Fits him like a noose."

Vetrano said, "I hope so."

I refused Vetrano's invitation to drinks and dinner. Instead, I went back to the Canary Club. It seemed like a good idea to clean up the whole racket that very night.

But Mona Gardner didn't smile when she saw me. She sat behind the big walnut desk and fiddled nervously with the intercom buttons. Then, she came out to face me.

I said, "I came to offer condolences, Mrs. Gardner."

"Condolences!" She spat the word out. I never knew violet eyes could get that hard.

I watched her twist a cigarette in her fingers. "Nervous about something, Mona?" I asked.

"What's there to be nervous about?"

I met her eyes. "Murder."

Shreds of tobacco spilled out of the cigarette. Suddenly, her glance lifted, went over my shoulder. Her eyes widened, then narrowed. I felt, rather than heard, the door open behind me.

Her hand jumped to her throat and she tottered, twisting and crumpling with her arms outstretched for me to catch her. I let her fall.

I moved to face the door. It was the blue-bearded tough I'd tangled with the first time I'd crashed the office. The shiv in his hand glinted evilly as he shuffled toward me.

I said, sharply, "Watch out—you're on her hand."

He looked down. That gave me a second. I stepped in, clamped my left hand on his knife wrist and twisted. As his head came down, I brought my right
up. He was through for some time.
I lifted Mona to the couch. After I’d slapped her face a couple of times, she came around. “That man—” She stopped when she saw him on the floor.
“He’ll be quiet now,” I assured her.
“That knife—” she shuddered. There was pain deep in the wonderful violet eyes. “How did you manage—”
“Skip it.”
She closed her eyes. When they opened again, she smiled tremulously and said, “I’m afraid you’ll have to take me home again.”
I took her arm to steady her. She leaned against me. I felt the shiver of her body as she saw the knife. The thought struck me that it had been a knife that did the job on Gardner.
Neither of us said much during the ride to the apartment. With my coat on one arm and Mona on the other, I rode up in the elevator. At the door to her flat, she fumbled helplessly in her bag, handed me the key and tottered back a step. But her eyes were inescrutable in the dim light of the hall.
I turned the key in the lock, pushed the door open—but didn’t go in.
I stood there, watching her, letting the tension build up. She swallowed nervously. A pulse fluttered in her throat.
I took a step forward and threw my coat into the darkness. Something swished at it in midair, a piledriver that could have crushed my skull.
I grabbed at the invisible thing, made a poor connection and was knocked against the door. I rolled into the protective cover of the murky darkness.
A foot stabbed my ribs. I grabbed it, jerked it down with me. A body fell on me. My fist found its head.
I staggered up, hoisted the struggling mass over my head, then bounced it to the floor and fell on it. It didn’t move.

PANTING heavily, I tottered to my feet. A switch clicked and daggers of light stabbed my eyes. When I finally could see, I was looking into the barrel of an ivory-gripped twenty-five. It seemed odd that so small a hole could be so bottomless.
At the operating end of the gun, her eyes cold as blue ice, stood Mona Gardner.
I said, “Be careful. That thing might be loaded.”

DEATH DOUBLES IN BRASS . . .

when a crooning cutie and a hot-horn jazz boy take a powder on the maestro who played for murder.

Thrill-Shot Mystery Novelette
by Robert Turner

Also detective-action stories by John D. MacDonald, Robert Carlton and others in the better-than-ever June issue—on sale April 27th.
"It is." Her voice was as frozen as her eyes.

I looked at the unconscious figure on the floor. "So Gardner wasn't dead after all, was he?"

She shrugged. It made no difference to her.

I saw the set-up then. They staged the fake killing to decoy me on to Schmidt. And they'd planted the highball glasses and shirt for me to find.

"You won't put it over, Mona. Without Gardner's body, they'll never try Schmidt for murder. And, when Schmidt gets out, he'll come gunning for you."

She eyed her husband's limp form. "Don't worry," she said carelessly. "They'll have their body." Her eyes met mine. "In fact, two bodies."

Her voice iced my spine. The last jagged details fell into place. "It's a nice picture the police will get, your husband was killed; I arrested Schmidt—"

"Then you're found in a ditch," she finished. "And the police are sure Schmidt's mobsters took their revenge."

"All of which leaves you with the whole junk racket in your lap, doesn't it, Mona?"

Her fingers tightened on the gun. "You catch on quick, Randall." There wasn't the tremor of a muscle. She said, smiling tightly, "This won't hurt a bit."

I tried to grin but the cold fear inside me froze my face stiff. Her hand moved slightly. Her eyes narrowed.

I thought: *It won't be long now.*

I said, abruptly, "Go ahead and fire—you ugly cheat!"

Mona tensed in startled amazement. Then venomous anger set in. She snapped a vicious shot at me. The hot blast singed my leg. Cordite stung my nose and eyes. I grabbed her wrist. She buried her teeth in my arm. I tried to fling her off and the shock of it pulled the trigger again. The bullet bit the floor viciously at my feet.

I yanked at her gun hand, twisted it behind her back. She fired again, the shot digging deep into the ceiling this time. I increased the pressure on her arm. The gun fell from her nerveless fingers. I caught it in midair.

Mona tottered drunkenly across the room, not stopping until she had collided with the wall opposite. All the bones in her body seemed to turn to jelly. She hung there momentarily, then collapsed to the floor. She cried and the sound was a vicious snarl.

I made my way to the phone and invited Lieutenant Vetrano down to take over the party.

In spite of the pain, Mona forced a smile. "Y'know, Rod," she said, gritting her teeth to make it sound offhand, "there's no police case here. My husband was never killed. The police will apologize to Schmidt and release him." Her tone became sharply sarcastic. "You're just making a fool of yourself.

For a moment, it made sense. Then, a thought struck me. "Do you think your husband wants to stay free when Schmidt gets out of jail? After the fast one you tried to pull?"

She didn't answer. I let her chew on it a moment, then finished it off. "He'll be so anxious to get into the can where it's safe that he'll spill his guts and tell everything."

Her face fell. "You're not so smart after all, are you, Mona? I mean, if a fool like me can catch you?"

The papers next morning headlined the wonderful police work that broke up the dope ring. I refused Vetrano's offer to let me take the bows. I wanted Schmidt's boys to forget I existed.

Besides, I had something that was worth all the headlines in the world. It was a note that came in the morning mail.

"You'll be glad to hear, I know, that Ellen is doing very well," it said. "And incidentally—that was a nice job you did on the drug trade."

It was signed, *Dr. Max Gold.*
Other Side of the Story

An Atlanta woman was arrested for failing to break the habit of rifling her husband’s trousers after they were divorced.

* * * *

Two men were carted off to jail in Washington, D. C., for getting inebriated in a graveyard.

* * * *

A Detroit man was picked up by police for stealing a watchdog.

* * * *

An Andover, Conn., man was arrested by police for shooting at his wife after she gave away two cabbages and failed to sew two buttons on his trousers.

* * * *

A Hempstead, N. Y., man was haled into court for blowing an automobile horn that went "Woo!—Woo!" at the girls.

* * * *

A Prague woman was taken into custody for obtaining extra ration books on the pretext that she had a zoo.

* * * *

A Milwaukee man was arrested for getting so mad when he kept getting a wrong number at a pay phone that he tore off the receiver, tied it around his neck with a cord and walked off.

Arrested for holding up a card game, a 20-year-old Columbus, O., youth explained: "Ma's been losing too much money playing poker and I decided to stop it."

* * * *

Seized by Vienna, Austria, police, for having three wives, a bigamist explained that he had a "poor memory."

* * * *

Apprehended for driving 70 miles an hour, a Little Rock man told police he was simply trying to scare his wife out of her hiccoughs.

* * * *

Five New York men, intercepted by police carrying a Bronx Park Lake rowboat blocks away from the park, explained they merely wanted to see how far they could carry such an object.

* * * *

A Chadron, Neb., motorist told authorities that the reason his car overturned was that he was trying to keep from getting smeared with lipstick by two female passengers.

* * * *

Hailed into court for possessing slot machines, a Denver cafe operator told the judge: "They're not for gambling—I keep them to put my money in for saving."

H. H.

81
DIG MY GRAVE

Suspense-Filled FBI Novelette

★

Satan himself lent the foreign agents the outer rim of his black pit to help develop their fiendish scheme.

★ ★

CHAPTER ONE

Bigger Than the Bomb

The little man at the far end of the bar was stinko. He'd been alternately happy, doleful, sullen. Now he'd become belligerent. Leaning over his glass he flapped a vacuous hand, got the barkeep's attention, and mouthed;

"Tha' guy. You shee 'im? The hi' guy wi' the blonde babe. Tell 'im Acey Davis wants t' buy 'im a drink." The little man's attitude indicated that a drink was a must. Anyone who refused was in for trouble.

The barkeep shrugged, moved to the other end of the mahogany, and said, "What will you have, sir? It's on the man over there. Mr. Davis."

He spoke to a handsome, frosty eyed young man with remarkably broad shoulders and hair as blond as that of the girl beside him. The young man said, "Go back and tell him I don't drink with strangers. Also the hell with him."

"I heard that!" the little man screamed. "Insults is it?" He was off his stool and down the bar like a miniature locomotive.

They raked the cornfield with their powerful lights...
IN HELL

Melody raised the automatic over the guard's head.

By PAUL W. FAIRMAN
Before anyone could move, he'd seized the young man by the shoulder, jerked him from his stool, and spun him—with surprising strength—onto the small dance floor away from the bar. The young man tripped and went skidding along its polished surface on his chest.

The girl he'd been escorting gaped in wonder and saw the little drunk take off in a flying tackle and land with a thud on the horizontal body of her date.

She screamed. Evidently satisfied with the shrillness of her voice, she kept on screaming. The little stew pot had been with three friends who now left the bar and moved toward the dance floor. The blonde moved also, meeting the leader of the three at an angle. She threw a panicky arm around the neck of the second, and jammed a clumsy elbow into the third. Her screams continued as the four of them went down in a heap.

This captured the fascinated attention of the barflies and turned the two-man match on the dance floor into a side show. There were raucous laughs from nearby inebriates who would never know that they were witnessing a precise scientific exhibition.

The blonde charmer had, in a few brief seconds, achieved a two-fold objective. She'd blocked interference bent upon splitting the two gladiators, and her screams were covering any words that might pass between them.

And words were passing between them.

The little man called Acey Davis, his lips close to the ear of his opponent was saying:

"The SAC was right. It's bigger than the bomb, Tony, but I've overplayed my hand and they're watching me. After tonight ignore my reports. I'm unreliable. Probably cold meat."

"For Pete's sake, fade then!"

"Can't. Then they'd be sure we were tailing them. This is what I've got—", and he began pouring out words under the general uproar going on in the place.

The three companions had achieved their feet now. Their feet were pounding close. "Okay—hang one on me," the little man whispered fiercely.

Tony Melody's fist traveled a scant six inches. There was a click. Then hands grasped his arms and lifted him up. He whirled with tigerish ferocity on the three and snarled, "Get this bum out of here; I'm telling you—get him out of here or I'll kill him!" He was a perfect picture of unleashed rage.

"It's all right, pal," a voice soothed. "We don't want no trouble. We'll take him home."

They lifted the inert body of the man they knew as Acey Davis and moved in a straight line toward the door.

The blonde girl came limping over, minus one high heel. She was readjusting her hairdo. In a low voice, she asked, "Are we going to follow them?"

Tony Melody shook his head. "We're going out for a drive to see if they follow us."

Ten minutes later they were driving slowly southward away from the night club belt toward the residential section of the city. Over them hovered a slim sickle moon and a skyful of pin-point stars.

"He thinks they're suspicious of him," Tony said. "If he's right, we'll draw a quick tail. And he must be right, or he'd have never used the barroom brawl gag. It's a contact method of last resort."

The blonde girl moved across the seat close to Tony Melody. After a minute of complete silence, she said;

"Remember me, Mr. Melody? Nancy Williams. The gal who's been hopefully chasing you all these months."

He reached out an impulsive hand. "Honey! I'm sorry! I was thinking—or trying to. You were swell."

"Of course I was. I'm always swell." Then, more seriously, "Look. You said you had a yen to lie on a barroom floor
and make conversation with a fellow worker. I offered to see that you weren’t disturbed. I did my job blindly, like a good soldier, without asking questions. But now, Mr. FBI-man Melody, it would seem that I’m entitled to some explanations.”

“By the way,” Tony asked. “Where did you learn judo?”

“Don’t try to evade the issue. I know that you, Tony Melody, are working under the name of Wallace Crane; that another agent named Frank Butler seems to be known also as Acey Davis. It’s all very confusing.”

TONY MELODY, driving with one eye on the rear-view mirror, seemed to be weighing something in his mind. Then he said, “It’s strictly against regulations, but this is an exceptional case and you’ve been of real help, so I’m going to give you the whole picture.”

“Good, and if you want to you can pull over to the curb and put your arm around me while you do it.”

With distinct regret, Melody passed up the invitation and kept going. “Here it is,” he said, “in chronological order: About eight months ago we got word that a brilliant foreign chemist named Max Hardane, had disappeared from Paris into thin air. This was important for two reasons—first, Hardane, who slid through the Nuremberg trials by the skin of his teeth, is an acknowledged dictator-minded oppressionist.

“It’s a foregone conclusion that he would automatically associate himself with a government or nation based upon the stifling of human rights. That of course left him far out of our camp and made him a man to be watched.

“Secondly, he is a genius of the first water in the field of chemistry. There aren’t four other men in the world who can equal him in sheer brilliance.”

“And you don’t know where he is?”

Tony Melody was watching a pair of headlights that had looming up a block rearward. He watched until they veered to the right and the car pulled into a driveway beside a neat bungalow.

“Yes—we know now. He’s somewhere in the United States, possibly within a few miles of us, working on a project that could easily change the history of the world.”

Nancy Williams’ blue eyes widened. “That’s a whale of a mouthful, mister.”

“You’re not fooling,” Tony Melody said soberly. “Oddly enough we got that last bit of information through scientific channels rather than through espionage. A man named James Wightman, owner of the big Wightman Chemical Company here in the city, notified us when the information dribbled his way through the scientific grapevine. He told us that Hardane had stumbled upon an earth-shaking formula that would automatically bring the world to its knees before the nation possessing it.”

“Will you quit worrying about that car back there and give me the rest of it? That’s only a delivery truck,” Nancy said.

“I guess you’re right,” Melody said. “Anyhow, it was also through Wightman that we got wind of the most daring plan we’ve ever encountered in the history of the Bureau: The country with which Hardane was working couldn’t furnish him with all the materials and equipment he needed to complete his experiments on the project—so they moved him over here.”

“To the United States?”

“Correct. And their espionage network, which is more extensive than you know, has one order and only one: Protect Hardane! Cover him at any cost. See that he works undisturbed with everything he needs at his command. And that’s what he’s doing right now—tonight—right under our noses. Max Hardane
Nancy Williams whistled softly. "Then he'll take this discovery back and they'll use it against any freedom-loving people who oppose them?"

"That is the general program."

They were in the open country now, skirting the town. Beyond them a peaceful countryside slept. Behind them the glare of city lights tinted the few new-formed clouds in the sky. The road over which they traveled appeared to be deserted.

"And Wightman," Nancy asked, "has no idea what this project really is?"

"No," Melody said. "As a source of information Wightman has dried up completely. He says that he knows nothing more, but somehow I get the idea that he's scared of something. I think they've gotten at him and shut him up."

Nancy was tapping a cigarette on a bright fingernail. She lit it and placed it between Melody's tight lips. "What progress has Frank Butler made?" she asked.

"Not too much. Frank cracked the fringes of their espionage as an all-around thug and muscle-man under the name of Acey Davis. Washington built him a pretty good background and turned him loose hoping he could wriggle his way up to Hardane.

"I've been his contact man for three months now and the picture's pretty bleak. He's been quartered at a downtown hotel with four thugs who haven't done much of anything but wait. They seem to be reservists of some sort."

"But who gives them their orders?"

"Some jerk named Kurt who gets his in turn from a man named Welton Walker, a strictly suave gent. But whether either of them know where Max Hardane really is—" Melody shrugged. "Tonight he told me—" He stopped again tensed and said, "Do you see what I see? A car back there without lights."

Nancy flashed a look into the mirror. Then her head was snapped sharply as the small sedan in which they were riding, leaped forward like a startled antelope.

At the same time the headlights flared up on the car behind.

"Hang on baby," Melody said. "I was a damn fool. I got too far from town and now we're pointed in the wrong direction."

The needle climbed to sixty, seventy, seventy-five. The road was like a black ribbon unwinding through a flame of headlights. The car behind came on slowly. Then, for a seemingly endless stretch it seemed to make no perceptible gain.

Tony Melody frowned. The car hung some three hundred yards back as though it were being pulled along by an invisible rope. What was the angle? He held the road that pierced the night in a straight line, wondering about a chase car not equipped to do more than seventy-five.

Then the headlights died, the motor-roar faded, and they were alone.

Melody shook his head. "That doesn't make sense," he muttered.

