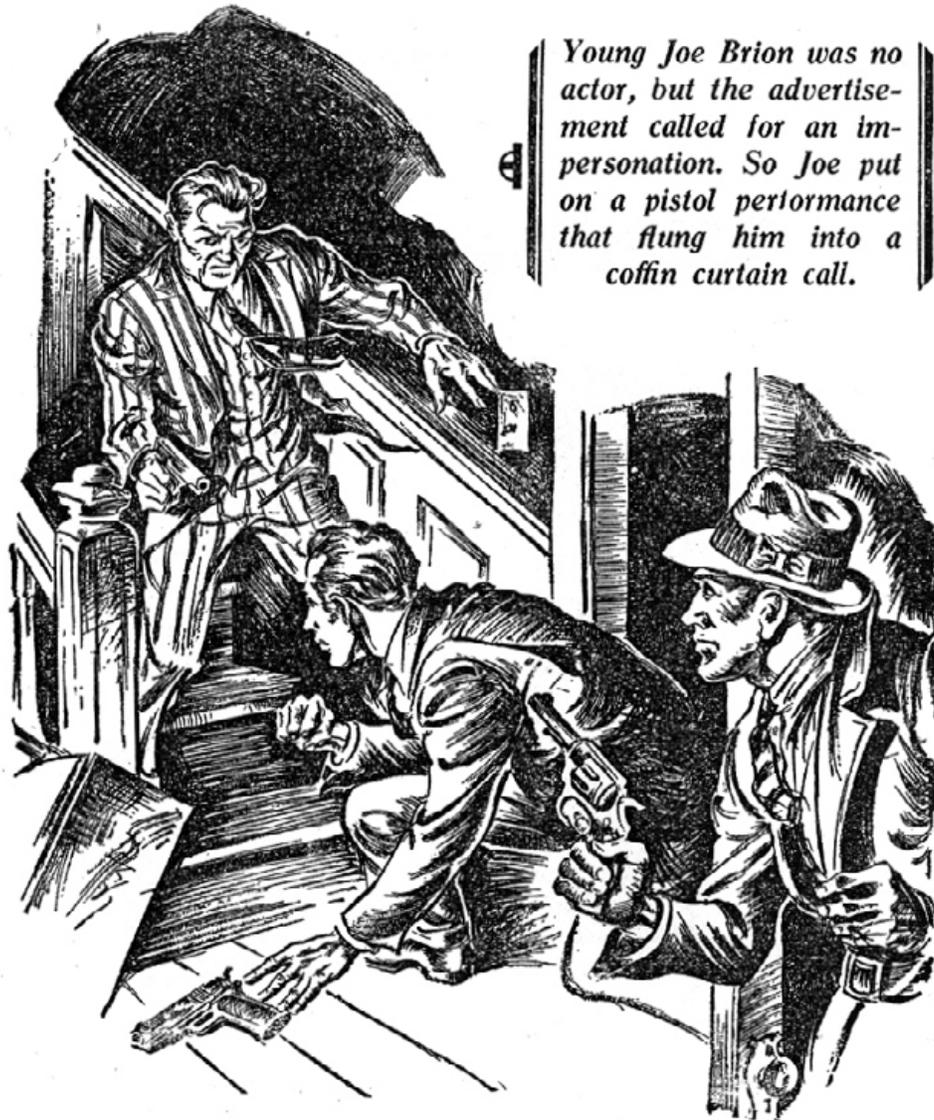


Hell's Impersonation



Young Joe Brion was no actor, but the advertisement called for an impersonation. So Joe put on a pistol performance that flung him into a coffin curtain call.

By H. Q. Masur

THE name on the door read: *Walter Meador, Investigations*. I checked it against the ad, polished my shoes against my trouser cuffs, and hunched up my coat to hide a frayed shirt collar. Then I pushed inside.

There must have been at least twenty guys ahead of me looking for the job, but not one of them filled the bill. It was made

to order for me. They saw it the minute I entered, and they glared with open hostility.

Twenty years old, sandy hair, blue eyes, weight about one hundred and sixty pounds. That's what the advertisement had read and I couldn't have described myself any better.

The guy came out of a side door as if

he owned the world. A handsome devil, with raven black hair, chiseled features and a pair of icy eyes that swept over the room. They rested on me, squinted a little, then brightened. He crooked his finger at me and I followed him into the private room.

