

Parade of the Wooden Kimonos

In the dead of night Marty Quade was awakened—by two guns trained on his head. Marty was about to be shot for being involved in a case he hadn't heard of—yet. But Marty was in too much of a hurry to die just then, so he composed a bullet rhapsody—for a corpse parade.



*Smashing "Marty Quade" Novelet**By Emile C. Tepperman*

CHAPTER I

THE Japanese gentleman was very apologetic. He stood in the doorway of Marty Quade's hotel room, with a flashlight in one hand and a small twenty-two calibre pistol in the other. Right behind him there was a second Japanese gentleman, who had no flashlight, but who made no effort to hide the gun in his hand.

"I am so sorry to intrude, Mr. Quade," said the first Japanese gentleman, speaking very politely and in precise English. "Believe me, it is very necessary."

Marty sat up in bed and blinked at the two uninvited guests. The hair on his chest glistened in the beam of the flashlight. He slept only in his pajama pants, and the upper part of his body felt chilly in the cold draft which the open door was causing.

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded.

The first Japanese gentleman stepped farther into the room. His companion, right in back of him, felt for the electric light switch, and flicked it on. The light from the ceiling lamp revealed them both to be faultlessly attired in evening clothes, with white tie, stiff shirt-front, handsome dark topcoats, and opera hats.

The second of the two closed the door carefully, and double-locked it. Then the first one put away his flashlight and advanced toward the bed. Keeping the pistol pointed at Marty, he showed two gleaming rows of false teeth in a smile that was supposed to be dazzlingly genial.

"Please do nothing rash, Mr. Quade," he begged. "I am aware of your reputation for toughness. But believe me, if you

should get out of bed, we would be compelled to kill you at once."

Marty looked at them soberly for a moment, then he began to grin. He propped himself up on one elbow, keeping the blankets over him. His other hand was under the blanket, gripping the thirty-two calibre automatic which he had picked up from the night table when he had been awakened by the fumbling at his door.

"Come right in," he invited. "Make yourselves at home, Mister—er—"

"Hito," supplied the first Japanese gentleman. "Matsuma Hito. And this"—he waved at his companion, who blinked owlishly from behind a pair of horn-rimmed glasses—"is my assistant, Mr. Nugo."

"And what's the idea, Mr. Hito," Marty Quade demanded, "of breaking into my room at three o'clock in the morning?"

"We did not break in, Mr. Quade," Hito protested gently. "We merely opened the door with a passkey."

"Where did you get the passkey?"

Mr. Hito smiled once more and raised one shoulder slightly. "From the night clerk. The poor fellow saw fit to try to resist, and Mr. Nugo was regretfully compelled to kill him. We have put his body in the vault."

MARTY'S fingers curled around the butt of the automatic under the blanket. His eyes narrowed. Mr. Hito was certainly not bluffing. His calm statement about murdering the night clerk had been made too matter-of-factly.

"If you wanted to get in here," Marty said, "why didn't you just knock instead of going to the trouble of killing the night clerk?"

Mr. Hito smiled deprecatingly. "We hoped to catch you—napping, so to speak. We wanted no trouble with you, Mr. Quade. We thought it wiser to talk with you—with the advantage on our side."

To illustrate what he meant by "having the advantage on his side," he thrust his pistol a little closer to Marty's bare chest.

"Go ahead and talk," Marty said. "But don't expect that little pop-gun of yours to do you any good. I've been shown bigger guns than that."

Mr. Nugo, who had come around to the foot of the bed, snickered. But Mr. Hito remained very grave. "I have been warned that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Quade. That is why we took such precautions tonight. I do not think that we will have any trouble with you."

"Get down to business," Marty said impatiently.

Mr. Hito removed his top hat, flattened it carefully, using only one hand, and then sat down in the chair near the bed. He put the hat in his lap and held the pistol over it.

"You are a very unconventional private detective, Mr. Quade," he began. "You have no office, and you transact all your business from your hotel room here, or from any bar where you may happen to be. In this manner, you are always within reach of any client who has immediate and pressing need of your services. Perhaps one reason for operating in this peculiar way is that you have clients in so many different and out-of-the-way walks of life."

"Look, Mr. Hito," Marty said in an exasperated voice. "For the sake of saving time, you can assume that I know as much about myself as you do. Skip the biography and get down to the bare facts. I want to get some sleep tonight."

Mr. Hito smiled. "Have no fear, Mr. Quade. You shall sleep well, tonight. Very

well indeed."

Mr. Nugo snickered again.

"I see," said Marty. "Curtains for me, eh?"

Hito shrugged deprecatingly. "No one dislikes bloodshed more than I do. But in your case, there is no other way."

"In plain English then, you're here to knock me off?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, yes. My humble apologies, but we must kill you in a few minutes."

"Why in a few minutes? Why not right now?"

"You do not understand, Mr. Quade. We are waiting for the telephone call."

"Telephone call? From whom?"

"From Andrew Gaxton."

"Ah!" said Marty. "Andrew Gaxton! But what has *he* got to do with all this. He's a writer of crime stories. And besides, he's in Mexico City—"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Quade. Andrew Gaxton arrived in New York by plane only a few minutes ago. We are quite sure that his first action will be to call you. He will ask you to meet him at once and act as his bodyguard. He has the utmost confidence in your ability to protect him, Mr. Quade."

"Thanks for the compliment," Marty said sourly. "But what's he afraid of?"

"Of me!" Mr. Hito said, with a show of becoming modesty. "He knows that I plan to—er—eliminate him, unless he complies with certain requests of mine. When he phones you, I shall let you answer. Then I shall take the phone, and inform him that I am here. I shall let him hear the shot which will—ah—deprive you of your life. When he understands that I have killed the one man upon whom he relied for safety, he will quickly come to terms with me."

Mr. Hito smiled, as if in appreciation of his own cleverness.

"You amaze me," Marty said. "You positively amaze me."

"Thank you," acknowledged Mr. Hito. "I always try to do a piece of work thoroughly. It is my profession."

"You mean you're a professional murderer?"

"No, no. I, Mister Quade, am a—"

Mr. Hito had no opportunity to say what he was, for the telephone on the night table rang.

Mr. Hito smiled, and bobbed his head. He waved toward the instrument with his pistol.

"Answer, please!"

A QUEER sort of tenseness seemed to take possession of both Mr. Hito and his assistant, Mr. Nugo. Nugo's breath left his lips in a sibilant hiss, and he leaned over a little, across the foot of the bed. His eyes, behind the horn-rimmed glasses, actually grew wider. The pistol in his hand moved forward, and the veins began to stand out on his skinny yellow hand.

Mr. Hito, however, remained outwardly calm, except for an almost imperceptible hunching of the right shoulder.

Marty pushed himself back in the bed, so that he rested against the headboard. He still kept his right hand under the blanket. With his left he reached out and removed the telephone from its cradle. He raised it and said:

"Quade speaking. How are you, Gaxton?"

There was a gasp at the other end of the wire. Then a voice said: "Marty! How did you know it was I?"

Marty Quade chuckled. "A little bird. In fact, two little birds. The name of one is Mr. Hito, and the name of the other is Mr. Nugo. They're here to kill me, so as to put a scare into you."