"Probably some college kid trying out a new speedometer. You were telling me what Frank Butler found out."

"He thinks that Hardane is working in a place they call The Pit. He's heard it referred to several times, but he's never been there and he doesn't know where it is. Also he says the big project has something to do with food. But he was pretty vague on that."

Tony made a left turn, swinging on a wide arc back toward the city.

The blonde dream by his side wrinkled her pretty nose. "Not much to report for all the risk he took."

"That wasn't his main reason for—Look out! Down baby, down!"

A HANDFUL of slugs clipped through the rear window leaving round holes and delicate traceries in the glass. They
fanned on through the windshield as Melody smashed down on the gas and cursed. He'd been a prize sucker. Thinking all was well while he'd been herded along like a cow to slaughter. A side road loomed and Tony took the turn on two wheels.

Crouched on the floor boards where Tony had shoved her, Nancy raised a white scared face to the FBI agent. "Someone's mad at us," she chattered. "Where the——"

"You're jumping baby," Tony yelled. "Hit the dirt and call me when you get back to town. Call me at home."

The pursuing car was only a pair of headlights far behind, but it was on the chase again and coming fast.

"How will I know if you come out all right?" Nancy asked tremulously.

Tony braked the car and pushed open the far door. "If I answer the phone, I made it," he barked savagely. "Get going."

"Goo—goodbye, love," Nancy called and was already half out of the car.

The gravel road was slightly graded and was bordered by loose earth that held moisture from a recent rain. Nancy hit the mud in a swan dive and slid down into water and high weeds on her belly. She'd be a mess no doubt, but he knew she'd be safe.

He gunned the light car and felt it leap forward under him. But it was too slow to walk away from the big job behind. The headlights grew bright enough to read by and the road stretched endlessly ahead with no intersections showing. He cursed at his helplessness and knew that he too would have to jump for it.

He chose section of road bounded on the left by a corn field, braked the car and dived out into the encompassing night. He had achieved the shelter of the murmuring corn when the big sedan pulled up and spewed a half dozen black forms into the road.

Safely beyond view, Tony Melody hesitated, looking back. Possibly they'd give up now. After all it was a dark night with the moon gone and a man could be pretty small in a corn field.

But they had no intention of giving up. They had come equipped for just such an emergency. Tony ducked back into the field as six high powered flashlights bit through the darkness. Each was capable of throwing a clear beam some two hundred yards. Tony melted back into the corn field as five of the six fanned out in a semi-circle and came forward like silent grim hounds after a cornered fox.

There was a breeze that covered the sound of Tony's movements. For that he was thankful. But he soon found that his pursuers were far from being amateur. Neither were they the ordinary garden variety of thugs. They worked as a group, closing in with the methodical thoroughness of a crack mop-up squad.

And the thought came to him as he moved like a ballet dancer from row to row dodging the fatal lights: This is war. Here in a peace-time world, with people sleeping in their beds all around on the dark countryside—this is war. This is a battle for survival with no holds barred.

He thought of Frank Butler and a lump came in his throat. All he could wish for Frank now was that it had been a quick, clean death. None of their devilish tricks, he hoped. Just a quick straight bullet.

He wondered where Franky had made his mistake. They'd evidently seen through the drunk act at the bar, but it was more than that and it went back farther. And one thing was certain:

They weren't sure.

They could kill Frank and they could kill Tony Melody there in the corn field under the moon, but still they couldn't be sure. Frank would have seen to that. That was the unwritten law of the FBI. Stub your toe if you must. A bullet in the brain was one of the calculated risks. But leave the field clean for the next man. Never
let them be sure they'd killed an FBI man.

On Tony Melody's body they would find a wallet with a few pictures of people they could never locate; a card telling them that a guy named Wallace Crane belonged to the YMCA; another proving that Crane had a right to drive the car that was registered in his name.

That was all. No gun. Nothing an ordinary working stiff wouldn't carry. They could suspect until their ears wilted, but they could never be sure.

Not until a man got through and Uncle lowered the big beam could they ever be sure that they'd been watched by the FBI.

They were clever though. Clever as hell. They would have to be to have caught up with Frank Butler.

The trapped FBI agent smiled grimly. Before long he might be able to ask Frank personally how that had happened.

Then a light flared not twenty feet away. Tony Melody crouched there like a sitting duck—waiting.

CHAPTER TWO

Lady in the Mud

NANCY WILLIAMS knew exactly how a toboggan feels sliding down a hill. Only this wasn't clean white snow. It was gummy, sloppy mud in her ears and nose, and ice-cold water soaking every square inch of her beautiful body.

She spat out a mouthful of mud and said: "D-d-d-darn! D-double damn! He's a great guy, b-but he's not worth this!"

Then the ground began vibrating and lights bloomed up as bright as day. She breathed a small prayer and knelt motionless in the water and the weeds.

It seemed that she must stand out in the glare of those headlights like the Washington Monument at high noon, but the occupants of the big black sedan were evidently all stone blind because the car roared on down the road.

Nancy waited until she had counted to one hundred and then pulled herself up out of the slime. She clawed her way up the incline and stood shivering and miserable in the darkness on the lonely gravel road, with only the company of her chattering teeth.

"Let the big strong men fight the invisible war," she whimpered. "Me—I'm cold and I'm scared and I want to go home."

As though in answer to her plea a second car turned into the gravel road up at the main turnpike. Nancy wafted a prayer of gratitude to her guardian angel and started trotting in that direction. Then she stopped trotting with a moan of pain as she realized that her shoes were gone and the gravel was cutting into her bare feet. She stood and waited as the car made its leisurely way toward her.

As the headlights picked her out the car came to a halt with a scream of brakes. It was as though the action were instinctive of the car itself and that it has stopped of its own accord. Then it picked up speed and came on and pulled to a halt beside her.

A side-spot swung around and poured yellow light over her. A well dressed man leaped from the car, his face a picture of amazement.

The man's voice broke through his amazement. "Great heavens! Was there an accident? I see no car!"

For an answer he got a rattling of Nancy's teeth. He said, "Get in my car, madam—quickly! Are—are there any more—?"

"I'm the only one," Nancy said.

"Get in—get in, child," the man urged. "Don't mind the cushions. They can be cleaned."

Nancy took him at his word and dived, water, mud and all, into the warm front seat. She sat back with a sigh. The man circled the car and slid in beside her, seemingly not worried in the least that
Nancy smeared the whole side of his expensive top coat with mud. He threw the car into reverse and began nudging it around in the narrow road.

"By the way, my dear," he asked gently, "who are you?"

"I'm Nancy Williams and you're—you're an angel to turn up this way."

"What on earth happened?"

Nancy combed her mind frantically, searching for a lie—a convincing lie. "I was riding with a fellow and he got fresh."

"He certainly must have. Did he take you out and dunkt you in the mud?"

"No—I jumped out of the car and I took too long a jump and landed off the road. I slid."

Suddenly the man threw back his head and roared with laughter. Oddly enough, Nancy wasn't offended. I guess I tell a pretty good lie, she thought.

"I'm sorry," he gasped. "Forgive me. I was very rude, but—well, you should see yourself."

"I can feel myself. That's enough. If it wouldn't be too far out of your way to take me home—"

"I've got a better idea. I've just come from a visit with my mother. It's only about four miles from here. I'll take you back there first and let you clean up. You'd never live it down going home this way."

"It's awfully nice of you."

"You should be more careful in your choice of boy friends."

Suddenly she wanted to blurt out the truth. She wanted to tell this man, whoever he was, that Tony was up that road somewhere, possibly being killed by a bunch of thugs. She wanted to tell him that Tony was in trouble and to call help. She opened her mouth to speak. Then she bit her lip and remained mute.

She looked up as her rescuer broke the warm silence. Swinging the car into a brightly lighted gas station, he said:

"I'll get out and phone mother so she can have some things ready. Won't be a minute." He left the car and walked briskly toward the station waiting room.

Inside, still smiling, he entered a booth and closed the door. He dialed and waited, humming a little tune. Then:

"Kurt?—This is Welton Walker—Listen—I've got the girl—Yes—real stroke of luck—I was following up to see that everything went right and I found her in a mud puddle—That's right—I'm glad it happened this way as I'd rather have the girl alive for questioning—Hmmm—What about The Pit?—Think not?—Okay, I'll bring her right to The Project—Seeing that other one might loosen her tongue if she's stubborn—The Wallace character?—He's no doubt dead by now—Of course he was an agent—See you."

He hung up and stood for a moment chuckling over the absurd spectacle of the mud-covered Nancy. Then he left the building, smiled pleasantly at the attendant, and entered his car.

TONY MELODY, crouching between two rows of corn saw the light grow brighter until the reflection outlined the figure holding the high-powered torch. It was a solid, stocky figure in what looked like a trench coat. The man was moving along toward Melody in the next row. The light swung back and forth.

As Melody crouched he saw the ugly automatic clutched in the man's hand.

The man marched stolidly along, a cog in a machine, filling his niche, a part of a relentless unit. Melody braced his toes against the ground.

The FBI agent sprang like shot released from a spring. His left arm went around the man's neck cutting off the scream rising in the thick throat. Only a gurgle passed the man's lips and Tony's right fist closed over the gun hand. He squeezed his thumb in behind the hammer and gritted his teeth as the metal head pinched down and cut into his flesh to the bone.
The light now. Flopping all over the sky, it would act as a signal and bring help on the run. Tony raised one knee and brought the man crashing down on his back in the soft earth with his gun arm locked back under his helpless body. Then he wrenched the flash free and set it so that it poured a steady beam off through the corn.

Melody’s knees held the man helpless and his fingers dug into his writhing throat.

The man’s body was a mass of pitching, writhing desperation. The will to live; the fight to survive. The fact that he was breaking his own arm at the socket did not lessen his struggle.

Then Melody the man became subordinate to Melody the FBI agent. His fingers loosened. His right hand became a fist that traveled a scant distance and smashed the man into unconsciousness.

Melody leaned back, breathing deeply. He couldn’t go out of character. Wallace Crane who belonged to the YMCA and was an ordinary guy might run from a strange car at night; he might hide in a cornfield and he might knock a man down to escape. But he wouldn’t kill a man with his bare hands. He wouldn’t know how.

Never let them know. Keep it clean for the next man. But he could take the automatic; any average man might do that, in such a fix. He pocketed it and moved like a shadow through the gap he’d made by felling the gunman. It gave him a clear exit from danger. They would come together, the separate units of that machine and find only an unconscious cog stretched out on the ground.

Melody ran south through the darkness. He’d gone some hundred yards toward where he’d dropped Nancy, when a thought struck him. He skidded to a halt and stood motionless.

Opportunity lay back there in the road. The kind Frank Butler made for himself, but the kind Tony Melody could get only by sheer luck. A chance to accomplish what the entire FBI had been attempting for months. The chance of a lifetime.

Tony left the corn field, crawled up the incline to the road, and moved back toward the red tail-light of the black sedan.

He approached the car on the soft shoulder of the road, moving like an uneasy shadow. Twenty feet from his objective, he stopped and stood crouching.

The man by the car seemed off-guard, relaxed. He stood wide-legged with his back to Melody’s approach, watching the wands of light bobbing around in the corn field. His hands were clasped behind his back.

Tony Melody eased the automatic from his pocket, took three careful steps forward—a fourth—a fifth. Infinite care went into each one. He held his breath until his lungs were hot inside his chest. Then he was there, wondering why the guard’s instinct didn’t warn him of the danger.

Melody’s gun barrel struck with a precision born of long practice. The guard looked care-free and peaceful stretched out on the wet ground.

At that moment a gabble of disappointment hit Tony’s ears. The racket floated in from the spot where four flash beams had converged in the corn field. There was the sound of foreign oaths and general consternation. Melody grinned as he turned toward the car. The beams were already pushing toward the road.

He was hoping for one small break and he got it. The luggage compartment was unlocked and empty. Inside he found plenty of room for one man to crouch down in comparative comfort. He brought his knees up under his chin and braced one foot against the door to keep it from slamming shut in case the car hit a bump. The noise of a slamming door would no doubt bring an investigation.

Melody was fully aware of the risks he was taking. He might be discovered im-
mediately. If one of the thugs noticed that the door handle was horizontal instead of perpendicular, he was through. Possibly they'd find use for the space back there.

Then too, for all the risk, he might achieve nothing. Maybe the car would be left in a place far from the one he sought. Still, the possibilities of it happening otherwise, he thought, were well worth the chance.

Tony lay waiting. With luck, they would think he'd knocked the second man out to take the car, and then fled when he heard them coming. Then there were muffled sounds outside. Exclamations. Footsteps came close, paused. Melody held his breath. Had someone already spotted the door handle? Then the crunching sounds went on around the car and he breathed again.

The vehicle sagged from added weight. The motor caught and rumbled. The exhaust roared. The car was in motion.

"Wish me luck, Frank," Melody whispered. "I'll be needing a lot more of it than you had."

**For** what seemed like an age, the car rolled monotonously forward. To Melody, wondering about the end of the trip, the crawling minutes were maddening. The sedan turned corners, stopped for lights, and conducted itself like a law-abiding conveyance. There were rising and falling sounds of other cars on the road. Tony decided that time had stopped passing and that this would go on forever.

After an eon had faded, a feeling of isolation crept over him. He felt that they were moving through a deserted area. The road had grown more irregular and the sounds of outside traffic had ceased. He'd long since lost his sense of direction and made no effort to estimate either compass points or distance traveled.

Instead he gave his mind over to mulling the whole general problem. Two facets of it were uppermost in his thoughts:

*What was the gimmick? What was the secret beside which the atom bomb paled into insignificance? What the hell were they looking for?*

Frank had said that it had to do with food. That was the first tip they'd had, but what good was it? For all that indicated, Max Hardane could be making a new kind of chocolate cake.

Tony Melody bumped the idea about in his mind. There was something nagging him back there; a wisp of recollection that floated in his memory and then solidified into a positive picture. An article he'd read in a national magazine. That was it! About food and the world. Snatches of it came back clearly:

Millions of human beings, born and yet to be born, face starvation... The food producing resources of the world are being rapidly depleted... The population of the world is increasing by leaps and bounds. The time is fast approaching when, for each person who is fed, two must stand by and starve.

Tony Melody's mind staggered under the implication of his thinking. The answer was apparent now, and it didn't take a brilliant intellect to figure it out. Franky had known. He hadn't been vague about the food angle at all.

He'd just been pressed for time and had done the best he could with the seconds he'd had lying there on the dance floor. He'd said that it was bigger than the atom bomb, hadn't he?

Tony visualized it and sweat broke over his body. Max Hardane, the chemical genius devises a way to limitlessly augment the world's food supply through the magic of chemistry. The dream of mankind come true. Food as abundant and plentiful as the air we breathe or the water we drink. Wonderful! Utopia!

**But.**

Hardane takes his secret to a foreign power and the word goes out: Come to
us, all you who are hungry and we will give you food—in exchange for your freedom. The nation with an unending food supply would rule the world.

The atom bomb? Pah! You can’t kill every human being. But if you could feed every human being!

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, that was what Max Hardane had within his grasp.

Tony Melody tried to quiet the upheaval in his mind. Now he understood why these enemies within were so relentless in their operations. What did his life, or Frank’s, or anyone else’s mean to them in this daring move for world domination?

Then Tony’s mind slipped to the second thing that had been bothering him. The man James Wightman. He had given the FBI word of this tremendous thing. He’d proved himself a good citizen by this deed.

Then he’d closed up like a tavern on election day. His excuse was that his sources of information had dried up. Did Wightman really know what Max Hardane was doing? He’d claimed not. Because of his clean record, he’d have to be given the benefit of the doubt.

Tony Melody had forgotten time and place. Now he was brought abruptly back to the present as the car tilted forward and seemed to be sliding from under him. It crept along in low as though the going were difficult.

The car was going down a steep incline. That was it. Hell lies in this direction, Tony thought grimly. Maybe they’re in league with Satan and he’s letting them use a section of the seventh circle. It would be an apt place for the development of this hellish scheme.

The sedan continued to descend until Tony felt that they must be below every known level in the nation. Then he realized that his dark, cramped quarters no doubt magnified the trip in his mind.

Finally the car leveled away and traversed a stretch of bumpy terrain. It came to a grinding halt as though its bones ached and it was glad to be home.

Inside the stuffy luggage compartment, Tony remembered that Frank Butler had referred to The Pit. And they’d been going down—down—down. He felt a giddy sense of elation.

But this feeling turned suddenly to one of heart-jerking fear. The car had lost its burden of bodies, and footsteps were resounding in some large, echoing place. One set had come close to the rear of the car and stopped.

The cause of their being—whoever he was—gave forth some words. Tony could get only the growling tone of the voice. Then there was a hand on the compartment handle. The door was lifted.

But only a few inches, before it was slammed down again and the handle turned with a grating noise.

The sound of multiple footsteps rapidly diminished, then ceased altogether.

And Tony Melody was left there in the silence—securely locked in the luggage compartment of the black sedan.