Indicating a chair, he sat on the edge of his desk, stuck a meerschaum pipe between his teeth and examined me through a curtain of smoke, then started asking questions. I told him my name was Joe Brion, that I came from Cleveland and hadn't been there since I was a kid.

"Got any family, Joe?" he asked.

I shook my head. "All dead."

That seemed to satisfy him. "How long have you been in Minneapolis?"

I didn't know what kind of an answer he wanted, so there was no point in lying. Besides he looked like a smart duck and would've spotted a phony answer right away. I said: "Just drifted in."

"Where you stopping?"

"In the park until I get a stake. I need a job and I'll do anything so long as it's honest. I saw your ad in the paper and I'm your boy, Mr. Meador." I did not say that I'd picked the paper out of a refuse can.

"Well," he said, smiling and showing nice white teeth, "I think you'll do, Joe. Just step outside and tell the gang the job's taken."

I gave the boys the bad news and received a couple of glares that would've dropped mercury through the bottom of a thermometer. Then I came back and sat down and waited while Meador punched more tobacco into his pipe. When he was finished he settled back in a creaky swivel chair and blew two rings into the air.

Finally he said: "I'm a private investigator, Joe, and I have a ticklish job for you. It may involve some personal danger, but if it does, you can rely on me to take care of you."

I leaned forward. "Is it on the level, Mr. Meador?"

HE GAVE a short, embarrassed laugh. "Honesty is a relative term, Joe. What might seem ethical to one man could be the crassest illegality to another. For example, Robin Hood stole money from the rich and gave it to the poor. In a way, your job is something like that."

I stiffened. This sounded interesting and I wanted to hear more. "You don't mean I have to crack a safe or something," I wanted to know.

And again he laughed. "Oh, no, nothing like that. It's really quite simple. My client has a nephew who is suffering from a very serious heart disease. His doctor doesn't give him more than five weeks. Now this young fellow has a wife and child on the coast and he wants to protect them with an insurance policy on his life. But, of course, in his present condition, no company would issue one."

He paused and I asked: "Where do I fit in?"

"What we want you to do is to impersonate him, submit to the insurance company's physical examination, then disappear from the picture."

"What's in it for me?"

"One thousand dollars, Joe. A whole grand. That's a pile of money."

I gnawed on my bottom lip a moment, troubled, watching him warily. One thousand bucks is a lot of tin. I'd never had a stake like that and I couldn't afford to turn it down. I asked:

"Will the insurance company be taken in? Won't they examine the corpse and see through the deception? After all, they're not fools."

Meador smiled disarmingly. "You don't have to worry about that, Joe. All you do is sign the application, let their doctor examine you, and we'll take care of

the rest.”

I shook my head. “Nothing doing. I never had any breaks in my life, but I’ve always stuck to the straight road. I don’t mind getting into the proposition, because like you say, insurance companies have most of the money and I’d be helping some poor girl and an innocent kid to get a start. But first I got to know how you’re going to fool the company.”

Meador held out his palms. “Very well, it’s like this. I’ve interviewed a lot of men, but you’re the only one who closely resembles the chap I was telling you about. Once the policy is issued, he’s going to climb into an old car, stall it on the railroad tracks and what’s left of him after the crash will easily be mistaken for the man they examined. He’s willing to give up a few weeks of his life just to take care of his wife and child. That’s all there is to it.”

I stared out the window a few minutes and thought it over. It sounded plausible. I looked up. “What’s the size of the policy?”

Irritation flashed over Meador’s face. “Fifty thousand dollars,” he snapped.

I didn’t like taking money from a widow and a kid, but a chance like this would never come again. Maybe I’d be able to get myself a small gasoline station and be a business man. It was almost too good to be true. I said:

“Make it two thousand bucks and you’ve got a deal.”

He was silent a moment and his jaw muscles bunched stonily. “All right, I couldn’t stand interviewing another couple of hundred punks.” He hunched over on his desk and scribbled on a piece of paper.

“Here’s the address of the boy’s uncle, Eugene Hedrick. Go over there and act as if you’re his nephew. He’ll give you some clothes and the rest of your instructions.” And tapping his head, Meador added:

“Use your bean, Joe. Be smart. If they ask you any questions you can’t answer, think twice and then say you don’t remember.”

