

GUNMEN'S HATE



The second adversary swung the barrel of his gun

by Col. William T. Cowin

Caught in a Trap Where Death Seemed the Only Way Out, A Daring Young G-Man Strives Desperately to Make Good on His First Assignment.

THERE were eight of them in that room. Eight pairs of eyes that held the flickering covertness of the hunted man. Eight bitter faces, etched with the acid of hate.

It was a shabby, furnished apartment, on a side street in Manhattan. There they waited, with tensed nerves and inflamed tempers. Malloy had issued strict orders that none was to leave the apartment

until the word came, until Mayhew returned from the country with the information that would send them springing to desperate and bloody action.

The room was blue with smoke. Four of them played cards. Three scanned the morning papers. But Malloy remained to himself, pacing up and down, scowling, uttering muffled curses under his breath.

For the heat was on Malloy's mob.

The G-men were on the trail. The word had gone out. Worse yet, the Malloy mob was broke. Too broke to seek a safe hideout and lie low until the deadly marksmen from Washington had time to interest themselves in another case.

Malloy was even now embarking on a single desperate foray to raise money—money enough to take a run out before the heat got too hot altogether. It was not mere chance that had made Malloy top man of these killers. Hard as they were, he was harder. Bitter as they were, he was more bitter. And deep down in his murderous heart he harbored a hellish hate for the G-men.

It was an obsession with Malloy. He cursed them and damned them. For they had slain the one thing that he had ever achieved an affection for. Malloy's kid brother had fallen a victim to the Federal guns; and Malloy, completely disregarding the fact that the kid had shot down two agents in cold blood, had nurtured this hatred in the depths of his soul.

An odd tattoo beat on the door. Every head in the room jerked around. Eyes contracted with heroin blinked swiftly. Hands reached for gun butts. Malloy sprang across the room. The muzzle of his thirty-eight was against the door.

"Who is it?" he snarled.

A whisper came back: "Mayhew."

Breath was drawn once more into lungs that had held taut. Weapons disappeared from view. Malloy shot the bolt, opened the door.

A burly man was in the room, the cynosure of all eyes. Mayhew threw a bag on the table and sank into a chair. He sighed heavily.

"Well," snapped Malloy. "What've you got?"

"Everything. The whole layout."

"Let's have it."

MAYHEW lighted a cigar. The eight men listened in attentive silence.

"He's at his country place near Belleville," said Mayhew. "He's got two servants in the house—and he's got a bodyguard."

"That's because of that damned amateur extortionist who sent him those letters last year. The kid the cops got here."

"Right," said Mayhew. "That's just why he's got a G-man with him."

"A G-man!" Malloy's voice was a dry detonation.

"Yeah," said Mayhew. "He's the bodyguard. They wanted to send another guy but the old man wouldn't stand for it. He says it's all hooey. He ain't afraid of snatchers. He's even sore that they got this one guy there. But they insisted on that."

"Okay," said Malloy. "You're sure you got everything? Sure we ain't going to run into something unexpected?"

"That's the whole layout," replied Mayhew. "Got it from the gardener. Talkative old guy—been in the family for years. Bought him three drinks in town one night and he talked."

"Okay," said Malloy. "Let's get going."

A man moved across the room. His dark face was grave.

"Wait a minute, Malloy," he said. "You ain't going to pull this snatch under a G-man's nose, are you?"

"Why not?" snarled Malloy. "He's a man, ain't he? He's just one man like any of the rest of us!" His eyes suddenly lit up. "By hell, Richards, I got an idea, and what an idea! Boys, we'll take the Fed, too!"

They stared at him. Even Mayhew was moved to protest.

"Take the Fed! Are you crazy, Malloy?"

"Sure," said Malloy. "Crazy like a fox. We'll take the Fed. I got a swell idea." His hand dropped to the butt of his thirty-eight. His voice dropped ominously. "Anybody think it ain't a swell idea?" he demanded.