CHAPTER THREE

This Way to Hell

THERE was a light, brighter by far than the sun—a piercing ball of fire—and Nancy Williams had been staring into it for hours. A man with great coarse hands was holding her head so that she had to stare into the light.

In the haze beyond the rim of the light were three other men. She couldn’t see them now, but she remembered them. The one with the bulbous nose had scissors for eyes.

The other man—sallow faced—had but one expression, a sad one. He used it all the time. When he spoke it was through lips that scarcely moved.

And Welton Walker. Walker stayed ever in the background to come forward
at times like the gentleman he was. Always with words of comfort:

"Look—she's taken all she can stand. Give me that water. A glass of water, Miss Williams?"

"For heaven's sake, Kurt! Give the girl a rest from that light!"

Then he'd fade to become part of the background and the questioning would go on:

"This gentleman friend of yours—this Wallace Crane. What did you say he did for a living?"

"For the fiftieth time—he's a bookkeeper."

"But you don't know where he works. Isn't it strange that a girl doesn't know where her gentleman friend works?"

"No, it isn't strange. I met him at a relative's house and I've only been out with him once before. He didn't tell me where he worked and I didn't ask him."

That devilish light! Why didn't they take that light away?

"If he is only a bookkeeper with nothing to hide, then why did he run away from our car?"

"I told you! It was late at night on a country road and someone shot at us. Wouldn't you run if someone was shooting at you?"

"What we would do is no concern of yours. What is your gentleman friend's real name? What is his real occupation?"

"Wallace Crane—bookkeeper—Wallace Crane — bookkeeper — bookkeeper —"

A white blur and faces dimly seen and far away. The light fading.

A lazy voice; "Boys! Use your heads. Take it easy. She's passing out on you."


"I didn't tell—I didn't tell." Nancy's voice in the beautiful curve of Nancy's throat.

There was a time of uneasy tossing, of fear and swirling phantoms. Then the light again, beating into her eyes and Nancy stifled a low moan as she became fully awake.

But the light was only the sun flooding in through a large window beside her bed. She looked slowly around her. This was the place they'd brought her originally—the room where she'd been given clothing and a hot drink. Then they'd come and taken her to the strong light and the questioning men.

As she swung her feet to the floor, she was jerked up sharply by a loud hissing noise. She stiffened and whirled.

The woman who had made the hissing sound was crouched on a chair in a far corner of the room. She sat with her feet twisted into the chair rungs and in her arms was a blanket bunched and folded into a bundle. The woman's hair was stringy and uncombed. Her face had obviously been pretty at some time, but now her eyes changed all that. They were glazed, lifeless eyes that stood wide and expressionless in her white face.

The eyes walled at Nancy and the woman repeated the hissing sound: "Shhh—shhh. You'll wake the baby. He sleeps poorly, the darling. If you wake him I'll have a hard time quieting him again."

Her lips made a crooning sound and she rocked back and forth in an exaggerated rhythm. Then her face lighted around the dead eyes. "Would you like to see my baby?" she asked.

Nancy slid from the bed and came forward slowly. What manner of nightmare was this? Bright lights and brutal men and vacant-eyed women rocking babies. She stopped in front of the woman and leaned forward almost fearfully, but she could see nothing but the tightly wadded blanket.

The woman's eagerness was pitiful in its intensity. She held the bundle forth at
arm's length and searched Nancy's face for signs of approval.

"He's a pretty baby," she crooned. "Such a beautiful child."

A slow, creeping chill oozed up Nancy's back to tickle the hair-roots at the nape of her neck. Her mouth and throat seemed frozen. Then she somehow knew that she should speak to this creature, say something—anything. "How old is your baby?" she asked, scarcely hearing her own words.

"He's going on four," the woman replied with serious gravity. "But this is the way I remember him. Just like this—so pink and rosy."

Suddenly, with the utter inconsistency of the mentally unbalanced, the woman looked down at the rolled blanket as though she'd never seen it before. Taking its edge in both hands, she let it spill to the floor and lie flat and empty across her knees;

"No baby. Nothing at all. I wonder what they did with—?" She raised her head and turned wide tortured eyes on Nancy.

The blonde girl grasped at her own reeling mind. She rushed to the window, threw it open. Where was she? Where was this place of nightmares?

It was high up in a tall building—a lake front building, and Nancy was looking out of a window on the lake front side. Away in all directions stretched a great expanse of blue water. Directly below, far down, was a narrow, roofed shed between the building and the lake—loading docks, no doubt.

And no sign of life anywhere. Screams would be fruitless. She was too high up to pierce the roof of those loading docks with her voice.

Then she realized where she was and the shock of it numbed her brain. She knew this building! But it didn't make sense. It tied in with nothing Tony Melody had told her about the case. Why Tony was so far off the track that—

Another thought struck her. A madwoman imprisoned in this high room with an unlocked window. An invitation to suicide? She whirled and looked closely at her companion. Then she saw it. The thin chain from the woman's ankle to the link in the wall at the head of the second bed the room housed.

Chained like an animal!

Impulsively, Nancy ran to the woman who was now standing lifelessly by the bed. She threw her arms around the creature in a gesture of instinctive pity;

"You poor thing! Who are you? What have they done to you? How did they drive you mad?"

The woman melted into Nancy's arms and burst into what appeared to be sane, wholesome tears. Nancy held her silently, letting her cry until it seemed she should be empty of grief.

Then she gently raised the woman's head, hoping to find some gleam of reason in her eyes.

There was only the blank empty look. "My baby," the woman said. "Did I show you my baby?"

The clicking of a key in the door brought Nancy to her feet. She whirled to face the door, completely at bay, waiting.

The door opened slowly and Nancy saw the bulbous nose and leering eyes of one of her late tormentors.

He closed the door behind him and Nancy saw the ugly looking automatic clutched in his hand.

The madwoman stood there trembling. Nancy could feel the terror radiating from her thin body. Slowly Nancy backed toward the window as she racked her brain. What was it they'd called him? Kurt—Kurt, that was it.

She said, "Hello, Kurt."

The voice was thick, guttural. "Hello, beautiful." The leer deepened.

Suddenly the madwoman's tipsy brain pushed her into action. Picking up the
blanket, she wadded it into a ball in her arms and approached the man called Kurt. “My baby,” she said eagerly. “Have you seen it?”

Kurt scowled as the woman stepped into his path. Then, without breaking his slow stride, he hit her viciously, with the back of his hand. Her scream was sharp as she reeled across the room and fell across the bed.

At sight of the blow, Nancy seemed to hear a dull roaring in her head. A strange red feeling rolled over her like a fog. It was as though her mind were slamming at the walls of her skull, seeking escape. Was this anger? She wondered in an odd impersonal way. Or was it terror? She didn’t know and it didn’t seem important.

Kurt saw the change come over her as he stopped six feet away. He drank in the smile on her face—saw it twist the red lips. He came toward her.

Her arms were smooth and brown—and very strong. The hands grasped the lapels of his jacket. Her legs furnished pivotal strength and leverage that shot Kurt over the sleek hip like a hurled log—straight toward the open window.

He died on the narrow dock roof thirty-three floors below.

Nancy stood swaying, her eyes tightly closed. She fought the sudden sickness in her stomach, staggered to the bed and fell across it.

“I’ve killed a man,” she whispered. Her rage was ashes now, and the words loomed in her mind. “I’ve killed a man—I’ve killed. I’m a killer.”

She gritted her teeth. Then there was a thin voice in her ear—timid, child-like. “Have you seen my baby? He’s very cute.”

TONY MELODY had long-since parted with any sense of caution. What lay beyond the steel shell of the luggage compartment he did not know. Death possibly—but most certainly death lay inside. He had been kicking the walls, at intervals, for a long long time. And with no results whatever except sore legs.

Evidently the area in which the car had been parked was entirely deserted. He slammed the heels of his hands against the steel and knew the sound would carry for quite a distance outside.

He beat his shoes against the car wall in a staccato of rage. This time the noise brought results.

Footsteps outside. But pattering steps that approached, hesitated and stopped. Melody banged again and the steps pattered swiftly away as if in fright. Tony lay back in despair.

But soon there was a soft scuffling noise, hesitant. It came closer and the door handle squeaked slightly above high-pitched whisperings. Then the handle turned full and the door was lifted.

Automatic ready, Tony Melody pushed the accursed thing up on its brace and rolled to a sitting position. Then he sat staring, turning his head in a slow circle. He quickly pocketed the gun.

The rear of the car was surrounded by a group of the dirtiest-faced urchins he had ever seen. They ranged from a two-year-old toddler, right up the line to a boy of possibly thirteen who stood a little to the fore of the semicircle. Tony counted heads. There were nine small fry, dirt-caked, raggedy, unkempt, ogling him as though he were a freak of some sort.

The thirteen-year-old spoke, “How’d you get in there, mister? You don’t belong in there.”

Melody grinned. “No, I guess I must have gone to sleep. Do you kids live around here?”

Tony blinked and looked around. He seemed to be at the bottom of a huge crater, and under a low-roofed shed with no walls. The car had been pulled close to one side of this crater. Some twenty feet to the left, Tony saw what appeared to be the entrance of a mine shaft.
He walked to the edge of the overhead structure and found that the walls arose sharply in a great circle around him.

Then he knew where he must be—in one of the old abandoned gravel pits far to the southwest of the city. Four great pock marks in the face of the earth which were marked as dangerous and shunned by all as death traps.

The thirteen-year-old had churned along in the rear of Tony’s swift strides and the rest of the urchins were strung out like bubbles in his wake.

“Sure, we live here,” the boy said. He pointed to a battered shack some three hundred yards away. “Over there in that house. Paw watches the old machinery for the company that used to dig gravel here. Who are you, mister?”

“I’m an inspector of the Company. Where’s your dad?”

“Paw and Maw went up the wall to town early this morning.” The boy eyed Tony suspiciously. “You an inspector? How come you was locked in the car?”

The other children had again encircled him. They stared in solemn silence. “Never mind that,” Tony said, easily. “Doesn’t anyone ever come here?”

The lad shook his head. “Only the men that bring the supplies.”

“What supplies?”

“The boxes. I guess they’re going to open the digging again.”

“Where did the men go who brought this car last night?”

“They took the other car I guess and went back to town. That’s what they always do.”

The sun was just coming over the east rim of the pit. Tony found that his watch had stopped, but he estimated the time to be about 10 a.m. He pointed back toward the shaft. “Is that where they put the supplies?”

The boy nodded. “But we ain’t allowed to go in there.”

“Is there anyone in there now?”

“I guess the man that guards the supplies is there. He never goes away.”

Tony fished some change from his pocket, held it out and poured it into the boy’s grubby palms. The youngster’s eyes grew big. “Gee! Thanks mister.”

“I’m going into the shaft now. You yell to me if anybody comes. Right?”

“Right.” The other children crowded around and stared at the money. Tony hurried back the way he’d come.

His thoughts were racing. So this was The Pit. A hideout certainly, but it was obviously not a place of activity. A supply depot? Could be. And clever too. What could better allay suspicion than a mob of unwashed kids?

CHAPTER FOUR

Satan’s Pit

As he approached the shaft entrance, he regarded it with some caution, but, mainly, with eagerness and elation. Win or lose, he was getting somewhere and whatever lay ahead was far better than the luggage compartment of the black sedan.

And the automatic was a comforting thing in his hand.

He passed the car, wondering about the switch of the previous night. Another sign of smooth system—caution. If that car had been spotted in the chase it wouldn’t trip them up hidden here in the gravel pit.

The shaft entrance was dark. The interior was quiet, ominous as he stepped inside. He found a bend some forty feet ahead by the simple process of banging into a dirt wall. Turning, he saw slits of light.

It was a door and light came from above and below it. Tony gripped the automatic. This was it. If the kid had been right about the guard, he might have a chance. If the place was full—curtains. He searched for the knob, turned it, found it
unlocked. He cautiously pushed in the door.

It was as though touching it had set off the sounds within. There was a sharp crack and a bullet splintered the door jamb. Then Melody was inside, the automatic in his hand bucking as its roar shook dirt from the ceiling. The guard's gun dropped from his hand, and the thin, stooped man was stooping even lower, and falling forward until the red hole in his head was touching the dirt floor.

Melody swung about then to face Frank Butler. He was going to remember what he saw for years. And after the details faded, he would still see the outline of Butler from memory.

Frank was a blood encrusted ghost. He was leaning against the wall in the lighted room. He leaned there wearily, his body drooping as though he held it upright by sheer will power. He had gone through more than an ordinary man could go through and survive. As Melody moved toward him, Frank raised his head with great effort. His face was set in a fixed and terrible grin—a badge of defiance, a snarling, tooth-baring grin that said things that might have been all the famous quotations of fighting Americans. Then he fell with a crash across the body of the man Melody had just killed.

Tony was across the room, lifting him. Frank opened his eyes and grinned weakly. When he spoke, his voice was a thin whisper. "Good joke. They thought I—was—dead—left me for dead in there. Made out worse than I was. Crawled out. It took hours. Then he spotted me—came out to finish me. Where the hell you been?"

Tony's throat lumped. He said, "Take it easy. I'll get you out of here."

"I'll be okay, now. You—beat it. This is their arsenal and they're scared. Planning to pull out. The project is—Wightman Chemical. Get—going." The thick, forced whisper faded and died.

Frank had been staying conscious on his nerve, and the nerve had finally run out. Tony hesitated. Frank didn't look all right, and it wouldn't take too long to drag him out. Then Melody shrugged. It might be too long. Frank had been right; it was time for him to get going.

But he cursed deep down in his throat as he swung outward.

The reception room was pine panelled. It was on the fourteenth floor of the big lake shore Wightman Chemical Building. It had a thick brown carpet and all the proper accessories. Only one thing seemed out of place: the receptionist. No beautiful blonde, this, but an efficient looking young man.

The young man said, "No. I'm sorry. Mr. Wightman is not available to anyone, Mr. Wallace. If you'll state your business to me—"

Tony looked through the young man instead of at him. Tony didn't see the young man. He saw Frank with his nerve run out—beaten out. He took the .45 from his pocket and pointed it at the young man. "Let's go in and see," he said.

The young man's eyes widened. He got slowly to his feet.

"Keep your hands down," Tony said. "Lead the way. I'll follow."

The young man gulped—seemed to be calculating.

Tony said, "Look, a friend of mine has almost been killed. I'm in the mood to kill someone just for the hell of it. That someone might as well be you." He slid the safety catch on the gun and pointed it steadily.

"He's—he's not in there."

"Where is he?"

"Upstairs. Thirty-second floor. Up in the experimental labs."

"Experimental labs. That's interesting. Let's go. You walk out and I'll be right behind you. If you start a caper you won't be around to see how it finishes."
“There’s a private elevator.”
“All right. Let’s go.”

As the lift shot skyward Tony thought:
*I’m a hell of an agent. A strong-arm man, that’s me.*

They left the elevator on the thirty-second floor and the young man led Tony down a long hall flanked with frost-ed glass doors. The young man’s eyes darted about, but the place was deserted. No one came to his aid. Finally he stopped at a door and tapped lightly.

Tony said, “Drop that rod or I’ll blast you.” He spoke to the heavy faced youth who opened the door. The youth had a gun, but his arm was down and the gun pointed toward the floor. Melody’s arm was up.

The youth dropped his gun and backed away.

There was no continuity from here on. Only highlights that stood out over the rush of action. Men in the room. At least a half dozen. A slim, debonair man; a sallow faced sad looking man; and James Wightman seated in their midst.

One quick look at Wightman’s face left something to stand out in Tony’s memory. A big, bluff, executive type. That had been Wightman. But not now. A broken, dejected hulk.

A thickset gunman broke the spell—dived for his shoulder holster. Melody rammed a vicious fist into the back of the youth from the reception room. The youth skittered across the floor, hit the gunman head-on. They both went down.

One shot. Tony’s gun spitting once. A man near Wightman’s chair folding over his own stomach, pitching to the floor.

Tony’s voice, “Easy does it! Hands up high! Quick!”

To a man they obeyed slowly. All but Wightman. He sat in his chair staring straight ahead. A mind far away. Only a shell sitting there.

Footsteps coming closer in the hall. Tony moved swiftly to the left, bringing the door into gun range. Waiting. An action picture turned into a movie still.

Nancy Williams in the doorway. One of her brown hands held an ugly looking automatic. Her other arm was tight around the shoulders of a strange looking woman. A woman with flat dead eyes, who carried a rolled-up blanket.

A slim, beautiful Nancy. A strange, dead-eyed woman.

A strangled cry from James Wightman—a moan of anguish as he came up from his chair and moved with jerky steps toward the woman.

Just time for Tony Melody to yell, “Down, Nancy On the floor!”

Then hell broke loose. Guns flying into view. Tony’s first shot caught the debonair Welton Walker squarely in the chest.

A slug smashed into Tony’s shoulder and spun him around, bringing Nancy into range of his vision. She was down on her belly drawing a bead on the sallow faced man. Her gun thundered.

Wightman, oblivious of everything, holding the mad woman in his arms.