He gave me some change for carfare, and on my way out in the trolley, I mulled the thing over in my head. It seemed like I wouldn’t be taking too much of a risk and once they paid me I’d get the hell away from Minneapolis and stay away.

HEDRICK’S house, stark and gaunt against a barren hill outside the suburbs, was by no means a reassuring sight. I walked through a rusty iron grilled gate, along a tangled neglected lawn and let a heavy brass knocker crack against the thick door panels.

My first look at the girl who opened the door was fine, but I didn’t get much of a chance to clamp my eyes on her right then. She was tall, beautifully built, with tawny straw-colored hair and great cobalt eyes which looked at me and into me and through me.

Suddenly she gasped, “Frank, oh, Frank,” and took a single step forward, flung her arms around my neck, pressed her body close and planted a long solid kiss against my mouth, and I felt my knees go pleasantly weak and I had to hang onto her.

She pushed me gently away, fear jumped into her big, gray-green eyes and she threw a swift look all around the seedy, neglected lawn.

“You shouldn’t have come here, Frank,” she said. “Get inside, quickly. Uncle is waiting for you.” And she grabbed my arm and yanked me into the house, slamming and bolting the door behind us.

The place itself gave me a shock. Huge and expensively furnished, not one item in it had been dusted for some time. The air was musty, and cobwebs danced from every corner. Even the bulb in the big, cut-

glass chandelier was a dirty yellow and flung shadows around the walls every time you moved.

I didn't budge an inch, I just stared at her. What the hell was she talking about? Then inside those eyes of hers I saw something, saw that she was just playing a part and I decided to string along—for a while anyway.

So I followed meekly in her sweeping wake down a long corridor to a library, where a skinny old gink who was little more than a sack of bones, about six feet tall and weighing no more than a hundred and twenty pounds, was seated.

He came up out of his chair like a creaking jack-in-the-box, stuck two shaking hands in front of his cadaverous face as if to ward me off and backed away into a corner. I stood quite motionless, gaping at him. Stark fear twisted his face and he started whimpering.

"Don't, Frank . . . don't touch me. . . . I swear I had nothing to do with it." He cowered against the wall, slobbering at the mouth. And at that moment I began to get a funny feeling.

We were not alone in the room—I sensed it. There was somebody watching us, more than one person. A prickling sensation crawled up my back, and for a brief instant my brain was blacked out in puzzlement.

I'd been told to play a part, but this didn't seem like the right show. I didn't know how to act, and then I decided to go through with the thing. Maybe this old fellow, Hedrick, was a psychological case, suffering from a persecution phobia.

I said soothingly: "Take it easy, Uncle Gene, I'm not going to hurt you."

I got my warning from the tall girl who gasped out a sob. I whirled and stared into the muzzles of three guns—held in the hands of three different men.

They were square-jawed, hard-faced

men and they meant business. Cops—it was written all over their faces. You couldn't mistake it.

"Take it easy," the leader said, "or we'll pour a ton of lead into you, Frazee. Don't move."

He advanced one step, stuck his hand into my coat pocket and pulled out a vicious-looking automatic. He snorted with satisfaction.

"Hah! A .45, just what killed Becker. If this piece of electricity checks, Frazee, you're gonna get an awful jolt of electricity."

I didn't quite get it, not even then. I guess surprise had dulled my imagination. I said: "What's the gag, boys? My name isn't Frazee."

"Not much. You're Hedrick's nephew. We heard you call him uncle. That's all we want to know."

I didn't answer. The girl was quietly sobbing in a corner, her shoulders heaving. What an act she was putting on! Old Hedrick had slumped into a chair; relief had eased the tension in his bony face. He looked at me and shook his head.

"Don't think too harshly of me, Frank. I had to give you up. Your sister couldn't stand it much longer, you being a fugitive from the law and liable to get shot any minute. Besides, I was afraid you meant to kill me next."

BY THAT time my jaw was hanging slack and I felt the color pour right out of my cheeks. My pulse was hammering at a terrific clip. Scared? Plenty. What a frameup!