"Holy Moses!" Andrew Gaxton

groaned. "I should have known better than to drag you into this. I could kick myself for having boasted, down in Mexico City, that my friend Quade would take care of me once I got to the States. You're as good as dead, Marty, and I am lost. That Hito is worse than a rattlesnake!"

"Tut, tut," said Marty. "Mr. Hito is easy to get along with. I'll take five to one that I buy you a cup of coffee at the lunch counter downstairs—in a half hour."

Mr. Hito and Mr. Nugo, who had been watching and listening very carefully, now exchanged glances. Mr. Hito nodded, and reached over and took the phone out of Marty's hand. He put the speaker to his mouth and said:

"Do not accept the wager, Mr. Gaxton. It is impossible to collect from a dead man. Listen closely now, and you will hear the shot—"

He nodded to Mr. Nugo, who snicked the safety catch off his pistol and thrust the gun all the way forward to bring the muzzle nearer to Marty.

Marty sighed, and took his own automatic out from under the blanket. The safety catch had been off all the time, and all Marty had to do was to pull the trigger.

He did so, and the gun *cracked*.

A big, round hole appeared in the center of the triangle formed by Mr. Nugo's eyes and the top of his forehead. Mr. Nugo let the pistol drop out of his hand. It fell to the bed. His horn-rimmed glasses fell off his nose. Then Mr. Nugo, looking quite bewildered, toppled forward. Blood spattered the white sheet. Mr. Nugo lay still. The reverberating echoes of Marty's shot bounced back from the four walls like the rumbling of a metal drum.

Mr. Hito was taken entirely by surprise. He had remained seated alongside the bed, with his opera hat in his lap, and the pistol held above it.

But he had been so sure that Mr. Nugo

would be capable of handling the simple matter of murder, that he had devoted his entire attention to turning the phone in such a manner that it would catch the full blast of the revolver shot. Marty's swift and unexpected action had caught him flat-footed.

For a fraction of a second he certainly did not realize what had actually happened. Then, as Nugo fell across the bed, Mr. Hito uttered a sibilant sound and lifted his gun.

But Marty Quade was already swinging the automatic around. He could have shot Mr. Hito through the head, just as he had shot Nugo. And perhaps he later had occasion to regret that he had not done so. But instead of shooting, Marty merely struck down at Mr. Hito's wrist with the barrel of the automatic.

The sound of metal striking against bone was drowned out by the still-reverberating echoes of the gunshot. But the feel of it was very satisfactory to Marty. The barrel thudded solidly against Hito's wrist, and the Japanese gentleman opened up his fingers and dropped his pistol, as if it were white hot.

For a second he looked with uncomprehending eyes at the dead body of Nugo, and at Marty's grinning face. Then he jumped up from the chair, spilling his opera hat and dropping the phone. He turned, crouched low, and dashed for the door. He twisted the catch, and yanked the door wide open.

"Hey, you!" Marty yelled. "Stand still, or I'll shoot—"

Mr. Hito threw himself flat on the floor, wriggled forward a foot or two into the hall, and then rolled out of the line of fire.

Marty swore under his breath, threw the blankets off, and leaped out of bed. Clad only in his pajama pants, he dashed out after Mr. Hito.

HE SWUNG out into the hall and stopped still, his face going a brick red. Mr. Hito was already far down the end of the corridor, near the fire exit. But there was some one else, less than ten feet away, coming toward the door.

She was a black-haired, black-eyed beauty, with a short fur jacket and a pair of blazing emerald pendants in her ears. A red silk dress swished around her long legs and clung to her narrow hips like cellophane.

But it wasn't her legs or her dress or her earrings or her hips that Marty was noticing at that moment. He was noticing the heavy black Luger which she was holding in one slender hand.

Besides noticing that Luger, Marty was also supremely conscious of his own lack of clothing. He uttered a gasp, and turned and dived back into his room.

But the black-haired girl came after him relentlessly, and started shooting. She was a terrible shot, and the bullets went everywhere except in Marty's direction.

The Luger was entirely too heavy for her, and the recoil threw her aim wild. The gun boomed four times before Marty got inside the room, and then he took another step and tripped over something. It was the body of the dead Mr. Nugo, which had rolled off the bed and was lying on the floor on its face, directly in Marty's path.

Marty went down head first, and his temple struck a glancing blow against the baseboard of the bed. It knocked him groggy for a second, and he lay still, his hands outstretched, one paw still gripping the automatic.

He heard the black-haired girl fire two more shots behind him. One slug hit the bed, and the other plowed into the floor almost a foot from his head.

She was certainly the rottenest shot who had ever popped a gun off at Marty Quade. But she must have thought that she

had hit him, for he heard her say with a strong Spanish accent:

"Let that be wan lesson to you, peeg. I, Esperanza Torres, 'ave keel you, weeth my own 'and!"

Then he heard her light footsteps swiftly retreating down the hall.

Marty wiped sweat from his forehead, shook his head to free it from dizziness, and got to his feet. He grabbed his robe lying on a chair, flung it around him quickly, then sprang to the door.

The Señorita Esperanza Torres was just disappearing through the same fire-door through which Mr. Matsuma Hito had made his exit a few moments ago. There was a flutter of her red dress, and then the fire-door closed behind her.

Marty started to give chase, and then realized that half a dozen doors in the corridor were open, and that people were peering out at him.

He swore under his breath, and gave up in disgust. He turned and went back into his room, shut the door behind him. Then, picking up the phone which Hito had dropped, he said:

"Gaxton! Hello, Gaxton!"

There was no answer. Marty scowled, and tried again. Still no answer. Then the hotel telephone operator cut in.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Quade?"

"What happened to the call I had on here?" he demanded.

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps you were disconnected. Do you know the number? Perhaps I could call them for you?"

"I don't know the number."

"Then maybe the party will phone back—"

"I'm afraid they won't!" he mumbled.

"What's that, sir?"

"Nothing. Listen—have you seen the desk clerk down there?"

"No, sir. That's very funny. I just rang the desk clerk to get the list of morning calls, but there was no answer—"

"All right," Marty said wearily. "Maybe you better phone down to police headquarters. Get hold of Inspector Hanson of Homicide. Tell him to come right over."

"Homicide! Did you say *homicide*, Mr. Quade?"

"Homicide."

"But—but that means murder. Is—is there some one dead?"

Marty threw a jaundiced glance at the body of Mr. Nugo. "If he isn't dead," he growled, "he's giving the best imitation of it that *I* ever saw!"

CHAPTER II

AT SIX-THIRTY that morning, Marty Quade was downstairs in the hotel restaurant, having coffee and ham-and-eggs with Inspector Hanson. The room upstairs was cleaned up, but there was a uniformed policeman on guard. Chalk marks on the floor indicated where Mr. Nugo's body had lain, and there was fingerprint dusting powder all over the place, and on the halls and stairways of the hotel.

Needless to say, Marty had not gotten back to bed that night. And Inspector Hanson was still firing questions at him, in between mouthfuls of ham and eggs.

"Damn it, Quade," he growled, "you say this Spanish dame fired at you six times, and we've found all six slugs. But it just doesn't sound reasonable that she should have missed you that many times at such close range!"

"All right, all right!" Marty snapped. "We'll do a re-take of it and have her hit me next time. Just get the dame back, and we'll give her another chance."