Then the place was magically full of men. New faces. Hard determined men. The SAC was there, twisting a gun from a hood’s hand with a quick turn of his wrist. The FBI boys herding cowed hoodlums into a group.

Tony getting to his feet. The SAC helping him with a rough jerk. “Through that door, maybe,” Tony said.

A big room beyond the door. A desk in the center. A man sitting stiffly upright at the desk. A slightly sardonic smile on the face of the man. But no movement.

The eyes stared straight ahead. The SAC touched Hardane’s shoulder and the great body tilted forward, pitched across the desk.

“Poison,” the SAC said. “Self inflicted.”
Then Tony was mumbling about Frank, while the SAC nodded. And Nancy was very close to him. He said, "I don't know, honey. Don't know what to say. I was a fool, risking your life."

Her smile was dreamy. "One kiss will even everything, honey. This is Nancy, remember? The gal who gets her men the hard way."

Tony Melody went down and out. Blackness, oblivion.

That night they picked four slugs out of his body.

* * *

Tony, his arm in a sling, stood before the SAC's desk. The SAC wasn't cordial. There was hostility in his stiff face.

The SAC said, "You're entitled to a run-down on the finish of the case. Any questions?"

"Wightman," Tony said. "I still can't figure the man—"

"Wightman won't be prosecuted," the SAC said. "It was a daring move on their part and he was under pressure after they separated him from his wife and kidnapped his three-year-old son. His mind wasn't his own anymore. His wife is recovering however, and your tip as to where we'd find the child was entirely accurate. Wightman picked his son out of that bunch of kids belonging to The Pit watchman who was, incidentally, their man. That was a clever move."

"How did you uncover the hideout, sir? I hadn't gotten through to you."

"No," the SAC replied with emphasis, "you hadn't. However, someone else got the call through."

"Nancy?" Tony felt a thrill.

The SAC's eyebrows went up. "Nancy? There is no woman involved in the case except Mrs. Wightman."

"The call came from Frank Butler. He crawled out, got a lift eventually, and used his head—which you didn't. He'll be out of the hospital in a month."

Tony grinned. "Yes, sir," he said.

The heat stayed in Tony's face but it dropped swiftly out of his mind. This was the SAC talking. Tony said, "Yes, sir."

"Two months," the SAC went on. Then his face softened and looked almost friendly as Tony turned toward the door. "I'd suggest you use that time in getting married. That is if you can find a girl stupid enough to—"

THE END
SHIV FOR YOUR SUPPER

I decided to move in if things got tough for her.

By HANK SEARLS

THE little bar off Union Square was crowded during the lunch hour, but when the big butter and egg men and their secretaries had finished drinking their lunches, Duke, who kept bar, and myself, a temporarily unemployed private detective, were left alone in the cigarette smoke.

Busted, and with drinks on the cuff, Private-op Jim Blair was angled into playing watchdog to a gambler’s playful wife.
Shiv for Your Supper

I wondered how many more drinks Duke’s cuff would hold. He didn’t seem worried, and I told myself that my company was worth more than mere liquor to Duke.

“Ever play the football pools?” he asked, handing me a yellow card of selections over the bar.

“Used to, until I noticed Johnny Picco riding around in a car while I was wearing out my shoes,” I said. “Does he still run those things?”


“He can afford to,” I said, swishing my ice around and hoping Duke would notice my empty glass. “Tony Driscoll’s his lawyer, and I do undercover work for Tony’s clients. The last time we got Johnny out of trouble we soaked him a grand. Never a murmur out of Johnny. A hell of a nice guy, for a gambler.”

The door swung open in a blaze of light and a slim, short man walked in. He waited until his eyes were accustomed to the dimly lit lounge and came over.

“Speak of the devil,” said Duke softly, and then, “Hello, Mr. Picco. Collecting for yourself today?”

“No, Duke,” said Johnny Picco.

“How’re they goin’?”

“Twenty-three bucks, Mr. Picco. Not bad so far.”

“Keep it all today, Duke. Last week was a good one.” Johnny sounded as if something were on his mind.

“Thanks, Mr. Picco. Thanks a lot.”

“Better you than Uncle Sam,” Johnny said, and turned to me.

“And how’s it with you, Jimmy?”

“I’m not starvin’, Johnny,” I lied. “And I take it you’re not either.”

“No,” said Johnny slowly, “not starvin’, Jim.”

He sat down on the stool next to mine and signalled for two drinks. Duke brought them and moved tactfully down to the other end of the bar.

“Tony Driscoll said I could find you here. That’s why I came down.”

“What can I do for you, Johnny?” I asked.

Johnny studied his drink for a while. Then he looked up and smiled grimly.

“It’s my wife, Jim. I’m worried.”

I had seen Johnny’s wife, a beautiful blonde. I figured if I had a wife like that I’d never have another worry in the world. On second thought, I guessed I might sweat just a little when she was out of sight.

“I think she’s playin’ around,” continued Johnny.

I felt sorry for him, but business is business.

“You want her tailed?”

“Yeah.”

“I can do it for you, but you want to be sure you’re goin’ to use the information in the divorce, because it’ll cost you dough.”

“If you find out anything, I’ll use it all right.” Johnny’s voice sounded strangely flat. I glanced at him and saw suddenly how he’d sewed up gambling in San Francisco. Behind the quiet, soft-spoken gambler was another harder Johnny with a glint in his gray eyes, a guy who looked as if he’d stop at nothing.

“OK,” I said, reaching for my notebook. “You can give me all the dope. What makes you think she’s running around?”

“Just stuff I hear around town.”

“When is she supposed to be playin’ tricks?”

“How would I know? You know what my hours are?”

“No.”

“Nine in the morning until three, four the next morning. Anybody tells you I’ve got a soft racket is nuts. Have to be in my office all day long—new outfit from L.A. trying to move in. Can’t trust any of my boys.”

If I had a wife like yours, buddy, I
thought, I'd hang around the old homestead, or hire a watchdog.

"Where do you live now?" I asked.
"Nob Hill Plaza."
"What number?"
"The penthouse."
"Any way I can get in without anybody knowing it?"
"You can have my key, if you want. The houseboy will let me in."
"The houseboy would know if I used it, too, wouldn't he?"
"Yeah, I guess so." Johnny thought a while. "If you can get up on the roof of the Regency Club, next door, you can climb the fire escape right up to my roof garden."
I jotted it down.
"Anybody in particular she's supposed to be goin' with?"
Johnny glanced up with the cold look in his eyes.

"Yeah. Roger Parks, a small-time actor down at the Market Theatre. He used to play the horses, and I introduced him to Ann at a cocktail party. They tell me he's been taking her to some of these gin mills down near Palo Alto."
"OK, Johnny. I guess that's all I need. I'll keep Tony informed, and you can contact him."

Johnny's fingers drummed on the bar. Finally he said:
"I don't want a divorce, Mike. If you find anything, I'll use it to run this guy out of town. If that doesn't work, I'll make him wish to hell it had."

"Yeah, I thought, and when the next actor comes to town, I'll be tailing your wife again."
"That's up to you. I'll start tonight."
I almost asked for an advance, and stopped as I saw Johnny reach for his wallet. He carelessly yanked a hundred dollar bill from a large family of the same and tossed it on the bar.
"Just to get you started right, Jim."

I waved nonchalantly as if I really didn't need it, but somehow it stuck to my hand and I put it away.

Johnny left and I had another drink, more or less to break the hundred. Then I drove up to Nob Hill and parked opposite Johnny's apartment house. It was a tall building, eighteen stories, and on top I could see the penthouse, about the size of a small country estate. I was glad I'd quit playing football pools.

I walked over and looked at the Regency Club next door. It was a men's club. I strolled up to the front door, and a doorman who must have voted for Washington stopped me. I flashed my badge and told him I was the fire inspector who had come to look at the roof. He passed me on to the elevator boy, a youth of about eighty summers, who took me as high as he could go and pointed to some stairs.

I came out on the roof of the club and found the fire escape, as Johnny had said. It looked like a cinch. I went back down to my car.

I smoked a pack of cigarettes and played the radio until the battery screamed in pain. Then I found the Owner's Manual in the glove compartment and tried to memorize page eight. After a while the rookie on the beat went by for the fourth time and stopped for a light. Tactfully he asked me what I was doing. I told him I was waiting to kidnap the mayor's daughter. He must have been a police school graduate, because he grinned and left.

Then a young punk in a zoot-suit strolled up and leaned against a light pole, a cigarette dangling from his lips. I tried to estimate where his shoulders ended and his padding began, and finally got tired of that.

I was looking at a worn-out map of Texas when I noticed activity across the street. First a convertible drove up to the door of the Nob Hill Plaza and a chauffeur got out and disappeared inside.
Then something blonde in a mink coat swished down the steps and climbed behind the wheel. The car floated away from the curb with the blonde vision driving, and was a block away before my ears stopped ringing and I realized I’d been staring at Johnny Picco’s wife.

My old buggy didn’t want to start, and I almost lost her in the Powell Street traffic. She stopped at the Hotel Clifton and a blond giant with a spoiled face stepped into the car. I looked at my watch and jotted down the time in my notebook. The cavalcade started up again and headed for Palo Alto.

The car swooped down the Bay Shore Highway and finally turned off at one of the little neon-lighted joints off the road. Ann Picco and Pretty Boy got out and walked in, holding hands like a couple at a high school dance. I waited ten minutes and followed them in.

The place was lousy with college kids and cheap chrome fixtures. The girls in sweaters were still buzzing like angry queen bees over Mrs. Picco’s mink coat. It was easy to see how Johnny had heard of his wife’s meanderings. She stood out like a diamond in a pawnshop window, even though she and Sir Galahad went into a dark booth in the rear of the dive.

I walked over to the juke box and invested a nickel while I cased the place. The booth next to them was empty. I slipped into the booth with my back to the partition and signalled for the waitress. She bounced over and took my order and I settled back to listen.

There was considerable talking in the next booth, but I couldn’t distinguish the words. I finished one drink, and then another, and decided that this was the kind of a job I liked.

In a little while I heard them moving around behind me and then they appeared on the tiny dance floor, Ann without her mink coat. I gulped and looked down at my drink. Without the coat she was even more beautiful than I remembered. I toyed with the idea of a worn-out private dick moving in and then remembered the look in Johnny Picco’s eyes. I was safer working for him than against him.

They danced two or three times, like a couple of professionals, and when they stopped some of the college kids clapped a little.

They came back to their table, both a little flushed, but the billing and the cooling had stopped. Their voices had gone up a couple of octaves and I could catch a word now and then. It was an argument, a drunken, juvenile sort of a fight.

“Ann,” I heard Parks say, in a low, passionate whisper, “let’s go back. Now!”

“Why, Roger, what for? We just got here.” Her voice was cool and a little amused.

“Let’s go, Ann.”

“I don’t see why you want to go. I’m having fun.”

Their voices dropped again and then I heard Parks call for the waitress. He paid the check and stood up.

“Come on, Ann. We’re leaving.”

I let them get a head start and paid my check. I caught up with them on the Bayshore Highway and followed them to Parks’ hotel. They stopped outside for five minutes while I pretended to be getting luggage out of my trunk compartment. I could see that the fight was still going on, and finally the car moved away again, with Roger Parks still aboard.

I told the anxious bellhop standing at the curb that I’d changed my mind and hopped back into my car. I lost them going up California Street, so I drove directly to the Nob Hill Plaza.

They were there already, and another conference seemed to be going on. Three times the door on his side of the car opened and the third time it stayed open.

“Tell him to shove off, baby,” I groaned. “Don’t let him go up there.
She let him go up.
I jumped out and crossed the street, heading for the Regency Club. The old guy was still on duty. I told him I wanted to check the wiring on the roof while the lights in the club were on. He believed me and I went to the roof and swung up the fire escape. It was a long way to the penthouse, and by the time I reached the top enough whiskey had flowed through my pores to float the Queen Mary. I poked my head over the rail.

I could see, through a maze of expensive porch furniture and potted trees, that a light in the penthouse was on. I flattened myself against the side of the penthouse and drew my head back far enough to see through one of the French windows.

Roger Parks was loafing on a couch. Ann was standing by a built-in bar mixing a drink. She was talking, but I couldn't hear a word. Finally she walked within range of the actor. He reached up and switched off the light, and as he did he grabbed her arm. I almost went in to break it up, and then I remembered what I was there for. Quietly I tried the French door and it opened a little.

Then Ann's voice floated out, cool and clear.
"Get out, Roger."
I couldn't hear Parks' reply, but I could hear a little scuffling going on. I cheered for Ann silently and decided to move in if things really got tough for her.
I heard her cross the room and then a door opened and closed.
"O K, sister," I whispered. "Nice try, but I guess you just don't have the stuff." I wanted a cigarette, or a drink, or both, and thought of what I'd have to tell Johnny, and shivered.

I WAITED five minutes without hearing a sound from inside. Once it seemed as if a door opened at the other end of the penhouse. Suddenly I heard a groan from the living room. It meant one thing. I shouldered through the door, groping for a light switch and stumbled over something soft and heavy. I knew what it was before I found the light.
He was lying in front of the couch, and a dark stain was spreading beneath him. A wicked looking knife lay beside him, the kind we prized in the Pacific. I felt his pulse and looked at his eyes and knew he'd made one pass too many.

I took a quick look through the apartment. The front door was open, and I was surprised, because I'd thought I heard it close. She wasn't there. I found the houseboy asleep in the servant's room, and decided not to wake him until I'd thought things over. I went back to the living room.

I called Tony Driscoll first. No one answered. I thought of leaving the body and going out the way I came but decided that Mrs. Picco was going to need a witness, and I was it. I called the cops, on the assumption that they'd be interested.

"Get up to the penthouse on the Nob Hill Plaza," I said, feeling dramatic as hell. "There's been a murder."

Next I tried to get hold of Johnny Picco. Nobody answered at his office. I looked at my watch. It was only 3:20 in the morning. I sat down and lit a cigarette and waited for the gendarmes.

I was just finishing the cigarette when Johnny Picco walked in. He saw the body on the floor and his jaw tightened, but otherwise he never changed expression.
"What happened?"
I stood up and walked over to the French doors and gazed at the lights in the bay.
"She killed him, Johnny."
"Why?"
"He was getting rough. She's OK, Johnny."

Johnny sighed like a man who's just put down a heavy suitcase.
"But she killed him? Why?"
“She was a little drunk, maybe, but technically it was self defense.”
Johnny began to pace the floor. Suddenly he stopped.
“Let’s get the body out of here. I can take care of it.”
I swung around.
“You’re crazy, Johnny. Tony Driscoll can get her off. I phoned the police.”
Johnny’s eyes glinted.
“I thought you were working for me.”
“I am and I’ll testify for your wife. But I’m not throwin’ my license away to keep your wife’s name out of the papers!”
“Where is she?”
I jerked my thumb toward the front door.
“ Took a powder,” I said.
Johnny seemed to think for a moment. Suddenly he stooped and picked up the knife.
“Hey, what’re you doin’?” I asked him.
“You’ll have your prints all over that thing.”
Johnny whipped out a handkerchief and began wiping the handle and the blade.
“My prints won’t be on it, Mike. And Ann’s won’t either.”
“What’s the point?” I asked as he tossed it back on the floor, and then a big cop stood in the door, with Symanski, of homicide, standing behind him.
“Who phoned the station?” asked the cop.
“I did,” Johnny said, and I felt a cold shiver go up my spine. I turned to him.
“What is this?” I asked, but I already knew what it was. I could almost smell the odor of a frame-up drifting across the room.
“I called you,” said Johnny to the cops.
“I came home and found this guy standin’ over the body.” He pointed to the corpse on the floor. Symanski peered in and then walked swiftly over and knelt by the body. He looked up.
“He’s dead, all right. Who is it?”
“A guy named Parks—Roger Parks,” Johnny said. “He was playin’ around with my wife. I hired this guy Blair to run him out of town. Looks like he took it in his head to kill him.”
Symanski whipped out his notebook.
“Let’s see. You’re Picco, aren’t you? Numbers game?”
“Bookmaker. And football pools,” said Johnny.
Symanski turned to me.
“What have you got to say, Blair? Is business so tough with you private eyes that you got to make like torpedoes?”
“ This, Symanski, is a cheap frame-up. That’s all I got to say. For further information, contact my lawyer, Tony Driscoll. In the meantime, you better start looking for a beautiful blonde named Ann Picco.”

“W E’LL handle the case by ourselves, thanks. You’re both under arrest. Is this the knife?” He took out the handkerchief and picked it up. Then he laid it tenderly on the table. He went to the phone and dialed.

“Joe? Send out the wagon and tell Doc to get up here. It’s murder, all right. Looks like Mike Blair, the private dick, did it, and maybe Johnny Picco is an accessory before the fact. Yeah, send out the press. Why not?”

I looked at Johnny. He was gazing at me, and his gray eyes didn’t waver a bit.
“You sure you don’t want to hang me right here?” I asked bitterly. “You paid your hundred bucks, you might as well get in on the necktie party.”