I saw it all, or most of it. The girl had dropped the gun into my pocket when she'd kissed me. As I saw it, her brother, Frank Frazee, had knocked off some chap named Becker. And with Meador's help they were framing me with the rap. Probably the cops didn't have too good a

description of Frazee.

Railroaded! That's what they meant to do to me. Railroad me right into the chair. And my hands were tied. I had no relatives, no friends, nobody who could identify me. They had me good and I knew it, because, of course, the gun would check with the bullet that had killed Becker.

All I said was: "I want a lawyer."

Between the phoniest tears I ever heard, the girl choked: "We'll hire you the best lawyer in town, Frank, dear."

I turned on her with a snarl. "You stay out of this. I'll get my own mouthpiece."

One of the dicks pushed forward and suddenly snapped a pair of handcuffs over my wrists. It was a deft, practiced motion and I didn't know what he was doing till it was all over. I saw red and started to curse and yank at them, but stopped when blood spilled down the backs of my hands. Two of the plainclothes men laughed.

"Nervous, hah, buddy? We'll quiet you up when we get you down to headquarters."

They propelled me down the hall, pushed me through the door and along the weeded lawn, sent me sprawling twice and kicked me to my feet. A short way down the road they had a car parked. It was not a long drive back to headquarters and when I got there I learned a lot about certain kinds of police procedure.

I was in a small room with one chair in the center placed directly under a large bulb whose white hot filament beat down unmercifully. It seemed there were ten men in the room, all hammering ear-splitting questions at me.

But I didn't open up, not then. I kept my mouth sealed. So they went to work with the rubber hose. The backs of your shoulders and legs. It hurts like hell, but it doesn't leave any marks.

They were having a fine time, getting too much pleasure out of it—so I made

them stop. I confessed. . . .

I confessed to a murder I hadn't committed, knew nothing about. I swore I'd killed a man who was a total stranger to me, whom I'd never seen.

And so they took me before a judge who glared down at me, and I got them sore all over again by renouncing the confession and swearing I'd never signed it. The judge set bail at fifty thousand dollars and it might just as well have been a million because I'd never be able to get a bondsman to put it up for me anyway.

I told him I was broke and he appointed a lawyer, a young squirt, fresh out of some jerkwater law school, who looked scared at defending a murderer, and I knew that my goose was cooked.

They took me back to my cell and I sat down on the hard cot and felt darkness and despair close in over me like water over a diver. There was one thing the young lawyer was good for. He caught himself a squint at the indictment and he knew what the hell it was about—knew, in fact, more than I did.

Becker, Hedrick and this Frank Frazee's father had been partners in an investment firm. Old man Frazee had been frozen out of the business without a nickel and had committed suicide. Two days ago, Frank drifted in from South America, where he'd been working, heard about his father, went straight to Becker and put a bullet between his eyes.

The girl's name was Ina. She was Frank's sister and lived with her uncle because she'd never gotten along with her old man.

Part of what happened after that was clear. Frank's relatives had decided to find somebody to take his place in the electric chair. And I was elected.

LATE that afternoon the cell door grated open. I had a visitor. Walter

Meador. He stood over the cot, staring at me, his face troubled. I gritted my teeth, measured the distance to his jaw and came off the cot in a long lunge, my fists cocked.

I let fly a right that never hit him. My left missed, too. I found both arms locked in a grip like the steel jaws of a trap. Meador was handy with his dukes and knew his business.

“Let go!” I sobbed. “You dirty double-crosser! I’ll kill you.”

Meador never relaxed his grip. His voice was soft, full of syrup. He said: “Take it easy, Joe. I know just how you feel. I came here the minute I heard about it. Believe me, kid, I didn’t know what they were up to.”

“You’re a liar!” I grated helplessly.

His powerful arms eased me back onto the cot. He pulled up a stool and sat down and got his mouth close to my ear, and started whispering so the screw out in the corridor couldn’t hear.

“I’m going to help you, Joe. It’s all my fault. I’ve had dealings with that Hedrick before. They’re a mean bunch and I should’ve suspected something.”

I glared at him, confused, not quite sure what to make out of it. I said between my teeth: “If you want to help me, just tell the truth. Tell them in court how you hired me.”