“Now don’t get tough, Quade,” Hanson barked. “I’m just trying to get a straight story, and I don’t think you’re giving me everything you know. We’ve checked with Pan-American, and they have no one by the name of Gaxton on their passenger list on the clipper last night. That was the only airliner that made connections with Mexico City. It’s the only ship Andrew Gaxton could have arrived on. But they haven’t got him down—”

“Maybe he used an alias. He was afraid of being knocked off. Maybe he tried to conceal his arrival by booking passage under another name.”

“We’re checking on that,” Hanson told him. “There were nineteen passengers on the plane, and we’ve located eighteen of them. The nineteenth, a chap named Smith, didn’t come in on the regular bus. He took a cab, and the porter heard him tell the driver to go to the Beverly Hotel, but no one registered there by that name—”

“Smith, eh?” Marty interrupted. “I suppose it never occurred to you that it might be Gaxton?”

“Sure it did!” Hanson growled. “But we haven’t proved it. There are plenty of men whose real name is Smith. Every time you see a guy who calls himself Smith, it doesn’t mean that he’s traveling under an alias.”

“All right, skip it,” Marty snapped. “What about Mr. Hito? Did he disappear off the face of the earth, too?”

Hanson shrugged helplessly, “We’ve picked up a hundred and sixteen Japs for questioning in the last two hours. You’ve been down to headquarters and looked them over, and none of them is Mr. Hito. I’m beginning to think there never was a Mr. Hito, or a Spanish dame, or a call from Andrew Gaxton. I think you made it all up, to cover something else you’re trying to hide from me.”

“What about the telephone operator?” Marty pointed out. “She told you there was a call at three ten—”

“Sure. But it might have been from anyone. She didn’t listen in. We’ve checked back on that call, and it came from an all-night drug store in Long Island City, which fits in all right, because Gaxton—or whoever he was—could have stopped off on the way from LaGuardia Airport to make the call. But that doesn’t prove it was Gaxton.”

“So?” Marty asked.

“So,” Hanson finished, “you’re still not out of the woods, Quade. If it turns out—”

Hanson stopped talking abruptly, his face going a dull red. He had been talking so loud and forcefully that his voice had been drowning out the voice of the newscaster, coming over the radio at the cashier’s desk.

But just then a few of the announcer’s words penetrated to their ears through Hanson’s bellowing, and it was that which had caused him to shut up. The announcer was saying:

“. . . body has been identified as that of Andrew Gaxton, the noted writer of crime stories, who has been in Mexico investigating Fifth Column activities for a series of articles he was preparing.

“The taxicab apparently went out of control when a bullet fired from a high-powered rifle pierced the windshield and struck the taxi driver in the head. The cab was speeding across Queensboro Bridge at the time. It went wild, struck one of the steel girders, and immediately burst into flame.

“Fire-fighting apparatus from Welfare Island, in the middle of the river, immediately below the bridge, were rushed up by the elevator which

connects the island with the bridge, but it was too late. When the taxicab driver and Andrew Gaxton were removed from the smouldering wreckage, they were burned to cinders.

"Mr. Gaxton was identified by a leather wallet which he must have been holding at the moment of the accident, and which was thrown from his hand, out of the car window on to the bridge roadbed. It will be recalled that Andrew Gaxton recently announced that he would return soon from Mexico City with information on Fifth Column activities there which would be dynamite"

Marty Quade's face was grim and tight as he listened to the radio announcement.

"So," he said softly, "They got him, after all!"

"Hell!" Hanson swore. "I should have been notified. It's a homicide—"

He was interrupted by a waiter who came to the table.

"Inspector Hanson?" the waiter asked. "You're wanted on the phone, sir. It's police headquarters."

Hanson nodded brusquely and got up. "That's the desk sergeant calling to report," he grumbled. "It's a wonder they wouldn't move a little faster. Don't go away, Quade. I got plenty to ask you yet."

HE WENT toward the phone booths, and Marty waited only until he was out of sight. Then he got up from the table, leaving the check for Hanson to pay, and hurried out the back exit of the restaurant, passing through the kitchen.

The night cook, a Greek by the name of Ulysses Macropulos, had his arms elbow-deep in a pie batter. He looked up and recognized Marty, and grinned broadly.

"Halloo, Mistair Ku-vade. I hearing

dat you gattin caught oopstairs by does woman, vid half your pajamas on, hah?"

"Nuts," said Marty. "I never sleep in a coat. That's why I grow hair on my chest."

"Hah!" said Ulysses Macropolos. "Vat you do if dere is fire, hah?"

"Listen, Ulysses," Marty growled. "I got caught in worse than a fire last night." He passed the cook's table and got to the back door, which opened into an alley alongside the hotel. "Do me a favor, Ulysses, will you?"

The cook grinned, and winked. "Sure. I knowing w'at you wants. W'en dose cop come, I ain't seeing you. I catch wise, hah?"

"Good boy, Ulysses," Marty praised. "That's the idea. You do me this favor, and I promise to taste your meatballs and spaghetti tomorrow."

"You promise? Hah! I making special for you tonight. But don't gattin you'self keel today."

"I'll do my best," Marty told him, and slipped out into the alley.

He made his way along the alley and stepped out into the street, trying to look as nonchalant as possible. Hanson's police car was at the curb in front of the hotel entrance, and behind it was parked a small station wagon belonging to the homicide division, in which they carried their fingerprint and photographic paraphernalia. But there were no police in evidence out here.

Marty turned west toward Eighth Avenue. He threw a quick glance across the street, and his lips tightened. A small, wiry man had come out of the lunchroom directly opposite, and he began to pace Marty, keeping just a little behind, but remaining on the other side of the street. After that first quick glance, Marty didn't look again, but he had seen enough. The man was Japanese.

Marty kept walking steadily west,

though he felt prickles along his spine. Those Japs had got to Andrew Gaxton swiftly and terribly. Now the only reason they could have for shadowing Marty Quade would be for the purpose of completing the task which Mr. Hito had left unfinished last night—that simple little job of murder. If Quade were taken out of the picture now, it would leave no one to testify against Mr. Hito.

At this unholy hour of the morning, there were only a few people out, all men, obviously early commuters, and laborers.

Marty slowed up, so that the man on the other side of the street was almost abreast of him. The man made no move to slacken his pace, but continued on, past Marty. But a little farther on, he stopped and looked in a store window displaying women's lingerie.

Marty grinned thinly, and continued on. He couldn't afford to lose too much time here, because Hanson would be coming out after him very soon now. But neither could he afford to let that Jap get behind him.

Just then, a taxicab which had been cruising slowly down the street, pulled up alongside Marty. Some one leaned out of the window and said: "Ps-st!"

CHAPTER III

BY INSTINCT, Marty's hand streaked to his shoulder holster as he whirled. But he let the gun slide back when he saw whose face was framed in the open window of the cab. In fact, he almost slid through the sidewalk himself. For the face in the window was none other than that of Andrew Gaxton, the man who had just been reported murdered over the radio.

Gaxton had a round, cherubic face, and immense ears. He also had a flabby extra chin, which was jellifying now, in his excitement. He thrust open the door of the

cab and croaked: "Jump in, Quade. Quick, for Heaven's sake!"

Marty glanced across the street at the Jap. The wiry little fellow was still admiring the ladies' lingerie.

Marty stepped into the cab and pulled the door closed without slamming it.