I wondered if I were kidding or not. I had a lot of faith in Tony Driscoll, but it already looked like a tough case to beat, and getting tougher all the time. Suddenly I decided that if I were going to live I’d better do something, and fast.
“Symanski,” I said, “let me talk to you outside.” I nodded toward the terrace.
“OK,” he said cheerfully. “Watch Picco, Murph.”
We walked through the French door and over to the rail.

"Johnny's wife did this, Symanski. I saw it. She and this guy Parks had a fight, she left to get the knife, evidently came back, stabbed him, and went out the front door. I was out here on the terrace."

Symanski laughed.

"Sure. And Johnny Picco is trying to protect his wife, who was running around with somebody else. You'd better think up a better one than that."

My heart sank. The story was weak, all right.

"Incidentally," asked Symanski, "How'd you get into the house?"

A nasty idea crept into my head and I knew it was now or never. I tensed.

"I climbed up the fire escape," I said innocently.

"Where?"

"Right in front of you."

Symanski leaned over the rail and peered into the darkness. I braced myself and let him have it with a looping overhand to the back of his head. There was a crack that was my knuckle breaking and then a clang like Big Ben striking 1 o'clock, as Symanski's forehead hit the top rung of the fire escape. He sank backwards, limp as a flour sack. I stretched him out so that he looked comfortable, took his gun, and climbed over the rail.

I went down a lot quicker than I'd come up, ran across the roof of the Regency Club, and sprinted down the stairs to the elevator. I leaned on the button. Several years passed. Finally the pointer above the door began to move like the hour hand on a clock, and then the door opened.

The doorman was running the elevator now. He asked me if the wiring on the roof was OK. I told him we might have to tear the whole club down.

As I passed out of the club I saw the Bush Street Precinct wagon drive up to the door of the Nob Hill and about a thousand cops jumped out. I waited until the first wave had passed and then walked quickly across the street to my car. I pulled out from the curb and was half way to the waterfront before I let off the emergency brake.

My knuckle began to throb and I knew it was broken and wondered if my neck would hurt as badly when they caught up with me.

I stopped at one of the little saloons down on the Embarcadero that stay open all night, and bought a straight shot.

I left the saloon and noticed a flop house across the street. I drove six blocks away, parked my car, and walked back. The old geezer at the desk glanced at me suspiciously, saw that I had a necktie on, and raised the price of a bed in the dormitory to fifty cents. I tossed four bits on the desk and he jerked his thumb toward the stairs.

"Two floors up—any bed with nobody in it—no smoking up there—you got to be out of the bed by ten or it's another fifty cents."

"Can I snore?" I asked, and climbed the stairs.

I found an empty bunk next to some wino who'd been drinking ethyl gasoline, from the smell, and flopped down on it without even taking off my clothes. The last thing I remember was taking out my wallet and slipping it under my pillow.

I WOKE up with somebody shaking me and grabbed for my wallet. It was an old hag with a face like King Kong, and it seemed she wanted to make the bed. I sat up. The biggest collection of bums I had ever seen were climbing out of their bunks, each with his own private hangover. I got out quick, but not before two of them tried to touch me for a dime for a cup of coffee.

I walked out of the flophouse into a blaze of sunlight. Cautiously I looked around. There were no cops in sight so
I headed for a lunch room up the street. I bought a paper and sat at the counter, ordered a cup of joe, and looked at the front page.

There I was, big as life. My first thought was that the picture didn’t do me justice, and then I looked at the mirror behind the counter and decided that whenever it had been taken, I’d been a lot handsomer. The growth of beard and the red eyes and the bags under them made a good enough disguise to get me by, and I gave up the idea of buying a shave.

I stepped over to the pay phone in the back of the joint and dialed Tony Driscoll’s apartment.

He answered himself, and seemed wide awake, so I knew something was up.

"Tony," I said, cupping the mouthpiece, "did you hear what happened?"

"Hear what happened? This place has been crawling with the boys in blue all night."

"I’m at North Beach," I lied, just in case the phone was tapped. "What’s the latest?"

"Can’t tell you much now. Picco’s sticking to his story. They can’t find his wife. What actually happened?"

"She killed Parks. Picco says I did it for pay. Looks as if she might plead self-defense if they find her. How about me?"

"Frankly, you’d better stay under cover. They have a terrific case against you, with Picco sticking his neck out as he has. Phone me if they pick you up. Otherwise call me tonight around eight. Do you have enough cash to get by?"

"Yeah. Your friend Picco was kind enough to give me an advance. That’ll look good, too, if it comes out in court."

I hung up and left for the saloon across the street. It was just opening up and the barkeep was sprinkling sawdust on the floor. I sat at the dark end of the bar and ordered a straight shot with a beer chaser. I passed the morning there very pleasantly, thinking of thirteen steps and a noose, and gas chambers, and a seat for one at San Quentin.

About noon the place started to fill up with longshoremen and sailors, and I pulled my hat farther down over my eyes. Two big stevedores next to me began discussing a football pool. I tried not to listen because I was a little tired of the subject.

When they went they left the selection card on the bar. It was green. I reached over and picked it up and a bell rang in my head. The last selection card I’d seen had been yellow.

I motioned to the barkeep.

"Who puts out this pool?"

He looked at me suspiciously and evidently decided that no plainclothesman would look as seedy as I did.

"Johnny Picco, the bookie, handled ’em until today. This mornin’ before I open up some new guy comes around, says Picco is out of business. He says he’s goin’ to pay twenty per cent to agents, so I take the cards. Whatta I care where the twenty per cent comes from?"

It was evidently the Los Angeles outfit Johnny had mentioned. How the hell they’d moved in in such a hurry I couldn’t figure. The morning paper probably hadn’t hit the street until around 5, and unless these guys had their cards already printed and waiting they couldn’t have distributed them that quickly.

On the other hand they wouldn’t have had them printed if they hadn’t known Johnny was going to be out of the way. Unless they had a fortune teller in the outfit they’d never have known he was going to be in jail.

I thought for a while and then moved to the phone. I turned to the classified section of the phone book and looked up print shops.

A HALF an hour later I was still calling print shops, and almost at the end of the list. My finger was raw from dial-
ing and I was ready to quit. I dialed the number of the HURRY-HURRY PRINTING SHOP, Calling Cards, Advertising, and a cheerful voice answered.

"Hurry-Hurry Print Shop, Calling Cards, Ad-

"Yeah, I know. What was the idea of changing the odds on the Stanford-U. C. L. A. game? You guys nuts? That could cost me plenty of dough."

I waited for the voice to ask me what the hell I was talking about.

"We didn't change the odds, Mr. Spade. I have the odds you gave me to print right here. Stanford and seven points."

"That so? OK, guess I made a mistake. Say, when did I give you that order?"

"Let's see. Day before yesterday, Mr. Spade. Anything else we can do for you?"

"No."

I hung up. It looked as if Mr. Spade, whoever he was, was clairvoyant. Or else he'd planned two days in advance that Johnny wasn't going to be around.

The light suddenly dawned. I motioned to the bartender again.

"Say," I said, "is this guy goin' to collect for the pool tonight?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"I got a little bar over in Berkeley. Maybe I might be able to do business with him."

"Well, he'll be in tonight," he repeated.

"Stick around."

I sat there all afternoon and well on into the evening. A grizzled old cop came in twice and looked the place over, and both times I almost climbed into my drink. About 11 o'clock the doors swung open and a young fellow in a well padded yellow sport jacket walked in and jerked his head at the barkeep. There was something familiar about him, but I was a little foggy and couldn't remember. The bartender went down and talked to him and I could feel them looking at me. Then the barkeep walked back and said:

"That guy is here now, if yuh wanna see him."

I strolled to the front of the bar.

"Torgus is my name," I said, sticking out my hand and trying to place the guy, "Pete Torgus. I own the Casa Rio Cocktail Lounge across the Bay. Thought we might do business."

The kid ignored my hand. "Yeah? Maybe we can. Come out to my car and I'll talk to you."

The bartender handed him a stack of selection cards and a lot of cash and we left. The kid got into a flashy convertible and I climbed in beside him.

"My name's Spade," he said.

Suddenly I remembered where I'd seen it before, and it was all I needed. I slid Symanski's gun out of my pocket and poked it at him under my arm.

"All right, sonny. Start drivin'."

His eyes shot to my face and he blinked.

"Look," he said, "If this is a stick-up, you're wastin' your time. I just started makin' the rounds, and all I got is what the barkeep in there gave me."

"I said start drivin'."

He started the car and pulled out.

"Head toward Twin Peaks," I told him.

"No, Sonny Boy, this is no stick-up. I'm one of Johnny Picco's boys, and you're goin' to pay us a little visit. Unless you start talkin' now."

"I wasn't cuttin' in on Johnny," he said quickly. "I read where he was in the jug, and I figured I'd take over until he got out, that's all."

"Yeah, you read it this mornin', so you had cards printed two days ago. And when you read it this mornin' you were plenty surprised, weren't you?"

"Whataya mean?"

"You were surprised because you thought you'd knocked Johnny off last night. Isn't that right, junior?"

"You're nuts."

"OK, if that's the way you feel. Tiny wanted to work you over anyway. Just
thought you might prefer to go to the cops and spring Johnny, instead of lettin' the boys play with you for a while. You're goin' to the cops anyway, you know.”

“Who's Tiny?”

WHERE you from? Never heard of Tiny Forbes? Brother, that guy can make a preacher swear he's been playin' the horses.

Sweat was glistening on the kid’s brow.

“What do you want to know?”

“I don’t want to know anything. It’s the cops that want to know. I know already. I know you were casin' Johnny's apartment house yesterday, because I saw you, standin’ there on the street, smokin’ a cigarette. I know you got up on the roof of the Regency Club next door and climbed the fire escape up to Johnny's terrace.

“I know you waited outside, behind the door, for Johnny and his wife to come home. I know you stabbed the guy you thought was Johnny, only it wasn’t Johnny, it was the guy his wife was playin’ around with. You know how I know?” I jabbed him with the gun. “I know because I was on the terrace too. I saw you,” I bluffed, wondering how we’d missed hearing each other on the terrace, but deciding that a private eye and a guy bent on murder could be pretty quiet when they had to. “Then I heard you leave the place by the front door, right after Mrs. Picco.”

“If you saw me, how come you didn’t do somethin’ about it?”

“Why should I? I work for Picco. If you want to kill some guy that’s playin’ around with Picco’s wife, what do I care? But when they put Johnny in the clink for it, that's different.”

“They ain’t tryin’ to nail Picco with it. The papers say they’re lookin’ for some private dick he hired.”

“They’ll nail Johnny too, if they can. But they can’t, because when Tiny gets through with you, you’re gonna sing, and sing loud.”

“Look,” he said hoarsely, “Reed sent me up from L. A. He’ll pay plenty if you let me go, and we won’t try cuttin’ in up here again. How’s that?”

“No soap,” I said. “Come on, give her the gas. What’re you waitin’ for?”

“OK,” he said in a hollow voice. “You guys won’t have to work me over. I’ll go to the cops. Where’s the station?”

We drove to the Bush Street station and I hauled him in. I asked for Symanski and he came out of his office in his shirt sleeves.

While the kid was talking I stepped to the phone and called Tony Driscoll. He was down before Symanski had the confession on paper. Tony looked worried until I gave him the big smile. Symanski stepped into his office and came out with Johnny Picco. Johnny seemed tired but otherwise OK. He looked at me and then at the floor.

“Sorry, Jim,” he said, “I—”

Sorry, he is, I thought. *Tries to pin a murder rap on me to save his wife, and he says he's sorry.*

“Forget it, Johnny,” I said. “I know how it is.”

“I guess that confession lets you out, Picco,” said Symanski, “but I’m putting the vice squad to work on your football pools, so you’ll probably be back to see us pretty soon.”

Johnny laughed and shrugged. Then Tony Driscoll stepped outside and motioned to someone in his car. She got out. It was Ann Picco.

“Thanks, Johnny,” she said simply.

“OK, honey. Staying home after this?” Her big blue eyes looked into Johnny’s and I wished somebody would look at me that way.

“Yes, Johnny,” she said. I wondered.
Mike Murray took a voluntary slay ride when trigger-happy Vito mixed his banditry with treason.

CHAPTER ONE

The Dead Return

MIKE knew he would find his man somewhere in this section sooner or later. Haste was imperative, but he couldn't help feeling a certain reluctance. So much depended on the first contact. Strack and the others must have been out of town on a job in the past few days.

Nobody had recognized Mike, although a few men had stared searchingly at him. This was not strange for Mike was slightly startled every time he looked at himself in the mirror. They could do wonders with that plastic surgery nowadays.

Strack liked to play pool so Mike had been haunting the poolrooms. Candy was more of a lady's man, and Vito went in for gambling. Strack was the one that counted, the old-timer of the trio, the big man since Mike Murray had been away.

Mike caught up with him at last, shooting straight pool at a far corner table in Angelo's, and he studied him through the smoke-hazed atmosphere. Strack was about forty, medium-sized, lean and hard, with thinning sandy hair and a keen sharp-featured face. A quiet relaxed calmly as-

* * *

"You aren't FBI," said Mike.
sured man, intent on the game, smoking a thin cigar. His clothes were well-tailored, expensive and conservative.

Strack looked as if he was doing all right for himself. He had always been a smart operator. There weren’t many racket guys like Strack, without a police record in all these years.

Mike waited until Strack finished playing, hung up the cue stick, and put on his double-breasted jacket. As Strack started out Mike stepped in front of him and saw Strack’s eyes widen and his face stiffen in surprise. Then Strack shook his head and moved to push on past, as if correcting a mistake in identity.

“Don’t you remember me, Stash?” asked Mike softly.

Strack turned back, staring and startled at the use of that old nickname. “Mike!” he murmured. “Is it really you, Mike?”

Mike smiled and held out his hand. “Sure, it’s me. Had my face lifted a little, that’s all.”

Strack shook hands wonderingly. “We heard you was dead, Mike.”

“The law thinks so too,” Mike said. “Where can we talk?”

“There’s no heat on you then,” Strack said. “Come on, Mike, there’s a bar in the other side.” He swore quietly. “I can’t get over this, kid. Thought I was seein’ a ghost, and then I noticed the straight nose.”

“I look better, don’t I?”

“You look different all right. Where you been hangin’ out?”

“On the Coast,” Mike said.

They stood at the untenanted end of the bar, saluted one another with the glasses, and drank slowly.

“What you plannin’ on doin’, Mike?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m out of touch here. I thought maybe you’d have somethin’ for me, Strack.”

“I always liked to work with you,” Strack said. “If it’s all right with the boys you’re in, Mike.”

“Who you got, Strack?”

“A couple of kids, I don’t think you’d know ‘em. Candliss and Sabataso. Pretty good boys if you keep ‘em in line. They’re apt to lose their heads.”

“What’s the pitch, Stash?” Mike asked, staring at the long ragged scar across the base of his left palm.

Strack looked down at the scarred hand and grinned in remembrance. “Should’ve had the doc fix that up too, Mike.”

“I suppose so,” Mike said. “But I went through enough with my face.”

Strack nodded. “Well, we’re playin’ the field mostly. We’ve been deliverin’ some goods once or twice a month. It pays pretty good and sometimes we pull a side job on the way. Kind of tame, Mike, not like the old days.”

“Nothin’ is,” Mike said. “But that’s all right with me. I don’t need so much excitement as I used to.”

Strack laughed. “Me neither, kid. Let’s go over to my place, Mike. I’ve got better liquor than this and the boys’ll be around later. We can talk it over.”

It was pleasant and comfortable in Strack’s well-furnished apartment, and the whiskey was superior. About midnight the other two dropped in and Strack introduced them to Mike. The younger men had heard of Mike Murray. Dead he had been something of a legendary figure, but alive they didn’t quite know whether to accept or reject him.

Candy Candliss, a handsome blond boy in extravagant clothes, carefree, reckless and happy-go-lucky, didn’t seem to care whether Mike joined them or not. Vito Sabataso, dark, sullen and moody, with bitter black eyes, ugly mouth, jutting nose and jaw, was inclined to resent Mike’s being taken into the group.

“A three-way split’s enough on our take,” Vito growled. “It ain’t runnin’ big enough to cut four ways.”

“It’ll run bigger,” Strack said. “Mike’s forgotten more than you jerks’ll ever learn,
and four men on a job are always better'n three."

"Guys get soft layin' around on the shelf," Vito said. "We been—"

Mike stood up with quick easy grace, the biggest man in the room, taller than Candy's six-foot height and wider than the stocky Vito, rangy and solid at once. "You think I'm soft, son?" he said quietly, his gray eyes cold and steady on Vito Sabataso.

"I didn't say you," Vito mumbled, shifting in his chair but not getting up.

"You'd better not," Mike said easily. Strack laughed. "I'll say you better not, Vito! You see that scar on Mike's left hand. He got that takin' a knife away from Big Charlie Kling. He just about made Kling eat that knife. I guess you've heard of Big Charlie, Vito."

"All right, forget it," muttered Vito. "Leave it lay."

"Sure," grinned Candliss. "Splash out another round of drinks, Strack."