His smile was a little sheepish. “I can’t do that, Joe. I make my living being a private detective and I’d lose my license if I confessed being in on a shady deal like that insurance business. You can think what you like about me, but I have my own code of right and wrong and I’m not going to sit by while you take the rap for Frank Frazee. I’m going to catch that guy if it’s the last thing I do, and you’re going to help me.”

“Yeah,” I sneered, “I’m gonna be a big help, locked up in this tank.”

He shook his head. “I’m taking you out of here, Joe. A bondsman friend of mine is putting up bail, but I want you to promise me you won’t jump town.”

I stared at him closely. Risking fifty grand to get me out of jail. I held up my right hand and swore: “Meador, help me out of this jam and I’ll work for you for a whole year for nothing. I’ll stick around town till this thing is cleared up or I’ll come to you and let you do what you think is right.”

I guess I never did such a good I piece of acting. I kept my face and my voice solemn and he believed every word of it. But I was lying. I was lying like hell. If they bailed me out of this clink, I intended to skip this burg so fast they wouldn’t even see my dust. I’d hop a rattler to the first coast town and ship aboard a freighter to Honolulu.

He held out his hand and I shook it. And a couple of minutes later the keeper came along with the papers and told me I was free to go for the time being. Meador had a car outside and while driving he talked.

“The only way we can clear you, Joe, is by catching Frank Frazee. His sister and uncle are hiding him out somewhere. Now that the cops have picked you up, they aren’t looking for him any more, so he’s probably around the house. Now, let me tip you off. He’s one tough customer and would blow your brains out rather than be caught.

“The only thing for you to do is walk into that house and act like you’re Hedrick’s nephew. If he wants you to get out, tell him to call the cops. He won’t dare deny you’re not his nephew and he doesn’t want the cops around anyway. While you’re there, case the place thoroughly.”

I smiled grimly. “That idea appeals to me,” I said. “I got a score to settle with Ina

Frazee." The thing was getting exciting and already I was forgetting my intention to blow town. I could do that later.

Meador was pressing something against my knee and I looked down. It was a small revolver and I took it in my hand. It felt good. It gave me a sense of power. I never held a gun before and I kind of liked it.

"You'll need a gun if young Frazee meets you. Be careful, Joe. Bring him back alive. Don't use the gun unless you have to."

THE car braked alongside the overgrown hedges lining the Hedrick place and I got out. I gazed inquiringly at Meador. He shook his head.

"You'd better handle this end of it alone, Joe. After all, I have no right to enter the house, Joe. They can make a smell about my being there, but not you."

He was right. I nodded, turned quickly, scaled the hedge and plowed through the weeds toward the big frame house. As I approached it, I saw a shade on one of the windows yank down. I banged the knocker against the door. Nobody answered. I kicked it with my heel. Still no answer. So I went around the back and viciously twisted the pantry door. It was locked. I grabbed up a rock, let it fly through a window, pried it open and clambered over the sill.

Inside the house was quiet. But I knew somebody was there. I started exploring. On the second floor I found her in one of the bedrooms. She was stretched out on a bed, fully clothed, her tawny hair tangled, her mouth a splash of crimson lipstick, her bosom moving slowly with deep sleep.

I watched her a moment, then I moved close, stooped over and kissed her. She awoke with a start, her big eyes fixed frigidly, then she swung her legs to a sitting position and caught me a beaut

right across my jaw.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Don't you like your brother any more?"

Her lips compressed. "Get out of here."

"Uh-uh. I want to talk to Uncle Gene. Where is he?"

"I'll have you arrested. I'll have you thrown out."

I let her see my teeth in a wide, sarcastic grin. "Don't make me laugh, sister. Go ahead, call the police, call the marines, see what happens."

She bit on her underlip, handed me a look that would have chilled steel, jumped up and flounced out of the room, her wide hips swaying. I heard her footsteps slapping down the stairs.

I went into the hall, peering into bedrooms, and at the second from the end I stopped short, stiff as a ramrod, my eyes widening in horror. For I had found Eugene Hedrick.

Only I wasn't going to talk to him because he wouldn't be able to answer. He wouldn't be answering anybody any more. He was as dead as a bullet clean through the right temple could make him. It turned my stomach, he was such a miserable sight, with his gumless mouth tucked in so that his chin and beak of a nose curved together and almost met.