"Get going!" he said to the driver, and then he dropped to the floor, crouching on hands and knees. "Pull that hat down over your face!" he commanded Gaxton. "And look natural. Keep your eyes straight ahead!"

Andrew Gaxton obeyed mechanically. "But—but—"

From where he crouched, almost at Gaxton's feet, Marty couldn't see a thing out on the street. "Take a gander across the way," he ordered, "and tell me if that Jap over there is wise to where I disappeared."

Gaxton looked, and exclaimed: "Oh, Lord! You didn't fool him, Quade. He's running toward us, and he has a gun out. He'll kill us both."

"Yeah?" Marty said, and poked his head up, sliding out his automatic at the same time.

The Jap had already reached the cab, and jumped on the running board. He was poking his gun in through the window, and Marty came up, his face only inches from the muzzle. The Jap grinned triumphantly and pulled the trigger.

The gun thundered. Flame belched from the muzzle, and a slug whipped out. But Marty's hand had come up at the same time as his head—the hand which held the automatic.

His automatic struck the barrel of the Jap's gun, driving it upward, and the slug instead of ploughing through Marty Quade's face, slapped into the roof of the cab, burying itself in the upholstery.

The Jap never got a chance to fire a second shot, because Marty smiled at him sweetly, and lunged with the muzzle of the

automatic, driving it smack into the fellow's chin. It cut a gash an inch and a half long from the point of his jaw up to his lower lip. And it drove his head far back. The Jap gurgled, let go his hold on the window frame. He went toppling off the running board and rolled away, limply.

Marty swung to the cab driver, who had automatically stepped on the brake.

"Keep going, my friend," Marty said. He emphasized his point by touching the cold muzzle of the automatic to the back of the man's neck.

The driver got the point all right. He took his foot off the brake and put it on the gas. They shot ahead to the corner like a projectile out of a cannon's mouth, and crossed Eighth Avenue against the red light without losing an iota of their speed. At Ninth Avenue Marty said:

"Turn right, my friend, and go uptown."

At the next corner Marty took the muzzle from the driver's neck. "All right," he said. "You can stop here."

They got out, and Marty smiled winningly at the driver. "You did us quite a favor, my friend."

"L-listen, m-mister," the cabby stuttered. "I d-don't w-want n-no t-trouble—"

"No trouble at all," Marty told him, "as long as you keep mum about us." He turned to Gaxton and said: "Give him some money."

Andrew Gaxton nodded eagerly and pulled out a roll of bills which was so fat that he had difficulty holding it. He peeled off two twenties, handed them to the driver.

"You better forget you had us for a fare," Marty warned.

"M-mister," the driver said, "I'm b-blind and d-deaf and d-dumb—"

"S-swell!" said Marty. And then he snapped his fingers in disgust. "Oh, hell!

I'm doing it too! Get going!"

They watched the cab disappear up Ninth Avenue, and then Marty took Andrew Gaxton by the arm and hurried him down the side street, back to Eighth.

Gaxton tried to hold back. "We can't go right back, Quade. The police will be looking for us."

"Not at Eighth Avenue, they won't," Marty told him. "They'll figure we're miles away."

"But where can we hide? I don't dare let the police get their hands on me!"

"Why not?" Marty demanded. "Look, Gaxton, if you've committed murder, I'll have no part of you. I'm in Dutch with Hanson already."

"No, no, Quade. It—it's nothing like that. But if the police get hold of me, they'll grill me. I can't take it, and I'll talk. And if I talk, then Esperanza's brother, Juan, will get boiled alive in a vat of oil—"

"Whoa up!" Marty exclaimed. "You're running the film too fast. Did you say Esperanza? Is it Esperanza Torres, by any chance?"

"Yes, yes! How do you know?"

"I've met the young lady."

"You have! Good Lord, Quade, you couldn't. She's in Mexico City."

"Nuts," said Marty. "She talked to me right in my room, this morning."

"What—what did she say?"

"She said: '*Let that be a lesson to you, you peeg!*' I'll never forget those words, Gaxton!"

"I don't understand," the writer murmured. "I left her in Mexico City yesterday." He looked up suddenly, and blurted: "Quade, we're almost at Eighth Avenue! I daren't take the chance."

"We're not going any further," Marty told him. "Here's where we turn in."

He steered him into the entrance of a seedy looking hotel which sported the

name *Argus* on a hanging speckled sign over the doorway.

"This is where you hole up."

Reluctantly, Gaxton permitted himself to be steered over to the desk. There was a large sign on the wall which said,

ALL RENT PAYABLE IN ADVANCE—
NO CHECKS
ROOMS RENTED BY THE DAY MUST BE
VACATED BEFORE THREE P. M.

PRICE LIST

Inside Room..... 60c
Outside Room 75c
Soap & Towel 10c
Shower Free

THE clerk at the desk looked up from a racing sheet when they came in. He grunted: "Hullo, Quade. Been a year since I seen you last."

Marty nodded. "Give us one of your broken-down rooms, Oliver. On the top floor, next to the fire escape."

Oliver nodded, and reached for a key. "Room seventeen. You want it with, or without?"

"With," said Marty.

"That'll be fifty fish," Oliver told him.

Marty glanced at Gaxton. "Give him fifty bucks."

"Fifty dollars!" Gaxton exclaimed. "That's outrageous. And what's this about *with* or *without*? I don't feel in the mood for—"

"Take it easy," Marty said. "We're just getting a room with silence. If the cops inquire about you, silence will be the watchword. Is that worth fifty bucks to you? Or isn't it?"

"Oh," said Gaxton. "I see."

He took out his roll and counted fifty dollars on the counter.

Oliver took the money nonchalantly and stuffed it in his pants' pocket. Then he

came around the desk, led them to the elevator and said: "Step in, gents."

The old cage creaked miserably on the way up, and Gaxton fidgeted nervously. At the seventh floor they got out. Oliver gave them the key.

"To the right, at the end of the hall," he said. "The fire escape is right at the hall window, next to your door. If anything comes up, I'll ring the hall bell three times. That'll be your signal to scam."

Marty nodded and led Gaxton down the corridor. He opened the door of Room Seventeen, and they went in. There was a single old bed, a dresser without a mirror, and a table with a pitcher of water and one glass. There was no chair in the room, and no closet. A cord tacked to the wall had two coat hangars attached to it. The bulb in the ceiling light was twenty-five watts, to discourage late reading.

"Holy Moses," Gaxton said, "is this where we must spend the day?"

"*You* must," Marty told him. "Sit down."

He fairly pushed him on to the bed. "Now! Let's have the story. How come you're reported dead, but still alive?"

Gaxton shrugged. "It was a mistake. After I called you and heard the shots over the phone, I got panicky. I dropped the phone and ran back to my cab. I told him to drive me out to Forest Hills. There I hid out in a hotel room till six o'clock this morning.

"Then I couldn't rest any longer, and went out for a cup of coffee. In the dining car, I heard over the radio about what had happened in your room. It was only then that I realized you were still alive. So I decided to go to see you at once. I got another cab, and we started for the Queensboro Bridge. I was sure I had lost Hito's Japs, but I kept watching all the time, and sure enough, I saw a car parked just at the entrance to the bridge, with two

of the yellow killers in it.

"They saw me at the same time, and as we passed them they started after us. I told my driver to hurry, and he raced over the bridge. We overtook and passed another cab, just like ours, and the Japs must have mistaken that one for mine. They blasted it."