Mike sat down again. "I'll earn my way, boys."

Strack was mixing drinks in the tall thin glasses. "You drink too much, Candy, especially of my liquor."

"When we movin' again, Strack?" Vito wanted to know.

"You two boys go out tomorrow and case that bank in Springville," Strack said. "Mike and I'll stick around and pick up the stuff here. Mike, you might as well move in with me, there's an extra bedroom."

"Tomorrow, Stash," said Mike. "I got a hotel room hired tonight."

Candliss and Sabataso left, shaking hands again with Mike before they went out. Candy boyish and friendly, Vito still sullen and smouldering. After talking for another half-hour Mike made his departure, flagging a cab to ride to the hotel. He'd probably have trouble with Vito Sabataso, but trouble had been his business for a long time, and with far tougher characters than this young punk could be.

Mike had nowhere to go except the hotel, nobody to meet outside, no telephone calls to make, nothing to arouse Sabataso's suspicions. He would go straight to his room. The one person he wanted to see was already waiting there for him.

IN THE morning Mike woke about 9 and got up leisurely. He would have preferred the privacy of this hotel room but it seemed wiser to accept Strack's hospitality. He brushed his teeth, shaved, showered, dressed in the brown gabardine with his Luger in a shoulder-holster in under the loose-draped jacket, and packed his two bags. Checking out of the hotel he took a cab to Strack's apartment house and carried the luggage in. Strack was just getting dressed and while he finished Mike unpacked.

When they left Strack carried a tan leather briefcase with a small bronze padlock on it and looked every inch the quiet prosperous business man in his slate-gray sharkskin. Nobody would have suspected that both men carried automatics under their left arms. They had breakfast in a coffee shop, lighting cigars over their second cups of coffee, and Strack spoke sparsely about picking up the goods they were delivering.

"You mean you don't know what you're carryin', Stash?" Mike asked in surprise.

Strack nodded soberly. "Sometimes I think it's just as well we don't. It must be dynamite, Mike. They lay about six grand on the line for every trip. This one'll bring ten because we got to go way up in New England. Up in our old bootleggin' territory, Mike."

"You always deliver to a different place?"

Strack nodded again. "Never twice the same." He glanced at his platinum wristwatch. "Time to be goin' kid."

"I can't figure it," Mike said as they went out into the street.
“Neither can I,” Strack said. “But it’s easy money.”

“Why take a chance hittin’ a bank then?”

Strack smiled. “The kids are like you and me used to be, Mike. They want more money, more excitement.”

They took a taxi to the station. Mike followed Strack to the bank of automatic lockers in one corner, where Strack inserted a dime, placed the briefcase in a locker, closed the door, and pocketed the key.

“Let’s have a drink,” Strack said, heading for the bar.

At the entrance a short man with thick-lensed glasses and a mustache stopped fumbling in his pocket and said; “Please, have you a match?”

“Sure,” Strack said, producing a book of matches.

The little man took it, lighted his cigarette, closed the folder and handed it back with a polite thank-you, and moved on into the crowd. In the bar they killed half-an-hour over their drinks and returned to the thronged lobby. Strack went to a different locker, opened it with the key he had received in exchange for his in the match booklet, and removed a tan briefcase identical to the one he had deposited.

“Neat,” Mike said.

“Yeah, and it’s always different,” Strack said. “I get instructions a day early. They never use the same place or the same man.”

“Hard to spot unless you were tailed awful close.”

Strack grinned. “I hope I’m never tailed that tight, Mike.”

“What now?”

“Now we have lunch,” Strack said. “Then we start drivin’ north. Tonight we meet the boys in Springville. Tomorrow, if things are right, we take that bank. After that we hit for the mountains.”

“Sometime they’ll try to collect that briefcase without payin’ off, Stash,” said Mike.

“If they do they’ll collect a bunch of bullets,” Strack said grimly. “That Vito’s hell with a machine gun.”

“Maybe that’s top secret stuff on atomic power we’re carryin’ for enemy agents,” Mike said thoughtfully.

Strack shrugged his immaculate shoulders. “The way I look at that it don’t matter much who’s got atomic power. If anybody starts usin’ it we’ll all wind up dead, so what the hell?”

“I guess you got somethin’ there,” Mike conceded.

When they came out of the bank Strack was waiting behind the wheel of a maroon car with the motor running. Mike and Candliss were carrying the canvas moneybags, while Vito Sabatasso covered them with the Thompson machine gun he had smuggled in under his topcoat. Strack was always nervous working the outside, and now his hands were sweating on the slender wheel and that familiar dryness was in his mouth, tightening his throat.

The clock on the dash said 10:03. Strack hoped that Vito wouldn’t blow and cut loose with that tommy gun. It was dangerous to always let Vito handle the Thompson, even if the guy was good with it. People on the sidewalk just stood and stared when they saw the gun, or ducked and ran for the nearest shelter.

Mike and Candy were in the back seat with the bags and Vito was on the curb looking around with the gun under his right arm, when Mike saw a blue uniform coming across the street on the run. If Vito had been inside they might have got away clean because the copper didn’t know what was going on, but Vito never missed a chance to show off a little and this time it gave the car away.

Mike saw pale fire spurt from the cop’s hand and heard the slugs screech into metal. Strack felt a numbing hammerblow shock his left arm, up near the shoulder, rocking him sideways against the cushion, and Mike thought: That does it. We’re
VITO had whirled into a crouch and was blasting away across the hood. The first blast caught the policeman and doubled him up, almost tearing him in two. Traffic had stopped and people were shouting and yelling hoarsely.

“Come on, you damn fool!” Strack snarled, crouching starkly at the wheel, his tailored left shoulder and sleeve dark with a spreading red stain. Vito swung into the front seat, teeth flashing white in his dark ugly face. Strack pulled the big sedan away from the curb, shifting swiftly and stepping on the gas, roaring out of there fast. Looking back Mike saw the crowd gathering around the dead officer.

“You all right to drive, Stash?” Mike asked leaning forward.

“I'll take her out of town,” Strack said through his teeth, driving with his right hand. Pain was beginning to wash through the numbness of his left arm in bright waves and the sunlit street shimmere before his eyes.


“I got him good,” said Vito.

“Yeah,” said Candy, shaking his blond head. “The whole country'll be out after us now.”

Strack whipped the machine down a right-hand sidestreet and through an intersection, wound it left and right and left again, taking the turns nicely and without slowing much. He could handle a car all right with one hand, but a glassy unreal brilliance was growing on everything in his eyes. Sweat came out on Strack's upper lip and forehead, and the bones of his lean face stood out sharper than ever.

“I guess it's broke,” Strack said. “It's givin' me hell now.”

There was no pursuit yet and Strack took it easier to avoid attracting attention. They left the northern outskirts of Spring- ville behind and branched onto a dirt road that led to the gravel pit where they had left the other car, a black sedan.

Strack got out swaying and sick, clinging to his left arm, the blood oozing out between his clenched fingers, his face looking drained and gaunt. They transferred the money and guns to the black car, and Mike helped Strack into the rear seat, while Candliss slid behind the wheel and Vito got in front beside him. They left the other car in the pit and rolled east on the gravel road that would bring them out on a main north-and-south highway.

The powerful black sedan was fully equipped for flight and Mike was digging out the first-aid kit while Strack struggled out of his blood-soaked gray coat. There was a large number of sandwiches, thermos bottles of coffee and ice-water, a big box of groceries and supplies, cartons of cigarettes, and a case of whiskey. In the luggage compartment were four five-gallon cans of gasoline and a couple tins of oil. The briefcase was on the floor beneath Strack's legs.

“Which way we goin' up, Strack?” asked Candy.

“Vermont, like I told you,” Strack said. “Route seven.”

Vito lit two cigarettes and reached back to place one in Strack's dry lips. Candy snatched the other one and Vito swore at him as he lighted another. Strack grinned palely, puffing on the cigarette. The glassy brightness was blurring and dimming now, the pain was hard and deep.

“Mike and I know the country up there,” Strack said. “We ran a lot of stuff through there in prohibition. Them were the days, weren't they, Mike?”

“You said it, Stash,” Mike said, tearing the reddened shirt away from Strack's shoulder and upper arm and starting to work on the wound.

“Remember that huntin' camp we used to hole up in, Mike?” Strack said. “That's where we're goin'.” He lay back on the
cushioned seat, his eyes closed and his teeth set, white and sweating as Mike worked over him.

"Slow up a little, Candy," Mike said. "And Vito, you better break out a bottle for this boy. He's goin' to need it."

At noon Vito switched on the radio and they listened to the news broadcast: "... At ten o'clock this morning the First National Bank of Springville was held up and robbed of approximately eighty-thousand dollars. Vito whistled with delight. "The four heavily-armed bandits shot their way out of town, killing a police officer and terrifying hundreds of stunned witnesses, making their escape in a maroon-colored sedan with New York license plates. The police of all the New England States have been alerted, and the alarm is also out in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania..."

"Eighty-thousand bucks!" Vito said exultantly.

"They always put it high," Mike said. "I don't think there's that much, but it's a good haul."

"We won't have any trouble till they find the other car," Strack said. "We ought to be in the mountains by then."

They felt quite safe riding north in the big black sedan with Michigan plates on it, but in this business you were never safe, particularly with a wounded man who was badly in need of medical attention. It was too bad Strack had to be the one who was hit, Mike thought. Stash had the connections and he held the outfit together. Without Strack they wouldn't be much of a team.

CHAPTER TWO

Wetery Grave

EARLY morning found them well up into Vermont. Mike had driven most of the night and now Candiss was back at the wheel. The car smelled of the whiskey that had drugged Strack into a semi-conscious state while serving to keep the others awake.

The two-lane cement highway curved in long up-and-down swoops through a valley walled in by mountain ranges. White mists were rising along the river to thin and fade in the clear blue air, and wooded slopes blazed with the crimson and gold of autumn as the early sun struck them. The world was washed fresh and clean in the morning light.

"Didn't you come from somewheres up here in the sticks, Mike?" inquired Candy, wheeling the sedan with casual skill.

"Yeah, I'm a country boy," Mike said, sitting back with Strack.

"This country's all right for cows," Vito said, snapping on the radio and punching buttons until he got the news.

"... The escape car was found abandoned in an old gravel pit on a back road three miles north of Springville, where the ruthless killers apparently picked up another machine they had hidden there. Vito cursed viciously. "They are believed to be heading north for the Canadian border, and a police dragnet has been spread over northern New England..."

"Somebody in this bunch is unlucky," Vito growled. "We ain't had any trouble up to now."

"It's always unlucky to kill a cop," Mike said mildly.

Vito turned with a snarl, "I suppose I should've let the cop shoot us all up, huh?"

"Take it easy," Mike told him.

Strack roused himself painfully and said, "Don't start runnin' off at the mouth, Vito. We got trouble enough."

"They still don't know what kind of a crate we're in," Candiss said cheerfully.

In the valley ahead Mike saw a small village that looked like the stage set of a rustic play. Sunshine touched the shingled roofs and clapboard walls, raying through the half-striped boughs that arched the street. Brown and amber leaves, damp
and glistening with dew, were strewn on
the central green where a granite Civil
War soldier stood rigid guard with his
long rifle. Smoke curled up from red brick
chimneys, and storekeepers were sweeping
off their front steps.

Candy stopped in front of a drugstore
and went in to get a paper, walking with
a stiff swagger after the long ride, hat
cocked carelessly on his high blond head,
looking more like a college boy than a
criminal. Candy told the old man at the
counter he wanted a New York or Boston
paper.

“Well, you won’t get none here till
along toward noon,” the proprietor told
him with evident satisfaction. “Nothin’ in
yet but the Rockwood Herald.”

“All right,” Candy said, grinning.
“Gimme the whatsit Herald then.” He
sauntered back to the car with the old man
peering curiously after him, and Mike
knew it had been a mistake to stop there,
especially when they had the radio for up-
to-the-minute news. But probably the boys
liked to read about their exploits in the
newspapers. “They even got it in this hick
sheet,” Candy said slipping lithely behind
the wheel. “Front page too.”

Vito grabbed the paper and scanned it
eagerly. “Listen to this,” he said disgust-
edly, and read aloud, “The police believe
that the shootin’ was done by that notori-
ous trigger-man, Hasty Frank Farrara.”
Vito swore with fluency and feeling. “Can
you tie that? They always give it to Fer-
rara. Hank ain’t used a rod in ten years
and they still give it to him!”

Candy laughed in boyish delight. “You
ought to complain, Vito. It ain’t right for
Hank to get all that publicity!”

Vito read on, “Patrolman Daniel Cody,
thirty-seven, the father of four children,
was instantly slain by murderous bursts
from the killer’s sub-machine gun. One
observer claimed to have recognized Mike
Murray, former underworld chieftain,
among the robbers, but the authorities re-

fute this statement as impossible. Murray,
they report, was killed by law enforcement
officers on the Pacific Coast two years ago . . .” Vito glanced darkly back at Mike.

Mike shook his head. “I don’t see how
anybody’d think they recognized me with
this new map.”

“How the hell did I know the guy had
four kids?” demanded Vito. “A guy with
four kids ought to know better than walk
into a tommy gun.”

“It’s the chair for all of us if we get
cought,” Candy said.

“We won’t get caught,” Strack said.
“This place is in the mountains, we could
hide out till hell froze over.”

“That’d be fun,” Candy murmured
dryly.

“You remember how to get to the camp,
Mike?” Strack said.

“I don’t think so, Stash. It’s been a
long time.”

“Yeah, twenty years is quite a stretch,”
Strack said. “But I know the way. I’d like
to see a doctor, though.” His face was
pale and shrunken, his eyes tortured by
the agony in his arm.

“We can’t take a chance with no doc-
tor,” protested Vito.

“The hell we can’t!” Mike said. “You’ll
see one, Stash. We’ll get you fixed up
right, boy. Open her up, Candy.”

A STEEP narrow road, rutted and
rocky and grassgrown in the center,
climbed into the mountains, and the big
black sedan rocketed up it with smooth
power. Thick brush screened the roadside
and autumn branches reached overhead
in a riot of color, almost shutting out the
sun in places. A rippling breeze turned
the forest into a wavering tapestry of
bronze and scarlet, and falling brown
leaves slanted across the hood of the car.
The highland air was keen as a blade of
steel.

At long intervals they came upon clear-
ings where unpainted farmhouses and
barns stood, weathered to silver-gray and black. A few were still occupied, but mostly they were abandoned and crumbling to ruin, roofs sagging in and porches drooping, broken windows revealing the barren debris of the interiors.

Strack said, "Mike came from this part of the country. Where was it now?"

"North of here," Mike said. "Not too far."

"Make you homesick, Mike?" grinned Candy.

Mike smiled slowly. "Not exactly. Maybe a little."

"What kind of a joint you takin' us to, Strack?" asked Vito.

"Safe," Strack said. "Perfect. Used to hide out here when we was runnin' booze and the heat was on."

"It ought to be safe," laughed Candy. "Unless they still got Indians up here."

The car swayed and bounced over the rough trail, and Strack stared down at his left shoulder and arm, neatly bandaged and supported in a sling now. "Sure glad to get that slug out of there. I wonder if that doc'll do any talkin'?"

"No, I don't think so," Mike said. "I had quite a talk with him. He's got a family and a good practice and he don't want to die."

"He'll report it," grumbled Vito. "You wait and see."

"Well, you're the one that did the shootin'," said Candy. "You're the one that'll burn."

Vito patted the Thompson gun on the seat beside him. "I won't burn as long as I can lift this baby."

A stream flowed along side of the road, murmuring over its pebbled bed, flashing white spray against dark-mossed boulders. "Trout in there, boys," remarked Mike. Slender silvery birches leaned over the running water, leaves riffling yellow in the wind, and dead brown leaves matted the roadbanks. As they climbed higher the scarlet maples, golden elms and oaks gave way to the somber denseness of tall pines, and the clean smell of pine boughs filled the air. It was like another world up here, Mike thought, pure and open and free.

Birds flickered ahead of the car and Vito fingered his gun. "Bet I could knock off one of them easy."

"Don't try it," warned Strack. "Game-wardens are tougher than cops up here."

The road grew steeper, rougher, narrower, with green and brown bushes whipping the sleek sides of the machine. Candlis swore over the wheel, his handsome face grimacing at such a primitive route. Vito eyed a flitting gray squirrel and caressed the tommy gun. Strack lay back and clasped the grinding squirrel in his arm. Mike was hunched forward, gray gaze intent on the landscape.

"Remember this now, Mike?" asked Strack.

"Some," Mike said. "Not very well though."

"I been here since you were," Strack admitted. "Turn right, Candy, and give her the gun. It's uphill now."

"Uphill!" laughed Candy. "When ain't it been uphill?"

The cabin, built solidly of logs, stood on a pine-shaded knoll. On all sides the mountain wilderness stretched away, a vast October haze of many colors. At the rear of the camp a brook flowed with a cool musical sound, and they knelt to drink of the pure water. Mike dipped a cupful for Strack, who was leaning on a fender of the car.