I stood there for a moment, waiting for my legs to generate a little action, my brain churning hard. Hedrick didn't look like he'd been dead long and that meant that Frank Frazee was probably around somewhere.

Downstairs there was an earsplitting shriek, high, sustained, frantic. I whirled, raced down the hall, took the stairs three at a clip, caught my toe on the carpet and took some dozen stairs skidding on my ear. In one way the fall was bad because it banged up my puss, but in another way it was good since it reminded me of the gun

in my pocket, the one Meador had given me.

INA was standing by the open front door, completely hysterical, screaming at the top of a powerful pair of lungs. It was crazy, screwy; it hadn't worked out at all the way Meador had expected. At this rate there'd be a couple of police cars along any minute.

And if they found me here, with that stiff upstairs, and a gun in my possession, nothing, nothing in the whole wide world could save me. A couple of blocks away I heard the long banshee wail of a police siren. I yanked out the gun, brandished it at the girl, hopped through the door and loped across the lawn as fast as a pair of frightened legs could carry me.

I jumped over the hedge—and stopped as if I'd smacked into a stone wall. A police car careened around the corner, came walloping down the block. I spun around, and slammed through the hedge because I couldn't get a running start, and beat it diagonally across the lawn toward the side street. And all the time that cobalt-eyed dame was yelling blue murder, chilling me clean to the bone.

I plunged through some rose bushes, came out on the side street—and then the whole world seemed to racket into my left knee. I fell headlong to the sidewalk and lay there unable to move. Blood was dribbling down my trouser leg and it felt like a white-hot poker had been shoved clean through the cartilage. I knew what had hit me, because I still heard the shot echoing against the hills.

The car from which the shot had come was still parked against the curb. Now its motor roared into action and it spurted down the block and disappeared from sight. It was an old blue coupe—Meador's car. I crawled back into the rose bushes and lay there, hugging my knee, while

thorns kept slitting the skin around my face in a dozen places.

Meador had shot me. All right. He'd hit me in the knee so I couldn't run away. Why? Because his friend had a fifty grand interest in keeping me around town. Well, that might have been one reason, a damn good one, but I couldn't help feeling there was a still better one.

Two more police cars roared up to the house, but the cops didn't scout around much. I guess they figured I'd lit out. They must have heard the shot and probably thought I'd pumped a slug at one of them as I escaped. I lay there in the rose bush for close to two hours, till the sun went down. I saw the morgue wagon roll up to the house and leave with its gruesome load. I saw the police cars leave until the house was deserted. My knee no longer bothered me. I was immune to pain. The wound was numb and I'd practically bitten out a chunk of my lip. I was still hanging onto my gun, feeling like a cornered rat, and I'm not sure I wouldn't have shot at anybody who came near me. My life wasn't worth a penny candle-light, but I meant to sell it dearly when, as and if the time came.

When it was quite dark, I snaked through the high grass, skirting the side of the house. Peering around the front, I saw a cop propped back in a chair on the porch, guarding the place.

I edged back, found the coal chute and heaved it off. Dragging my bum leg after me, I eased in head first and let myself slide swiftly into the pitch blackness. It was an eerie sensation, speeding someplace, not knowing where.

I braced myself to hit the sharp pile of coal. I swung off into space for a fraction, then landed on something soft that crunched under my weight. I ran my hands over it, then jerked them away, scrambling to one side. It had the cold, damp feel of a

corpse.

I pulled out a match, struck it—and almost swallowed my Adam's apple. It might almost have been me lying there dead. About twenty years old, light blue eyes that were wide open and glassy, a thatch of sandy hair, and well built.

Frank Frazee . . .

HE'D already stiffened and seemed to be staring at me like one of those advertising posters. I didn't like it in there one damn bit. The match went out and the darkness jumped at me again. I rolled off that pile of coal while new jerks of pain poured through my knee.

I crawled up the stairs leading to the ground floor. The door was open and I slipped through it, worming toward the hall. The bell rang, rasped against my ears and I huddled against the shadows. Ina opened the door. I sucked in a long breath and closed my hand around the gun.

They passed close to me without a word, turned into the study. My finger itched against the trigger. I had all I could do to keep from killing him right then. I dragged along the carpet and pushed halfway through the doorway.

He whispered, "It's all fixed now, honey. We're in clover," and put his arms around her and kissed her.