Marty nodded. "They got the wrong man?"

"Yes. I heard the shot, and then the crash of the car. I looked back and saw the flames. I paid off my driver and let him go. Then I walked back to the burning cab and threw my wallet on the ground nearby. That's how they figured me for dead."

"I see," said Marty. "And what about the car with the Japs in it?"

"It must have escaped, back into Queens. I didn't see it."

"Are you sure those Japs didn't stick around and spot you leaving the wallet?"

Andrew Gaxton turned white. "You—you mean—they could have followed me—all the way—"

"Anything is possible," Marty told him. "I suppose you never looked behind you once, all the time you were waiting in that cab for me to come out of the hotel?"

"Well, no," Gaxton admitted. He was nervously cracking the knuckles of his right hand by squeezing them with his left. "It never occurred to me that they might have picked up my trail—"

"Stop cracking your knuckles!" Marty barked. "You'll have me nuts in no time!" He waved angrily at the writer's hands. "What about Esperanza Torres? Where does she fit in the picture?"

GAXTON shook his head. "I don't understand it at all. I left her in Mexico City. I even kissed her goodbye at the plane. She couldn't *possibly* have been here ahead of me, which is what she must have been, if she was at your hotel room

while I was on the wire—"

"Is she a long and slinky dame," Marty asked, "with black hair and black eyes, slender and beautiful as all hell?"

"That's she!" Gaxton exclaimed. "It's incredible that she should have been here! She's my fiancée. It's for her that I'm doing all this—taking all these awful risks—"

"Doing all what?"

"Bringing the papers to New York."

He produced an envelope from his pocket. Out of the envelope he took a folded batch of onionskin papers, which he opened.

"Here is conclusive proof that the Japanese are conducting a Fifth Column campaign in Mexico and that they plan to establish bases down there, from which to launch an air attack against the United States!"

"Ah!" said Marty, taking the papers. "So this is Mr. Hito's profession. He's a spy!"

"Of course!" exclaimed Gaxton. "He'd do anything under the sun to get these papers back!"

Marty looked through them swiftly, and whistled. They were photo-static copies of original documents, mostly written in Spanish. One of them was a photograph of an order from the Mexican Division of the Imperial Japanese Secret Service. The order directed local commanders of Fifth Column units to report to Mexico City to receive orders for "Q" Day, which would be the day upon which an uprising was scheduled in the Province of Sonora.

Another was a copy of a letter from a Mexican official, asking for additional funds. Attached to it was the reply from the Chief of the Imperial Japanese Intelligence Service, instructing him that money had been placed on deposit in a certain bank to his credit. It was signed

Colonel Matsuma Hito.

"Wow!" said Marty. "I should have shot that guy through the gizzard!" He swung angrily on Gaxton. "Why didn't you take this stuff straight to the State Department in Washington?"

"That's what I was going to do, but I got a radiogram while I was on the plane. It was from Esperanza. Here." He pulled the crumpled form from his coat pocket and thrust it at Marty.

The radiogram was in Spanish, but in between the lines, Gaxton had scribbled the English translation:

JUAN IN OIL IF PAPERS ARRIVE
WASHINGTON. FOR MY SAKE GO
NEW YORK AND MAKE DEAL WITH
HITO WHO IS NOW THERE.

ESPERANZA.

"You see," explained Gaxton, "it means that the Japanese spies down in Mexico City have kidnaped her brother, Juan, and threaten to boil him in oil if I deliver these papers to the U. S. State Department. Juan Torres and his sister, Esperanza, have been collecting these documents for me.

"In fact, Juan Torres even posed as a traitor to Mexico in order to get into the confidence of the Japanese Intelligence Service. Now that they got him down there, it means that he'll die a slow death—no matter if I give up the papers or not. But I decided to see if I couldn't trick Hito into ordering him released. That's why I decided to get you to protect me while I carried on the negotiations."

Marty tapped the radiogram. "If Esperanza Torres sent you this from Mexico City while you were on the plane, she certainly couldn't have reached New York before you."

"That's right—"

Marty suddenly put up a hand to stop

him. Out in the hall, the bell was ringing. It was muffled, so that it would not awake anyone asleep on the floor. But it was perfectly audible to anyone listening for it. It rang three times, swiftly, then three times again.

"The police!" Gaxton exclaimed.

"Worse!" said Marty, shaking his head. "Three times is the signal for cops. Two three's is the signal that something else has come up—also calling for a quick lam."

"The Japs!"

Marty nodded. "It looks like they trailed you, after all. Let's be going, Gaxton!"

CHAPTER IV

HE HUSTLED Gaxton out into the hall and over to the window. Behind them they could hear the old-fashioned elevator machinery creaking as the cage rose slowly.

"They're coming up!" Gaxton groaned. "Lord, we'll never escape them. They're devils—"

Marty wasn't listening. He was working like a Trojan at the window, trying to pry it up. It hadn't been opened in so long a time that it stuck stubbornly.

"Didn't I pay that Oliver fifty dollars for silence?" Gaxton demanded. "How come he's bringing those Japs up here? How come he talked? How come he told them what room we were in?"

"Mr. Hito's Japs have nasty ways of persuading people to talk," Marty said drily. "I don't blame Oliver at all. You wouldn't expect him to let his eyes be put out for a mere fifty bucks, do you?"

The window still refused to yield, and the creaking of the machinery became louder as the cage neared their floor. Desperately, Marty reversed his revolver, wrapped his hat around the butt and

smashed out the window pane.

It tinkled against the fire escape outside, some of the broken glass spattering against the wall of the adjoining building, which was only a few feet across the alley. Marty trimmed off the jagged ends of the remaining glass, and pushed Gaxton out on the fire escape. He followed him closely.

Gaxton wanted to go down, but Marty pulled him the other way.

“Up!” he ordered.

“But we’ll be trapped on the roof—”

“Up!” Marty repeated, glaring at him.

Gaxton was too scared to put up much opposition. He started climbing.

Marty remained at the fire escape, peering in through the broken window. He heard the elevator cage come to a stop, and saw the shaft door slide open. There were half a dozen wiry little Japanese men in there, and it was one of them who was operating the elevator. They started to surge out into the corridor, naked guns ominous in their hands.

Marty Quade’s eyes were bleak and hard. He raised his automatic and pulled the trigger five times fast, sending a flailing barrage of death into the huddled group of men. Cries of pain and surprise rose among them, forming a sort of high-pitched threnody to the thundering chorus of Marty’s automatic obbligato.

The smashing slugs from Marty’s gun hurled those men back into the cage, threw them into a confused mass of dead and wounded. Some one fired over the prostrate bodies of his fellows. The bullet whispered in Marty’s ear, then clanged an anvil chorus against the iron railing of the fire escape behind him.

Grimly, Marty fired twice more, emptying his automatic. Turning quickly, he dashed up the fire escape ladder after Gaxton.

The writer was waiting on the roof, trembling, in a cold sweat of fear.

“I—I was wondering what I’d do if you got killed—”

“If I get killed,” Marty told him, “you might just as well jump off the roof! Now come on!”

He led the other at a run across the top of the building to the other side. Here, the roof connected with the roof of the adjoining building.

“This is the way all of Oliver’s tenants make their getaway when the bell rings,” he explained.