"That's nice," Strack said. "That's about the best drink I ever had." He had the tan briefcase under his arm.

"What do we do, break in?" asked Vito.

"I got a key," Strack said. "I was up here huntin' once and met the guys who own it, Charley Blackmer and Russ Ward." He unlocked the door and they began unloading the sedan to move in, while Strack sat down on the edge of a bunk.
The camp was in good condition, walls, floor and roof sound and secure, the windows intact. The interior was one large room, quite clean and orderly, with a stone fireplace, a stove, two tables, six chairs, and four double-deck bunks. Strack lay back on the lower berth and watched Mike kindle a fire with the wood they found neatly piled in one corner.

“Kinda like comin’ home, huh, Mike?” Strack said.

Mike looked at him. “Yeah, it is at that, Stash.”

Candissoo got some glasses out of the dish cupboard and went out after a bucket of water while Vito poured a round of drinks. Mike examined the box of provisions and said, “I suppose I’m the cook.”

“Are you a boy scout too?” Vito said, handing Strack a glass of whiskey and a lighted cigarette.

“Sure,” Mike said easily. “I’m a handy man.”

“They don’t come any handier,” Strack said.

“We’ll count the dough tonight,” Vito said. “See how bad them bankers lied.”

Mike was getting the cooking utensils ready. ‘This is a nice layout, Stash, they got everythin’ here.”

Strack nodded, a pleased look on his sunken face. Candy started to wisecrack but stopped short and glanced at Strack.

“Yeah, this is great,” Vito jeered. “A good place to die in, this is!”

“How long we layin’ up here, Strack?” asked Candy.

“Until the heat’s off some,” Strack said. “Got to be in Rockwood the twelfth.”

“Next week,” Candy mused. “The heat ain’t goin’ to be off by then.”

Mike fried the steaks in butter and even Vito admitted they were good, but Strack could not eat much. After the dishes were washed and put away they opened up the canvas bags to count and divide the money. There was $74,682 besides a sack of silver that Vito had taken.

“Somebody in that bank made themselves about six grand on the deal,” Vito complained.

“Sure,” laughed Candy. “A bunch of cheap crooks in them banks, Vito.”

Later, while Vito and Candy were drinking and playing cribbage, Strack and Mike stepped outside to get some fresh air. It was cold in the mountains, the night breeze mournful in the pines and the stars overhead as sharp as rapier points.

“You’ll have to deliver that briefcase in Rockwood the twelfth, Mike,” Strack said. “Unless I’m feelin’ a lot better.”

“You’ll be all right by then, Stash.”

“Maybe, but I want you to know, just in case. Register in the Bardwick Hotel as Loren Charles Havenhurst from Detroit. A man callin’ himself John Brandeis will come to your room. You collect ten thousand and give him the briefcase. That’s all there is to it, Mike.”

“Hell, you’ll be rarin’ to go yourself next week, Stash,” Mike said. “Maybe we’ll go together.”

“I don’t know, Mike.” Strack shook his head slowly. “That slug stayed in there quite awhile. I feel poisoned all through.”

“You need some rest, that’s all,” Mike told him.

“Yeah, but you remember what I told you,” Strack said. “In case somethin’ goes wrong.”

In the morning Strack was worse, although he had slept with the aid of the sedatives Mike had gotten from the doctor. He had a temperature and his arm felt swollen and inflamed. Strack didn’t want any breakfast, and the others were worried and strained over the bacon and eggs and coffee Mike prepared.

Vito didn’t like it when Mike suggested that he should help Candy with the dishes, but he complied sullenly. Mike thought: If anything happens to Strack this party’ll go to pieces fast. Vito is a trouble-maker.
and Candy’s like a lost kid up here in the woods.

Strack lay on his back staring at the bunk overhead, hour after hour without moving or speaking, his eyes hot and glazed, his lips dry and cracked. Fire bathed his left arm from wrist to shoulder, and sweat glistened on his thin drawn face. Mike brought him water and examined the arm below the bandage. The veins stood out fiery red in the tortured flesh, and Mike tried to keep his face from showing how bad it looked.

"Rest, Stash," Mike said. "That’s all you need."

Strack turned his sandy head from side to side. "That bullet," he said. "In there too long, Mike."

Mike went out front where Candy was sitting with his back against the log wall watching Vito oil the Thompson gun. Mike said, "We got to get Strack to a doctor, boys."

Vito’s black head jerked up. "Doctor, hell! That other one you took him to probably poisoned his arm."

"The lead poisoned it," Mike said. "He’ll die if we don’t get it taken care of."

"And if we try to, it’s curtains," Candy said. "For all of us."

"That’s right," Vito said. "We can’t take a chance on no more doctors, hot as we are now."

Mike knew they were right, for once. They couldn’t get to a doctor without bringing the law down on their heads. They might snatch a doctor and bring him up here, but that wouldn’t be good either and maybe it wouldn’t help Strack much. That arm looked like a case for the hospital, Mike realized. That arm looked as if it would have to come off.

Mike turned away from the other two and strode up and down the pine grove. He didn’t know what to do. With Strack down he felt all alone, bewildered and helpless. Vito and Candy weren’t taking any orders from him. Strack could handle them, but they wouldn’t listen to Mike.

The day passed somehow, dragging and dreary. A radio news broadcast informed them that the four Springville bank robbers were suspected to be in Vermont, either hiding out or heading for Canada. Every highway and town was being watched.

That definitely precluded any possibility of getting Strack to a physician, even if he had been in condition to travel. His fever increased and his mind wandered as the agonizing hours wore away. There was a feeling of death in the cabin, and Vito said he could smell it.

That night the pills didn’t do any good, and Strack moaned and tossed and cried out in delirium so that the others could not sleep. All night Strack thrashed and fought the fire that was consuming him, panting and sobbing, raving about his mother and a woman named Millie and somebody called Dan.

It was an ordeal for all of them. In the bunk next to Mike’s the wounded man twisted and screamed and writhed, forever fighting the flames that were eating his flesh. Listening to him the others suffered too, sweating and turning from side to side, swearing into their pillowed arms. Once Mike caught the movement across the room as Vito reached under his bunk, brought out the tommy gun, and slowly swung it in Strack’s direction.

"Put it away, Vito," Mike said softly and clearly, aiming the Luger, and Vito turned to catch the glint of the automatic in Mike’s big steady right hand. Sighing and cursing Vito replaced the gun beneath his bed.

"He’s dead already," Vito muttered. "He stinks of death. I only wanted to put him out of his misery, Mike."

"Shut up," Mike said. "And leave that gun alone—if you want to live. Next time you reach, Vito, I’m shootin’."
Gray morning was creeping through the pines into the windows when Strack at last grew quiet, and the other three men finally fell into an exhausted sleep...

A scream seemed to shatter the hot weird vapors of Strack’s dream and he woke suddenly, ashamed to think he had screamed, his mind all at once amazingly clear. For a long time he lay there listening intently. There was no sound in the cabin except his own heart-beat and the breathing of the others in sleep. He hadn’t screamed after all, he thought with relief, it had just been in his dream.

He felt the need of talking to Mike but didn’t want to wake him. He looked at Mike’s sleeping face in the wan light, like the face of a stranger with that straightened nose. I liked him better tough-looking with that bashed-in heak, Strack thought irreverently. Good old Mike, I thought he was dead and now I’m the one that’s dying.

Strack accepted it quite calmly now.

Sheets of fire played along his left side, blowtorches that seared bone-deep, but his mind stayed wonderfully clear. From somewhere in the grayness came the cool ripple of running water, and toward that silken sound Strack yearned with everything in him. There was nothing left in the world but to reach the cool peace of that water. Cold water flowing over a stony bed, that was his heaven, and his whole life had been lived to make that single objective.

Strack rose from the bunk, a living flame without weight or bulk. Goodby, big Mike, he thought, goodby Candy Kid and black Vito. The door opened easily and he fell through it in a long loose stagger, floating gently to the softness of the earth, pine needles and dirt cushioning his fevered body. He got up somehow and drifted on toward the lovely sound of the stream, like a windblown flame through the morning mist. The ground rushed up at him again, cool and fresh under his flaming face.

Clawing his hands into the dirt Strack crawled toward the brook, its music lilting closer and closer. Sobbing and panting now Strack plunged forward with a small eager cry and thrust his blazing left arm into the cold pressure of the current. The music flowed straight through him then, there was relief at last from his blistering torment. Strack’s mouth smiled as the sweet water touched it, and his peace was final and complete.

They found him there a few hours later, his lean body submerged from head to hips, his right hand anchored on a brown boulder, the water reddened from his opened wound. The bright music of the stream rose in the sunlit air as Mike dragged him out on the bank, and they stood there staring down at the drenched dead figure.

“There’s one guy they won’t hang no rap on,” Vito said.

“They never hung anythin’ on Stash,” Mike said.

“That’s right, Strack always beat ’em,” Candy said. “But he had to go a long ways to beat this one.”

Vito looked at Mike. “This one was sour from the beginnin’.”

Mike regarded Vito coldly. “There’s some tools in camp. Get them out and we’ll dig a grave.”

“You takin’ charge here, chum?” Vito asked sneeringly.

Mike stood tall and easy, thumbs hooked casually in his belt, the Luger under his belt near his right hand. For once Vito was without the tommy gun, but he wore an automatic in his shoulder-holster.

“You got any objections, Vito?” Mike asked quietly.

Vito’s fingers spread out and his dark face twisted, lips snarling back on his teeth, black eyes lighted with a murderous flare, but he did not reach for his gun or make any reply.
“I'll get 'em, Mike,” Candy said quickly and walked to the cabin.

When the grave was ready, Mike carried Strack's body to the edge and asked Vito to lend a hand in lowering it, not wanting to let Vito get any ideas about making the grave serve for two instead of one. They worked faster filling it up and stamped the sods back into place on the surface. Vito crossed himself, Candy and Mike stood briefly with bowed heads, and they walked back toward the hunting lodge without talking. Mike would have to watch Vito more carefully now that Strack was gone. He didn't relish being shot down by a bullet in the back.

It was strange and flat and empty with Strack gone. They all felt it in varying degrees, but avoided mentioning it. Candy and Vito wanted to get out of there and move on, but Mike said it wasn't time yet to make a break, and besides they had to deliver the goods next week in the nearby town of Rockwood. Everything would fall through if he didn't deliver.

Candliss missed the bright lights, the bars and nightclubs. It bothered him to have all that money and no place to spend it.

Vito Sabataso, entirely without imagination or any emotion beyond anger and hate, spent his time playing solitaire, oiling the machine gun, and sleeping. He was getting restless.

Mike tramped the wooded highlands alone, somber and thoughtful, missing Strack more than the others realized, keeping a watchful eye always out for Vito, knowing that he would have to kill Vito sooner or later, before Vito got the chance to kill him. Ever since Vito had shot down that policeman in Springville, Mike had felt a chilling premonition of trouble, disaster and death. He had seen death in Strack's face long before it came, and in his mind that marked the beginning of the end. The end of this whole rotten, crooked business.

CHAPTER THREE
Murder Masquerade

MIKE was walking on the ridge when the vicious chatter of machine gun fire came from the cabin. Drawing his automatic Mike broke into a run, wondering what that damned Vito was up to now. Vito had been getting uglier by the hour, and perhaps he had turned the Thompson loose on Candy, who was always kidding him. As Mike neared camp he saw that the boys were merely engaged in target practice.

“What the hell you tryin' to do?” Mike demanded. “Bring all the game-wardens in Rockwood County down on us?”

“Nuts, mister,” Vito said.

“We got to do somethin', Mike,” Candy said.

“Put that gun up,” Mike told them.

Vito glared defiantly at Mike and the Luger in his hand, cradling the Tommy gun in his own right elbow.

“Try it, Vito,” invited Mike softly. “Go ahead and try it.”

Vito laughed a barking laugh, still measuring Mike and gauging his chances, when Candy stiffened suddenly, swore and pointed to a lanky stooped man emerging from the brush, a gaunt whiskered farmer in overalls.

“Hello, boys,” he said in a twanging voice. “Heard the shootin' so I came on up. Thought maybe Russ and Charley was up early this fall.”

“We're friends of theirs,” Mike said. “Just tryin' out some new guns.”

The farmer nodded toward Vito.

“That's an odd lookin' gun there.”

“Listen,” Vito said. “You better run along and milk the cows.”

“Shut up!” Mike said.

The man's pale blue eyes flickered from one to another. “I'll be gettin' on about my business,” he said with stiff dignity. “Ain't no hand to meddle. Jest figured..."
maybe it was somebody I knew." He moved away down the road in a queer half-loping gait.

Vito trained the Thompson on his back, but Mike stepped in and knocked the barrel down. "Don't be a damn fool, Vito!"

"He'll talk," Vito said. "He'll turn us in. He'll come back with a flock of hick sheriffs."

"No, he won't," Mike said. "He never heard of us, and he don't care about us. Take it easy, Vito."

"Mike's right, Vito," said Candy. "You're trigger-happy. But we got to get outa here, Mike. We're goin' wacky up here."

"Yeah," grunted Vito. "Let's blow. I got enough of this, too."

"All right," Mike said wearily. "We'll move out—tomorrow."

"Make it tonight, Mike," pleaded Candy. "I got a feelin'."

"I said tomorrow," Mike told them, turning and walking into the cabin. Vito watched him narrowly all the way, but he didn't raise the Tommy gun.

Their second visitor came the next morning, an old mountain woman, bent and gnarled with white hair, a wrinkled brown face, and eyes like pale blue ice. She carried a sickle in one veined hand, and she faced them from the doorway without a trace of fear.

"Don't look like any huntin' camp I ever saw," she said, peering and sniffing about the interior. "And you don't look like huntin' men either."

Candy swore. "I told you, Mike—"

Mike glanced at him and Candy stopped short. Vito's hands were twitching and that wild light was beginning to burn in his black eyes. Mike switched his cold gray gaze to Vito's flat dark face.

"We been here before with Charley Blackmer and Russ Ward. We're not huntin', we just came up for a rest. They let us use the camp."

The old lady scanned Mike's strong-boned face and shook her white head. "You look some like my own boy did, and he was a bad one, too. You're no friend of Charley's and Russ'. You might a been once but not any more, and the other two, they never was! My eyes are old, but they can see, and they know people when they see 'em."

"Get her outa here," hissed Candy under his breath. "She gives me the jitters."

"What's that?" asked the old woman sharply. "Speak up, young man, I can't hear so good. But I guess I've heard about all there is worth hearin'!" Her laugh was brittle as breaking glass.

"Where's your boy now?" Mike inquired.

"Dead," she said. "And better off that way. A wild one that turned bad, I don't know how or why. They sent him home in a sealed box. He's buried down in the family lot beside his father. Bad or not he was our boy. He looked somethin' like you, mister, big and tall."

Vito was scowling in deep thought. "What's your name, lady?"

"Murray," she said promptly. "A good name even if he dirtied it for us. An honest name until young Mike spoiled it some."

Vito and Candy were both staring at Mike now.

The old woman waved the curved blade in her hand. "See this sickle? I always carry it with me to cut down weeds and poison vines, things no good to man or beast. Once I cut a rattlesnake's head clean off with it! And there's somethin' about you three, I can tell—" She turned on Mike. "You might a been a good boy once, like my boy was. But you went wrong like he did. Too bad, I'm sorry for you, all of you. You're just no good!"

She turned her back on them in fearless scorn and marched out of the cabin swinging the steel blade in her withered hand. Vito's black eyes glittered as he reached
for his machine gun over on the table.
"Leave it alone," Mike said. "Let her go."
"Your own mother, Mike?" Candy asked wonderingly.
Mike nodded sadly. "I never would've known her."
"The hell it's your mother!" Vito said. "I had a hunch about you right along. You ain't Mike Murray. Mike Murray's dead."
Mike smiled gravely. "Officially, he is. It was my only out. I planted identification on this body that was smashed beyond recognition."
"Maybe," grumbled Vito, his eyes and mouth wicked in their ugliness.
"What the hell, Vito?" Candy said. "Strack knew Mike Murray as well as anybody. Strack wouldn't fall for a phoney."
"Let him think what he wants, Candy," Mike said. "We're in this together. She's some old lady, isn't she?"
Vito went to a window and stood looking out, hands tense at his sides.
"We got to be hittin' the road," Candy said.
Vito swore with sudden fury. "Look!" he yelled. "Look what she's doin'!" He jumped for the machine gun on the table.
Mike looked out the window nearest him. With steady methodical strokes the old woman was slashing at a front tire of the automobile, the keen steel biting long gashes in the hard rubber. Mike spun about on his toes, right hand ripping the Luger out of the belt. Vito had the Tommy gun up in the window when Mike's voice lashed out:
"No, Vito!"