I said softly: "Make it a good one, Meador. It's the last you'll ever get."

They jumped apart, stared down at me. Under the makeup Ina's face was chalk-white. Meador's jaw lengthened grimly. I was lying on the floor with my right elbow supporting the gun hand which I held trained squarely on Meador's stomach.

"Joe," he muttered. "How the dickens did you get here?"

I laughed harshly. "You saw to that, Meador. You fixed it so I couldn't get away. It was a slug from your gun."

He waited a second, then he nodded.

"That's right, Joe. When I heard Ina screaming I knew something was wrong and I was afraid you'd bolt. I'd promised my bondsman friend you'd show up at the trial."

My teeth clicked. "Nuts, Meador. You didn't want me to get away because you wanted the cops to catch me with this gun. I'll bet it's the one that killed Hedrick. That's why you gave it to me. You knew he was dead all the time. You killed him.

"That's why you got me out of jail, so you could pin the blame on me, let Ina inherit his money, and then the two of you would clear out. It was a neat idea, Meador. And it worked out—up to a point. Only you're not going to enjoy any of Hedrick's money. Because you're gonna get it from the same gun that gave it to him."

I knew I had the thing figured right. The expression on the girl's face told me that. Before, when she'd showed fear, she'd only been acting. This was the McCoy. Those great eyes weren't beautiful any longer; they were bugging out of their sockets.

But Meador's reaction was different. A strange smile spread across his mouth. He started coming toward me. He drew back a heavy shoe to kick the gun out of my hand.

I hadn't meant to kill him. I wanted only to make him confess. But he had too much guts. The guy was like a robot. He didn't know the meaning of fear. He could still deny the story and make me take the rap. I couldn't prove a thing. So I pulled the trigger . . .

His big foot cracked against my knuckles and the gun went spinning across the floor. Meador laughed. It was an unpleasant sound.

"Why, Joe, I'm surprised. You don't think I'd give a desperate kid like you a gun, do you? Not one that was loaded.

You sure are a hard bird to get rid off.” He put his hand into a shoulder-rigged holster and pulled out an automatic.

“I’m afraid I’ll have to lay one into you, Joe, my boy. I’ll tell the police it was the only thing I could do when you came sneaking back here. When they find your prints on that other gun it will clear up the case.”

He brought the automatic down from over his head and I saw tension whiten his trigger finger. A dank hand clamped around my stomach and damn it if I didn’t think I was going to pass out even before he fired the shot. It was nausea concocted of fear, rage and frustration. And in that instant my brain snapped, became crystal clear. I held up my hand and yelled at Ina:

“Don’t be a fool! Hedrick saw your brother through a window coming to get him and he shot Frank in cold blood. He went out and dropped him through the coal chute. Then he got Meador to help him fix it by substituting me. You thought they were hiding Frank—instead he was downstairs in the cellar, dead, and Meador knew it all the time.”

Even as I spoke I saw new horror flash over Ina’s face and distort it. Meador could have stopped me with a bullet but he didn’t. Maybe he was stunned how I’d figured the whole thing. But now his lips tucked in and a sudden vein throbbed in his temple. The big automatic bucked

violently in his hand three times, filling the room with thunder.

The first shot scorched my hair. The second bit a vicious splinter out of the floor near my head, and the third went altogether haywire. A frenzied Ina was clawing at his arms and face, screaming imprecations. I wouldn’t’ve expected it, but the dame really loved her brother.

Meador was bringing his gun around to chop her over the head, and there I was on the floor unable to do one damn thing to help her. But I’d forgotten about the cop dozing in the chair outside on the porch. He’d come in and now his service revolver barked, catching Meador in the small of the back.

Meador stiffened, arched, flung his hands up and twisted slowly to the floor. The cop looked at me, at Meador beside me, twitching, at Ina, who’d become hysterical and was spilling the whole story, and scratched his grizzled head with the snout of his police positive.

I lay there, hugging my knee, thinking that the city of Minneapolis was going to have to supply me with a doctor free of charge. I was thinking also of the two thousand dollars I’d never get and the gasoline station I wouldn’t own.

But somehow I didn’t care much about that. Back in jail I’d promised myself a trip. And when they let me out of the hospital that’s where I was gonna go—Honolulu. . . .