They crossed on to the next roof, and Marty pointed to a faint red line, drawn in chalk, with arrows spotted on it every ten feet.

“We just follow the red line,” he told Gaxton. “Isn’t it worth fifty bucks?”

The red line ended in front of a skylight, the door of which was swinging open. Gaxton eagerly lunged for it, but Marty pulled him away. “That’s only for the people who follow us. We go around.”

CIRCLING the skylight, Marty came to a stop in front of a dumbwaiter shaft. He opened the door, and there was the dumbwaiter, empty and waiting to receive them.

Some alterations had been made in it, so that it was twice as long as the usual dumbwaiter, with a sturdy, two-inch-thick shelf in the middle. Each compartment was large enough to accommodate a full-grown man, doubled over.

Marty stuffed Gaxton into the lower half and then climbed into the upper half, himself. He reached out and pulled the door shut. The daylight was immediately blotted out, leaving them in darkness. Marty felt around and, finding the rope, hauled on it cautiously. They began to descend, without sound.

Marty chuckled in the dark. "This is a remodeled tenement house," he explained. "Now it's a furnished-room house, and they don't use dumbwaiters any more. In fact, they've probably forgotten that there ever was a dumbwaiter in the building. Oliver owns it. While we're going down here to the cellar, those Japs—if any of them are still alive—will be trooping down through the skylight on the false trail."

"Look here, Quade," Gaxton said suddenly. "I begin to think you're going to get me out of this. A little while ago, I had lost hope. Now I'm beginning to breathe more freely."

"Don't get too optimistic," Marty warned, hauling on the rope. "This Mr. Hito is a very clever man. He may pop up where you least expect him."

They finally reached the bottom of the shaft, and Marty pushed the shaft door open. They rolled out of their cramped position, onto the basement floor. The dumbwaiter shaft was located in a corner of the cellar, and the coal bin had been built up in front of it, to screen it from observation.

They had to step gingerly over the coal, which slid and danced under their feet. Finally, however they managed to scramble out, alongside the furnace.

"Whew!" said Gaxton. "It's hot down here!"

Marty led the way toward the back door. "Go easy here," he warned. "This takes us out into the same back yard as the hotel. If Hito has posted any men out there, we'll have a fight on our hands."

As he talked he slipped a fresh clip into his automatic.

"Listen, Quade," said Gaxton. "I haven't talked about money with you. So far, you've earned more than I can ever pay you. If you get me out of this alive, just name your fee."

"Yeah!" Marty grunted. "I've had experience with guys who were willing to give me their shirt while the heat was on. But after I got them in the clear, they didn't remember how grateful they'd said they would be. Me, I like to get paid in advance."

"I've got plenty of money!" Gaxton rushed on, pulling out his roll of bills. "Just say how much!"

Marty looked at the roll, estimating its value. "So far," he said "I've given you about five thousand dollars' worth of service. If we come out of this alive, I'll probably earn another five thousand. I'll settle with you now for two grand."

"Make it three thousand!" Gaxton gurgled, and started peeling hundreds off the back of the roll. He thrust the money into Marty's hand.

Marty didn't count it, but slipped it casually into his pocket. He grinned in the semi-darkness of the basement. "Always strike while the iron is hot!" he said. "That's a damn good motto."

He led the way out of the cellar. At the back door he paused for a moment, peering into the back yard. It was a cloudy, sunless day, but there was enough light to perceive that the back yard was empty. Marty nodded, and stepped out, but did not relax his vigilance. Behind him, Gaxton crowded closely.

Marty nodded to the left. "There's an alley around the side of this building. We go halfway up the alley and then step in through the cellar door of the next house. That's the corner. We go out the front way, and we'll be on Eighth Avenue. We can mix with the crowd and grab a cab. Let's go."

They swung into the alley, and as soon as they had done so, Marty knew they had walked into a trap. At the far end of the alley there were two Japs with sub-machine guns. At the same time, Gaxton

exclaimed:

"They're after us, Quade! Behind us!"

Gaxton's last words were drowned out by the thunderous roar of Marty's automatic. He hadn't waited for those machine gunners to open up, but had started shooting the moment he spotted them.

This time he conserved his ammunition, because he knew the fight wouldn't be over with the killing of those two. There were others behind them. He fired only twice, and the two Jap machine gunners went spinning backward, the weapons flying out of their hands.

They had been so supremely confident of the efficacy of their quickfirers ever Marty's pistol, that they had waited just that extra moment, to relish the taste of their triumph. And it was that extra moment which meant the difference between life and death to them. Marty hadn't waited to think. He had just started shooting.

He didn't wait now to see where those two Japs fell. He whirled around to see what was behind. At the same time he thrust Gaxton in back of him.

IN the rear of the alley were several wiry, yellow men, guns in their hands. The trap had been well-planned. Hito must have surveyed the ground, like a good general, and decided just where the enemy could retreat to if he should escape the killers who had gone upstairs. Then he had stationed men down here, to insure the success of his campaign.

The Japanese started shooting, and Marty, disdaining to kneel or crouch, faced them, spraddle-legged, and traded shots with them. Japanese, endowed with poor eyesight, are notoriously bad shots.

Their bullets sang all around Marty and Gaxton, caroming off the brick walls on either side, and ploughing into the

ground. Marty shot carefully, picking them off one by one.

He yelled over his shoulder to Gaxton: "Get going! Find that side door and amscray!"

"But you'll be killed—"

"Get going, I say! I took your money, didn't I?"

There was no more opposition from Gaxton. Marty devoted his attention solely to the fight. The thundering guns drowned out any possible sound Gaxton might have made in retreating, so Marty couldn't tell whether he had obeyed or not.

He was down to his last cartridge. He had knocked over a couple or so of the yellow men, but more came crowding into the alley. They formed a solid line across the width of the alley, and began to charge. They came in at a run, their guns blazing in front of them.

Marty fired his last shot. This was the end. Well, it was all in the game. By his peculiar code of ethics, he deemed it his duty, once he had taken a client's money, to serve that client, even at the cost of his life. He had made plenty of money in his career, and he had lived a fast, full life.

But he had always known that the end would come like this one day, without notice and without preparation, and without benefit of clergy. Well, he was ready for it.

He smiled grimly, and went into a crouch, running to meet that charging line of death.

CHAPTER V

FROM behind him came a frantic, desperate shout in a voice so distorted that he had difficulty in recognizing it as Gaxton's: "Down, Quade! Get down! Down!"

At the first sound of that voice, Marty caught the play. A great feeling of elation

warmed his blood at the thought that Gaxton was coming through. He threw himself forward, flat on his face. He slid along the concrete walk for a couple of feet, toward the charging Japs.

And then, from behind him, there came the brittle staccato chattering of a sub-machine gun. Bullets whined above Marty's head. In front of him, the Japanese gunmen began to go down as if a high wind were carrying them backward irresistibly.

The charge broke up. Those in front fell, writhing, to the ground. Those behind turned to run, but were mowed down before they could take more than a few steps. The withering hail of lead from the sub-machine gun did not cease until the alley was entirely cleared of the enemy.

Marty jumped to his feet and turned to where Gaxton knelt on one knee, with one of the discarded submachine guns at his shoulder. Gaxton grinned broadly and threw the gun away. Then he came running toward Marty.