There was a deathly silence in the room. "All right," went on Malloy. "Get ready to move. We're pulling this thing tonight. Get packed up."

His seven henchmen sprang to action. Malloy sat at Mayhew's side.

"Nice job," he said. "Did you get anything else?"

"Nothing much," said Mayhew. "I understand the Fed you're going to snatch is a youngster. He's been working in the code department for the Government. This is his first actual assignment. Anyway, that's the gardener's story."

Malloy nodded his head slowly. A mad, lustful gleam was in his eye. He spoke slowly and softly, more to himself than Mayhew.

"They knocked off Mike, damn them! Well, here's where I even things up forever."

Mayhew glanced at him. He recognized that expression on his chief's face; that murderous expression which usually presaged bloody violence.

HASTINGS lounged beneath a huge oak tree and idly watched one of America's richest men putter contentedly in his garden. Dusk was falling over the countryside, bringing with it the quiet serenity of the summer evening.

For three days now Hastings had lounged about the estate, keeping an eye on old Ronald Norcross; and now he was beginning to wonder if the wire pulling and effort he had exerted in leaving the code department had been worthwhile. Still it was a change; and how his partner, Garnett,

had envied him when he had drawn this bodyguard assignment!

He ground out his cigarette in the moss at his side and yawned. The uneventful hours of the past three days had made him careless.

Neither he nor Norcross was aware of the shadowy figures that moved quietly through the dusk, using the cover of the foliage to mask their advance. Then of a sudden a rosebush parted. A figure loomed up on the garden path. Four other wraiths materialized at different points.

The tableau had evolved in less than three seconds. Shadowy and unreal it registered on Hastings' vision. He sprang to his feet, his hand on his gun butt.

Gun out, he charged down the lawn. Norcross' voice now smashed on his ears. But the old man's cry ended in a groan as a gun barrel crashed down on his head.

Hastings raised his gun. Another voice came from farther down the path.

"Malloy! Watch it! There's the Fed!"

At that moment Hastings' finger constricted on the trigger. Steel and flame leaped from the muzzle. One of the dark figures uttered a yelp of pain, reeling back, cursing, into the bushes.

Two more shots cracked out. Hastings heard the slugs whine over his head. He was desperately cool now. Carefully he sighted in the dim light. Again his finger jerked the trigger. Thrice he replied to the barrage which now came from the path.

Then of a sudden he heard the sound of rapid footfalls behind him. He spun around. Again his finger tugged at the trigger, but a smashing fist knocked the weapon from his grasp. Two men were before him. Two snub-nosed automatics were aimed at his heart.

Still he did not hesitate. His fists

shot through the air like pistons. One of them landed cleanly on the point of a jaw. A man slumped suddenly at his feet. The second adversary raised the barrel of his gun, brought it down in a sharp arc.

Hastings threw his head to one side. The gun hammered down hard on his shoulder. His knees buckled under the blow. He reeled. Then an arm encircled his throat from the rear. Like a steel vise it tightened. Again the barrel of the automatic before him was lifted.

This time it crashed down upon his skull. Unconsciousness fell like a hood about his senses. Inert and lifeless, he fell back into the arms of the man behind him.

MALLOY leaned back before the roaring open fire in the old farmhouse. He lighted a cigar and inhaled deeply.

“Well,” he announced, “the hard part’s over. The contact’s arranged with the old man’s lawyer. We’ll have the dough tonight.”

Mayhew nodded. “That part’s okay, chief. We been here two days now, and you ain’t peeped about that Fed. What are you going to do with him?”

Malloy chuckled, but there was little mirth in his face when he spoke. “That’s the part I been saving,” he said. “Saving until we got the old man arranged for. Now comes the idea I told you about. I’m going to square things with those Federal rats for what they did to Mike.”

Richards glanced at him eagerly. “You mean we’re going to give that guy the works, chief? Burn his feet and all that?”