VITO whirled swiftly and Candy dodged out of line as Mike's automatic blazed and roared. Vito lurched under the impact and fell back against the wall, his mad black eyes on Mike as he tried to bring the Thompson up level. Mike's gun blasted again and Vito rocked and twisted on the wall, stumbled slowly forward on sagging legs, touching off a burst from the Tommy gun that tore splintered furrows across the floor.
Mike fired once more and Vito pitched heavily forward, sprawling on his hands and knees, his black head slumping over the gun-barrel. Then Vito was all the way down, flat on top of the gun, his body squirming and stiffening on the boards, going limp and lifeless.
Mike wheeled on Candliss, the Luger ready, but Candy was still crouching against the wall, stark and wide-eyed, making no move for his gun. "No, Mike, no!" Candy cried desperately.
"All right," Mike said. "All right, Candy."
He turned to watch the old woman disappear down the road, running in short stiff steps, the sickle swinging in her hand. One tire on the car was flat, slashed to ribbons. A breeze sighed mournfully in the dark pines outside, and stillness was strange in the cabin after the racketing gunfire, cordite fumes were sharp in the smoky air.
"Some old girl," Mike said, smiling gravely and shaking his head. "Come on, Candy, we got a tire to change and then we'll roll."
"That sounds good to me," Candy said.
They jacked up the car, put the spare wheel on the right front, filled the gastank from one of the emergency cans, and went to the creek to wash up. In the cabin they divided the money into two equal shares, loaded the car with the extra guns and supplies, and got dressed for the road. Candy combed his blond hair and knotted his brilliant silk necktie with scrupulous care. They avoided looking at Vito's body except when Mike picked up his guns and wallet. There was a little whiskey left in an opened fifth and they finished that.
It was useless to do anything about Vito because they were sure Mrs. Murray
meant to call the police. The thing to do was hit the hell out of there and fast.

"Imagine your old lady droppin' in like that," Candy said.

"It was quite a shock," Mike said. "But it’s better all around, that she thinks I’m dead."

Candy shook his sleek golden head. "Must be a funny feelin’, Mike, everybody thinkin’ you’re dead."

After a final check to see that they had everything they wanted, the two men closed the camp and walked to the sedan. Mike had hold of the door-handle when Candliss spoke behind him:

“All right, Mike—or whoever you are. This is it!”

Mike turned slowly and saw Candy’s handsome face set tightly and the Colt automatic big in his slender hand. "Don’t be a hophead like Vito,” Mike said gently. "There’s only two of us left, Candy. We got to play it smart and together."

"No, I’m takin’ it from here."

"You can’t do it alone, Candy,” Mike said. "You don’t know what to do in Rockwood."

Candy laughed. "I don’t care. I should worry about ten grand when I’ve got seventy-five. To hell with Rockwood!"

"It’s not the money, Candy,” Mike said patiently. "It’s that outfit we’re dealin’ with. If that briefcase isn’t delivered they’ll run you down before the law does kid, and you’ll wish you were gettin’ the chair instead of what they’ll give you. They’ll even hit your family and friends to get you, Candy.” Mike thought this was what he got for being too sure of his man. He pulled a skull just when things were breaking the way he wanted them.

Candy was a little hesitant and uncertain, troubled by Mike’s cold calm logic. "Well, maybe you’re right, Mike. But I’m goin’ to take the Luger and make you drive. Don’t try anything now."

Candy stepped in close, alert and wary,
F.B.I. Detective Stories

to reach for the gun in under Mike's left arm. Mike exploded into sudden violent action, and Candy found himself turned upside down and whipped headlong through space.

Mike was somehow behind him as he reached his knees and Mike's big fist caught him flush on the chin.

Mike took the Colt .45, lifted Candy and threw him into the front seat. With a handkerchief Mike tied the boy's wrists tightly behind his back, picked up Candy's hat, and climbed in behind the wheel.

It would be a lot simpler if he didn't have Candy on his hands, but that couldn't be helped unless he wanted to kill Candy or toss him out in the ditch somewhere. Mike thought he could handle Candy all right the rest of the way.

Mike had been in bad spots before, but this was about the worst. The briefcase business complicated everything. He had

---

**CAN YOU TELL (without knowing beforehand) anyone's age or cash in pocket? 20c tells how.—Never fails. Robt. C. Lees, 6217 W. Wis. Ave., Milwaukee 13, Wis.**

---

**Draw me!**

**$1000.00 in Valuable Prizes**

1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes... COMPLETE ART COURSES including Drawing Outfits (Value of each course $24.00)!

4th, $100.00; 5th, $50.00; 6th, $30.00 and 10 prizes, $10.00 each

Copy the girl and try for a prize! Splendid opportunities now for trained artists in all fields. Find out how much ability you really have. Mail this coupon with your drawing.

**ART INSTRUCTION, INC.**
Dept. 5939, 500 South Fourth Street, Minneapolis 15, Minn.

Please enter my drawing (attached) in your $1000.00 contest for May. (Please Print)

Name__________________________Age____________________

Occupation___________________Address__________________

Zone____City__________________State___________________

**RULES:**

You must be amateur. Our students not eligible. Make copy of girl 5 inches high. Pencil or pen only. Omit lettering. All drawings must be received by May 31, 1949. None returned. Winners notified. If desired, send stamped, self-addressed envelope for list of winners.

---

126
Kill That Corpse!

to cope with Candy, the police, and the agents on the receiving end. If he could get to a telephone before Candy came to it would help.

Lack of communication had been the weakness all along, Mike thought with a wry smile. At least he had finally shot that mad dog Vito off his neck. He had a chance all right, a fighting chance. Hell, it was a good chance.

The rough part would be keeping the cops off their tail until tomorrow night.

At 8:45 ON the evening of October 12th Mike parked the sedan in a dark back street in Rockwood, sighed and leaned back and looked at Candliss, sitting beside him. Mike had won Candy over, to the point of an armed truce anyway, and it seemed fairly certain now that they would not be fighting or killing one another. Mike had told Candy it was up to him from here on, he could either take the car and beat it alone, or he could join Mike later at the hotel.

“Well, we made it this far, kid,” Mike said. “I’m goin’ to the Bardwick and get ready to meet the boys at this end.”

“You expectin’ trouble, Mike?”

“I don’t know, Candy. If they tied us up with the Springville bank robbery there might be. They wouldn’t like that. They’d maybe decide it was safer to rub us out.”

Candy swore softly. “I can’t make up my mind, Mike.”

“Take your time,” Mike said. “I’ll write my room number on the inside of the back cover of the phone directory at the second booth in the lobby. I’ll put a heart around it to make sure. It’s better if you don’t have to ask anybody.”

“All right, Mike,” Candy said. “I may be seein’ you then. If I don’t, good luck.”

“Same to you,” Mike said, shaking hands and sliding out of the car, taking the briefcase and his topcoat stuffed

---

LET'S MAKE YOUR NEXT TV BUSINESS A SUCCESS

Want to make more money? Want to be your own boss—have your own money-making business—with your future assured? Then learn Radio and Television with my proven two-way method (lesson instruction plus actual practice) that can help you get into this great and growing business quicker. You learn by doing, right in your home in spare time. During your training you get 10 big kits of radio parts with which you perform hundreds of tests and experiments, build scores of circuits and testers to help you learn faster, more thoroughly.

Since 1929 I have been training men all over the world for success in radio, television and electronics. To learn how I can help you too, take the first step now by sending for my big 56-page illustrated book that tells how you may cash in on radio and television’s big opportunities. My book is Free but it may mean your future success. Send coupon for it today.

C. H. MANSFIELD, President
Hollywood Radio and Television Institute
110 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles 14, Calif.

SEND FOR THIS BOOK

1. C. H. MANSFIELD, Pres., Dept. PF-1
2. Hollywood Radio and Television Institute
3. 110 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles 14, California, U. S. A.
4. Send me your free book “Your Opportunities in Radio, Television and Electronics” which explains your 2-way home study training method.
5. No salesman will call.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY
STATE

If a veteran of World War II, check here.

---

RESTAURANTS, CLUBS, ETC.

Amazing Imported Secret Recipes. Servery English Fish and Chips and Wanderer. Amazing recipes. Make famous delicious plat fish from one pound fish diet. Tremendous profits. Send $5.00 and receive back mailing, book valuable recipes, satisfaction guaranteed. Mail to:

C. MILLER, Box 175, ESKRIDGE, KANSAS

INVENTORS

Patent laws encourage the development of inventions. Our firm is registered to practice before the U. S. Patent Office. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERNER & DAVIDSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
1504 Victor Building
Washington D. C.

---

FEET KILLING YOU?

PROMPT RELIEF OR NO PAY!

If walking or standing is torture send for Foot-Rite Cushion Comfort Insoles. They have brought foot joy to thousands suffering from corns, callouses, tender heels, pains caused by weak arches. Foot-Rite Cushion Comforts take the painful pressure off corns, callouses, arches. Walking-jar support weak arches. Light-spongy-ventilated-durable. GUARANTEED. Wear 30 days. If not delighted return them. Postage $1.08, plus postage and C.O.D. charges. If you send check with order all postage, give shoe size and whether for right or left. WRITE FOR "FOOT-RISE PRODUCT GUIDE", giving many valuable tips on how to care for your feet, included with each order. Order today.

FOOT-RITE PRODUCTS CORP.
2800 Broadway, Dept. 86-H, New York 31, N. Y.
“Saved my Life
A God-send for GAS-HEARTBURN”
When excess stomach acid causes painful, suffocating gas, sour stomach and heartburn, doctors usually prescribe the fast-acting medicines known for symptomatic relief—medicines like those in Bell-ans Tablets. No laxatives. Bell-ans bring comfort in a lift, return bonus to us for double money back. ©

BELL-ANS for Acid Indigestion 25c

TOOTHACHE?
Quick relief with Dent's. Use Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops for cavity toothaches. Use Dent's Dental Polticate for pain or soreness in gums or teeth. At all drug stores.

Since 1888

DENT'S TOOTH GUM
TOOTH DROPS
DENTAL POLTICATE

Want a Business of Your Own?
Read “It’s Your Business” by J. L. Simon, CPA, lecturer, business consultant. What to do—what to avoid—to succeed in a small business. Case histories of 30 going businesses in various fields. Packed with know-how for those investing $1,000 to $100,000. Price $8.50. ORDER FROM YOUR BOOKSTORE OR WRITE: FAIRCHILD PUBLICATIONS, 7 E. 22 St., N. Y. 3.

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 15-B, 645 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Illinois

STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and Larger Personal Earnings. 40 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. L.L.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—“Law and Executive Guidance”—NOW!

YOU CAN EARN $30 A DAY!
Men—Women to contact mothers for BRONZE BABY SHOES mounted on beautiful bookends, ashtrays, picture frames. Full or spare time. WRITE FOR SALES PLAN AND FREE SELLING KIT BRONZECRAFT, 1318 Velasco, Los Angeles

ИЛЮСТРИРОВАННАЯ БРОШЮРА!
B.S.M., FELLOWS! BE THE LIFE OF THE PARTY!
WITH THESE SMALL ILLUSTRATED CARTOON BOOKLETS OF COMIC CHARACTERS
60, ALL DIFFERENT, $1 POSTPAID
SOLD, NO POSTAL C.O.D.'S!
REGINALD SALES
1216-PF Park Row Bldg., New York N. Y.

INVENTORS
Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared “Patent Guide” containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with “Record of Invention” form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
926-D District National Bldg. Washington 8, D. C.

STAMMER?
This new 150-page book, “Stammering, Its Cause and Correction,” describes the Bogus Valley Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering successful for 48 years. $1.00 each. Bogus, Dept. 4228, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

F.B.I. Detective Stories

heavily with money and one bottle of whiskey. “So long, boy.”

Three hours later, still waiting alone in the room he had signed for as Loren Charles Havenhurst of Detroit, Mike was no longer so sure. He decided that Candy had blown himself, and he wondered why the agents hadn’t arrived.

Mike was mixing another highball when someone tapped on the door panel. His heart jumped so hard he nearly spilled the drink. Reaching in his right-hand jacket pocket Mike slipped the safety off the Luger and gripped it firmly as he walked to the door. It was Candy, tall and slim, blond and debonair, grinning that boyish grin, and Mike let him in quickly. Candy had the tommy gun under his topcoat.

Mike shook his head. “You may be sorry you came, son.”

“What the hell,” Candy laughed. “It can’t be worse than rammin’ around the country all alone.” He lifted the drink Mike had just prepared.

Mike smiled and started pouring another for himself. “We better not talk too much, Candy.”

“These guys are really big league, huh?” Candy murmured.

Mike nodded. “Big league as a world war, kid.”

“Is it that kind of a deal, Mike?”

“Afraid so,” Mike said. “Strack didn’t know and I’m just guessin’.”

They waited another hour and more, smoking and drinking slowly, speaking softly if they spoke at all. Candy had concealed his topcoat and hat in the closet with Mike’s, and Mike had placed the briefcase in a bureau drawer with Strack’s automatic on top of it. It was 1:18 when the knock finally came on the door, and Candy slid soundlessly into the bathroom with his drink and the Thompson gun. Holding the Luger in his pocket Mike went to open the door. There were
Kill That Corpse!

three men in the corridor, medium-sized, well-dressed, poker-faced.

"Mister Havenhurst?"

"That's right," Mike said. "Come in." He backed away before them, and the last one in shut the door behind himself. Mike saw then that the second and third men held ugly blunt-nosed automatics.

"What is this, a stick-up?" Mike demanded loudly, so Candy would be sure to hear.

"This is the FBI," said the first man, flashing a badge. "You will lift your hands and keep them up. You have a brown leather briefcase with you, I assume."

Mike raised his hands reluctantly. "You aren't FBI. You're pullin' a doublecross."

"Are you alone?" the first one asked, gesturing to the two behind him to ascertain that point. "Where is the case?"

"I'll get it," Mike muttered, turning to the chest of drawers.

"Never mind, I'll get it," said the leader, pushing past Mike.

At that moment the other two men were pulling open the doors to the closet and bathroom, which were directly opposite one another, and Candy unleashed the Thompson on them with a blast of stabbing tearing flame, the bullets ripping through them both before they could press a trigger.

"Nice work, boy," Mike said. "And we got one of 'em alive so he can do some talkin', Candy."

"Who the hell are they?" Candy asked. "How'd you know they wasn't FBI, Mike?" He moved to lay the machine gun down, reconsidered and held it. "We better breeze, Mike. The whole town'll be on us!"

Mike smiled gravely and shook his head, holding the Luger straight on Candiiss. "No, Candy, we're all through runnin'," he said. "Put that gun down boy. I knew, Candy, because I'm FBI."
Candy dropped the Thompson on the bed and gaped at Mike in astonishment.

"I'll see that you get a break, Candy," Mike said. "You did a good job for the U.S. tonight, kid, and you never knew what you were carryin' to these people."

Candy sank down on the edge of the bed, turning his blond head slowly from one side to the other. "You ain't Mike Murray then. But how in the hell—?"

"Mike lived quite awhile after we got him on the Coast, Candy. I was about his size and build, looked somethin' like him, and I practically lived with him as long as he lasted. Studied his speech and actions, learned all I could about him and Strack. Then I had my face operated on, and they put that scar on my left hand."

"What chance have guys like me got?" Candy protested. "When they go through all that to get us."

"It wasn't you so much," Mike said. "It was this outfit of foreign agents you were runnin' errands for, Candy. Let's tie this baby up here."

"All right, Mike," Candy said, grinning like a kid. "I'll take care of him. I don't mind workin' for the FBI on a deal like this." Candy ripped a pillowcase into strips and bound the unconscious man hand and foot. The hall was alive with tramping feet and Candy looked at Mike.

"Bein' behind bars is goin' to kill me, Mike. I'll never stand it."

"It won't be too long, Candy," Mike told him. "You'll still be young when you get out. Maybe I can get you a full time job with us, if you behave yourself."

Candy smiled brightly. "That'd be swell, Mike," he said with gay bravado.

Hard knuckles hammered urgently on the door and Mike went to unlock it, stepping carefully across the two shattered forms on the floor, feeling a weary sense of relief that it was all over and the work of years had paid off at last.

THE END
A wonderful wallet made of fine leathers that's trim, slim and beautifully tailored for all occasions! Secure all-around zipper closing; zipper coin pocket; 4 acetate windows for cards and photos!

In 6 attractive colors

STEER GRAIN • BROWN • BLACK
RED • KELLY GREEN • NAVY

A wonderful Inner Sanctum Secret Compartment keeps your private affairs strictly confidential! Divides and hides your large bills from prying eyes.

FREE! With each wallet, a copy of the famous booklet "Secrets of Successful People." Inner Sanctum is the wallet for successful people.

POPULARLY PRICED at your favorite store or write to ARISTOCRAT LEATHER PRODUCTS, Inc., 292 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N.Y.
"Another rare find for Roy Chapman Andrews—he's switched to Calvert!"

Ask any man who's switched to Calvert! He'll tell you Calvert Reserve actually is a smoother, milder, mellower whiskey. He'll remind you that you can always count on Calvert for better taste... because Calvert knows blending like no other distiller! And he'll suggest you taste Calvert Reserve. Then... odds are you'll switch, too!

100% BLENDED WHISKEY—86.8 PROOF—65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS... CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., N.Y. CITY