Marty dashed past him, knelt beside that sub-machine gun, and vigorously wiped fingerprints from the stock. Then, jumping to his feet, he seized Gaxton by the shoulder and propelled him toward the side door of the adjoining building. He pulled it open, yanked Gaxton in after him, and closed it.

Already, people were running toward the alley. Peering in from the street, Marty glimpsed their faces as he closed the door. Also, he heard a shrill police whistle, repeated over and over again.

He made sure the door was closed, then found the latch and turned it. Gaxton was breathing noisily behind him.

Marty took him by the arm and led him down a flight of stairs, then across the basement, and up another flight of stairs. They found themselves in the rear of a motion picture theatre.

It was dark in here, and the house was empty and deserted. The show wouldn't begin for hours. Marty hurried up the aisle to the front, found the small office which opened into the lobby. He turned the catch and pushed it open, and they stepped through.

In the street, a crowd had gathered at the mouth of the alley, watching the uniformed policeman who had bravely gone in there with his whistle blowing. But none of the crowd dared follow him.

Just as Marty and Gaxton got out on the sidewalk, a police radio car pulled up with squealing brakes, and two more officers got out on the run. The crowd was growing thicker by the second.

Marty nodded, and piloted Gaxton down Eighth Avenue to the next corner. They found a cab, and Marty said: "Grand Central Station."

As the taxi wound through traffic, Marty put a new clip in his automatic. Then he looked at Gaxton.

"Andy," he said, "you're okay by me. That was a nice piece of work you did back there. I never figured you for so much guts."

Gaxton blushed. "Aw, hell, Marty, I had to keep you alive. With you dead, I'd have been in the soup for fair. I wouldn't have known which way to turn."

"All the same," Marty said, "you saved my life, when you could have got away clean. I won't forget it."

They got out at Grand Central Station. Inside, Marty led Gaxton over to the operator-serviced phone booths in the Concourse, and shoved him into one of them.

"You call the State Department in Washington," he ordered, "and tell them what you have. Make an appointment to meet some one there in a couple of hours. Then we'll go across the street to the Airlines Terminal and book passage in a

Washington plane. We'll be out of New York before Hito's killers pick up our trail again."

"I can't do it, Marty!" Gaxton protested. "If I turn these papers over to the State Department, Hito's men in Mexico City will boil Juan Torres in oil. How could I face Esperanza, after having done that to her brother?"

MARTY nodded. He was beginning to understand the peculiar and steadfast loyalty of this Andrew Gaxton, whom he had underestimated. Just as Gaxton had been willing to pick up a machine gun and fight for Marty, he was willing to go to any lengths to save the brother of his sweetheart.

"All right, then," Marty said suddenly. "You get in there and put in a long distance call for Esperanza Torres."

"In Mexico City?"

"Sure."

"But you said you saw her here in New York this morning."

"I say I saw her in New York, and you say you left her in Mexico City. So suppose you call up and find out. Maybe she's crossing you. Otherwise, why would she want to shoot me in the seat of the pants?"

Shrugging, Gaxton went over to the operator and put through a person-to-person call for Esperanza Torres, in Mexico City.

"That will be seven dollars for three minutes, sir," the girl at the switchboard said. "Plus twenty cents tax."

"Better give her twenty dollars," Marty advised. "You'll probably talk more than three minutes. You can get your change when you finish."

Gaxton gave her the money, and returned to the booth. It was only seventy-two seconds by Marty's watch when the connection with Mexico City was

completed. Gaxton had to close the door so he could hear above the noises of the station.

Marty, watching him, saw him talking urgently and desperately, then he saw him become pale and taut. Gaxton took out paper and pencil and scribbled something down. After talking for another minute, he hung up.

He came out of the booth, shaken and trembling. He thrust the paper into Marty's hand. On it was written an address:

Bianca Torres, Hotel Hutton

"What's this?" Marty asked.

Gaxton seemed to be in a daze. "It—it's Esperanza's sister, Bianca. It was she who shot at you this morning. I'd forgotten that Esperanza ever had a sister. Bianca went to Spain to serve as a nurse in the Loyalist Army, and she was captured by Franco.

"She escaped, and wandered all over France for a year, then got passage on a refugee boat for New York. She's been here a couple of months. After I left in the plane, Esperanza cabled her that I was coming to New York, and that you would work with me. She also warned her that Hito was in New York. She said Bianca would co-operate with you and me—"

"She picked a fine way to co-operate!" Marty said bitterly.

"But that isn't all!" Gaxton exclaimed. He stopped, and gulped, then rushed on. "Juan Torres was killed last night! They fished his body out of the bay. He had been dipped in a vat of hot oil, then tossed into the ocean. They—they didn't wait to see if I'd turn the papers over to the State Department!"

"The devils!" Marty said hotly. He gripped Gaxton's arm. "Now you are free to hand those papers over."

"No, no!" the writer groaned.

“Esperanza got a call from Hito’s representative down in Mexico City. The fellow said that Hito knew the whereabouts of Bianca here in New York, and would give her the hot-oil treatment unless I return the papers to him. Hito figures that we might let Juan die, but that we’d never let a thing like that happen to a beautiful girl like Bianca!”

“Oh, hell!” said Marty. “Let’s go and find this Bianca.”

He took Gaxton’s arm and started to turn around, and some one said: “Why, you’re certainly going somewhere, Mr. Quade. But not to find any dames. You’re coming down to a nice clean cell in police headquarters!”

Marty stopped short, facing Detective Sergeant Sloane, of the homicide detail.

“Fancy meeting you here!” Sloane said, taking out his handcuffs. “We’ve been combing the city for you, but we never figured you’d be sap enough to come to Grand Central Station.”

“That’s what I figured you’d figure,” Marty said sourly. “That’s why we came here.”

“Only by accident did I see you,” Sloane apologized. “I’m just going off duty, and I’m on my way home to Larchmont. But I’ll give up my time off—for the privilege of taking *you* in!”

“Don’t bother,” Marty said, and swung for Sloane’s jaw.

HIS short punch had all the power of his shoulder muscles behind it. Sloane said, “Ar-gh!” and buckled at the knees.

Marty caught him and let him down easily, taking the handcuffs out of his hands and slipping them into his own pocket as he did so. A number of people turned to look. No one had actually seen the punch, and they thought Sloane was just another drunk. A uniformed station

guard came running over, and Marty yelled to him.

“Officer! Officer! This man needs medical attention!”

The guard knelt hastily alongside Sloane, and Marty stood up. He gave Gaxton the high-sign, and they faded away. They went out the Vanderbilt Avenue exit, and Marty started walking hurriedly north.

“Where are we going?” Gaxton demanded.

“To check on Bianca Torres. Maybe we’re not too late to stop Hito from grabbing her!”

“With every cop on the police force looking for us,” Gaxton commented breathlessly, “we have a fine chance of blocking Hito! I don’t understand why he should have killed Juan, and switched to Bianca.”

“I do!” Marty barked, swinging briskly into a side-street, and heading east. “Bianca is in New York, while Juan was in Mexico City. Knowing you, Hito figures you’ll make a try to save Bianca. And he’ll be waiting for you, Andy. Make no mistake about that—if Bianca’s still at the Hutton Hotel, then Hito and his killers won’t be far away. They’re waiting for us!”

“You think it’s a trap?”

“Nothing else but!”

“Then why’re we going?”