“Maybe,” said Malloy, “if he don’t do as he’s told. But that ain’t the idea. Now get this: take a look at that road map on the wall. See? Now that’s where we are. Twelve miles northeast of Belleville. That other camp of ours is about twenty miles

cross country on that dirt road. Landers, you’re going there tonight.”

Landers raised his beady little eyes. “Me? What for?”

“Because you’re the best pineapple man in the business. You’re going to mine that joint, plant enough dynamite in it to blow a city to hell. You’re going to attach a battery to it so you can set it off.”

“So what?”

“So,” said Malloy, and his eyes burned with an evil fire, “when a whole party of G-men raid the place you can set that dynamite off, Landers. That’s what.”

They stared at him. Mayhew cleared his throat and broke the silence. “Who the hell’s going to raid the place? How do you know the Feds’ll knock that joint off?”

“Because,” said Malloy triumphantly, “Little Rollo in there’s going to write them a note telling ’em that he and Norcross are being held there.

We’ll send a messenger boy in with it. Hell, it’ll be in his writing. They’ll rally. In the meantime, Landers is lying low in the woods with his battery. When he sees ’em go in he pulls the switch. Bango. A dozen rats die.”

Mayhew shook his head. “How do you know that mug’ll write the letter?”

Landers grinned evilly. “We got ways to fix that, ain’t we?”

“Okay,” said Malloy. “We’ll get our dough early tomorrow morning. In the meantime we’ll swing this little party tonight. I’ll go in and talk to the boy friend in a minute.”

But there was little need of talking to Hastings. The farmhouse was a one storied structure, and the walls were thin. Norcross had been incarcerated in the attic. Hastings was in a tiny room off the kitchen. Every word spoken in the other room was audible.

He raised his eyes as the door opened. Malloy entered the room. In his hand he held an ordinary lined-paper notebook. He tossed this and a pencil to Hastings.

"I got a job for you, rat," he snarled. "I want you to write a note. I'll explain—"

"Don't bother," said Hastings. "I heard what you said in there."

"Okay. Then write it."

Hastings met his eyes squarely. "No," he said.

MALLOY grinned unpleasantly. "Listen," he said. "You're a kid. From what I hear, you're new in this racket. You ain't been around much. Well, let me tell you there's ways of making men do things they don't want to do. Think it over, son. I'll give you half an hour."

The door slammed and once again, Hastings was left alone to do his thinking.

He sat on the hard wooden chair which comprised the sole furniture of the room. His brow was wrinkled and his heart was sore. It was not fear of his own fate that depressed him, but rather the fact of failure in a service where failure is unknown.

Idly he riffled through the notebook. Idly he glanced at the stubby pencil, and the black-lined pages. Then of a sudden his heart leaped. An idea illuminated his brain.

True, it was a chance—a long, long chance. But Garnett should know. Garnett would understand. He snatched up the pencil eagerly....

A little later Malloy reentered the room. Behind him was Richards, his face contorted evilly.

"Well?" Malloy demanded. "Have you been thinking those things over?"

Hastings nodded mutely. His face registered a fear that he did not feel.

"You've got me all right," he said dispiritedly. "I know when I'm licked. What do you want me to write?"

Malloy grinned triumphantly. "I'll dictate."

Hastings picked up the book and the pencil.

"Okay. Take this: 'They've got Norcross and me at the summer camp nine miles along route 18. Turn left on the dirt road.... Now sign it.'"

Hastings wrote slowly, laboriously. He made no effort to disguise his handwriting, yet he scrawled in a painful backhand. It was not his usual mode of scribbling. Garnett would know that much, anyway.

He handed the book to Malloy. The gangster scanned the writing. His eyes gleamed. He ripped the page from the book.

"Okay, boy scout," he said. "Here, Richards, get this to town. Give it to Western Union. Have 'em send it up right away with a boy. Landers, you get going. You'll have about two hours. Do a good job."

Again the door shut on Hastings. The lock clicked home. He heard the receding footfalls, the fading voices. Then, after a short time, all was quiet.