“Because there’s nothing else for us to do. We can’t wander around New York, waiting for some copper to pick us up. And we can’t smack them all in the jaw, either. Our only out is to find Mr. Hito and have it out with him—win or lose, kill or die!”

“And I haven’t even got a gun!” Gaxton said ruefully.

Marty grinned, and took a police service thirty-eight out of his coat pocket and handed it to him. “I did a little

pickpocketing when I was kneeling alongside Sloane,” he explained.

Gaxton took the gun gingerly. “I never handled one of these.”

“You did all right with the submachine gun,” Marty told him. “Just do as well with that, and we’ll come out all night. Be sure the muzzle is turned toward the other guy when you pull the trigger.”

Gaxton grinned. “Marty, I’ve been writing about crime and crime fighters for years. But today was the first time I ever held a gun in my hand. I like it. I think I’ll become a man of action instead of just writing about them.”

“Don’t make plans for your future,” Marty warned, “till you know Mr. Hito is six feet under ground.”

They stopped in front of a small but highly conservative looking hotel, with a small brass plaque alongside the door. The plaque read:

HOTEL HUTTON

Marty took a quick look around. “No Japs in sight,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean they’re not around. Keep your hand on the butt of that gun.”

They entered the Hotel Hutton, and went up to the desk.

“We’re calling on Miss Bianca Torres,” Marty said.

The clerk raised his eyebrows. “Name, please?”

“Tell her it’s Mr. Black and Mr. White.”

“H’m!” The clerk coughed his disapproval, but went to the house phone. A moment later he returned, however, and said: “You may go right up, gentlemen. It’s Suite 1212.”

Marty nodded and led the way to the elevator. The cage took them up to the twelfth floor, and left them alone in the quiet, carpeted hallway. The walls were

adorned with wallpaper, and imbued the place with an atmosphere of subdued respectability. But Gaxton shivered a little.

“I feel as if we were walking on a keg of T.N.T.!” he whispered.

Marty grinned, and stopped in front of Room 1212. He rapped twice, but there was no answer. He took out his gun, and pushed at the door. It was unlocked, and it came open, revealing a two-room suite with a little foyer.

He could see into the living room, and it was evident that there was no one there. At the right, a bathroom door was partly open, while at the left the door to the bedroom swung wide. Part of a bed was visible.

Upon it lay the motionless figure of a woman. A blanket covered her, but it came down only to her knees, exposing her dress. It was the same red dress Bianca Torres had worn that morning.

Marty cat-footed into the living room. He turned and whispered to Gaxton: “You stay right here in the foyer, and keep your back to the wall. Cover me.”

Gaxton nodded, and gripped the police revolver tightly.

Marty crossed the living room, ignoring the open door of the bathroom, and stepped into the bedroom.

Almost at once, a head arose behind the bed.

IT WAS the familiar head of Mr. Matsuma Hito. Only his eyes showed, and one hand, which held a gun trained upon the temple of Bianca Torres. At the same time, two other Japanese heads arose from behind the two boudoir chairs in the room.

Guns appeared beside those heads, trained on Marty. At the same time, Hito whipped the blanket off Bianca Torres, revealing that her arms were tied cruelly behind her back.

“Good morning, Mr. Quade,” Hito said pleasantly. “It was nice of you to come—so that I can complete my unfinished job of this morning.”

“You fool!” Bianca exclaimed from the bed. “W’y you ‘ave come? W’y you no ‘ave let Andrew geev those paper to thee State Department, an’ let me die!”

Marty glanced at the two Japs, barricaded behind the chairs on either side of him. Then he looked over at the cynical countenance of Mr. Matsuma Hito, behind the bed, and at Bianca’s slim, bound figure. He grinned at her.

“You’re certainly worried about me now—for a dame that tried to pump me full of lead this morning!”

“Eet was a meestake!” she exclaimed. “Thee cablegram from my sister—she ‘ave been meex up in thee translation. Esperanza ‘ave say that you work weeth Andrew, but thee translation ‘ave say that you work weeth Hito. I ‘ave theenk you are a traitor to your friend, Gaxton, an’ I ‘ave go to keel you.”

“I see,” said Marty. “And now we’re all going to be killed by Mr. Hito.”

“Quite so,” said the Jap, still hiding behind the bed. “Mr. Gaxton will be taken care of in the next room, by my men who were hiding in the bathroom—”

From out in the living room there was a sudden flurry of shots. Marty could distinguish the deep booming of the police positive, throatily drowning out the spiteful bark of smaller calibre pistols.

Marty jumped forward into the bedroom, and the two Japs fired from behind their chairs. Marty paid no attention to them. He went for Hito. He leaped high up, on to the bed, alongside Bianca.

Now he was above the Japanese spy-master. Hito, squealing, raised his gun to shoot upward, but Marty slanted a shot

downward from his automatic, and it took Mr. Hito right in the top of the head.

Marty bounced off the bed, amid a flying barrage of shots from the two Japs. He landed flat on the floor, snapped a shot at the right-hand chair, and saw that Jap’s face disintegrate, then he rolled over and fired at the other Jap.

That fellow didn’t seem to care much for the fight any more. He threw his gun away and raised his hands in the air. Marty’s bullet had nicked him across the top of the scalp, and he looked groggy.

Marty grunted, sprang to his feet, and tapped the fellow on the head with the barrel of his automatic. Then he sprang out into the living room to see if Gaxton needed any help.

Two dead Japs were lying across the threshold of the bathroom, and a third was peering around the door jamb to get a shot at Gaxton, who had dropped to one knee. The Jap was hidden pretty well from Gaxton, but he was in full view of Marty. Grimly, Marty let him have one in the shoulder; and the fellow tumbled backward.

Gaxton sprang up and exclaimed: “Marty! We’ve won!”

Marty nodded soberly, and turned back into the bedroom. He went over to the bed and untied Bianca’s arms. She smiled up at him, her lips full and warm.

“You weel forgeev me for that I ‘ave shoot at you, no?”

“Baby,” said Marty, “I’d forgive you anything!”

He helped her up and into the next room, just in time to greet a rushing deputation of uniformed police and detectives who barged in with drawn guns. It took him a little while to explain things, and by that time Inspector Hanson arrived, and he had to explain everything over again.

There were calls to the State Department, and the F.B.I., and to Mexico City, and at the end of it all, Marty took Bianca's arm with one hand and Gaxton's with the other and said:

"Let's go get some more breakfast. I never had a chance to finish my first."

Inspector Hanson came over and took his arm in a grip of steel. "There's only one place you are going, my fine-feathered friend. That's back to the hotel restaurant and pay that check you tried to stick me with!"

Marty grinned. "It's a pleasure, Hanson. I earned enough today to pay your salary for six months. I can afford a breakfast."

Bianca Torres pushed Hanson away, and wrapped her arm around Marty's. She snuggled close, and looked up at him with a warm smile.

"He shall go weeth none of you. 'E 'ave promise' that 'e forgeev me for that I 'ave shoot at heem. 'E mus' come weeth me. Eet shall take heem a long time—thees forgeving!"

She thrust them all aside, and led Marty out of the room.

Watching him angrily, Hanson growled: "You always were a lucky skunk, Quade!"

Marty turned at the door, with Bianca on his arm, and bowed.

"Better luck next time, Inspector Hanson," he said, grinning.