THERE was no light in Hastings' room. The hours seemed interminably long. Occasionally he heard movement and voices in the living room of the house. In desperate suspense he waited, waited to see if his plan had worked. He dared not consider the consequences of its failure. That meant not only his own death but the doom of his comrades who would respond to his message. His hands were cold and he could hear the pounding of his heart against his breast.

Then, once, he thought he heard the

purring of an automobile. For a while it seemed to grow clearer, then it ceased altogether. A prayer was on his lips.

Then to his ears there came a sound—a sound of footsteps in the brush outside. His heart bounded as he heard a familiar voice cry out:

“Malloy! Come out with your hands up! You’re cornered and surrounded.”

For a moment there was silence within the house, the stark silence of complete and utter surprise. Then, like the roaring of a bull, came Malloy’s call to arms.

“It’s the heat! Get out that tommy gun. Let ’em have it! Blast ’em or we’ll all be dead men!”

A machine gun stuttered from without in answer to Malloy’s challenge. In another instant the tommy belched forth a chattering answer. The night was hideous with sound. The shouts of men merged with the sharp clatter of the small arms.

Relentlessly the besiegers closed in on the house. A stinging thread of fire crashed against the tiny window of Hastings’ cell. Shards of glass tinkled to the floor. Then, of a sudden, he again heard the mighty voice of Malloy, raised above the din of the fight. “Hold ’em off with that tommy! I’ll settle that rat who double-crossed us—”

Heavy footsteps raced across the floor. Hastings heard the lock turn in the door of his cell. Swiftly he made his way to the side of the door, stood there motionless. The door pushed open. Gun in hand, Malloy charged into the chamber.

Hastings leaped at him. His right fist hammered against the killer’s jaw. His left seized the thirty-eight, tried to wrench it from the other’s grip.

A single shot spat from the barrel, ate an ugly hole in the floor. Malloy had reeled back from the blow, yet he did not

relinquish his grip on his weapon.

Now he closed in again, swinging wildly. Desperately they fought there, chest to chest. Hastings did not dare release Malloy’s right hand. They stood there slugging, each with one fist. Once Malloy’s knuckles hammered home flush against the G-man’s mouth.

Hastings spat blood, closed grimly to the attack once more. Like a pounding piston his fist hammered again and again into the evil face of Malloy. Then of a sudden the gangster gave a swift and mighty wrench of his gun-hand.

FOR a fleeting instant Hastings’ grip was loosened. Malloy’s wrist tore away. His gun hand was free!

Hastings saw the thirty-eight move, saw the muzzle come up. Desperately he swung his right again. This time every ounce of his strength was behind it.

It smashed full on the point of Malloy’s jaw even as the thirty-eight exploded. He heard the bullet whine past his ear. Then the weapon clattered impotently to the floor.

Malloy’s knees buckled. He fell grunting at Hastings’ feet. The G-man snatched up Malloy’s fallen weapon, raced into the living room. He saw a bending figure over a tommy gun. He raised the thirty-eight, fired. The gunner slumped, his deadly weapon stilled.

Men raced on the porch outside, poured into the room. Those of the Malloy mob who yet lived backed against the wall. Their hands were raised above their heads.

Mitchel, chief of the Division, entered the room behind his men. His face lit up as he saw Hastings.

“Good work,” he said. “Garnett figured it for us.... All right, boys,” he said to his men. “Round ’em up. Where’s Malloy? Where’s Norcross?”

"Upstairs," said Hastings. "In the attic. Better get him out right away."

Mitchel issued an order to a subordinate. It was Garnett himself who brought up Malloy, still blinking, half dazed, yet conscious. Hastings grinned at his partner.

"I knew you'd figure it," he said.

"Hell," said Garnett. "I can figure any code you can write!"

Malloy stared at them dully. "Code?" he said. "What the hell are you talking about? I dictated that note myself!"

"Tell him, boys," grinned Mitchel.

"Well," said Garnett, "I knew there was something phony because of the backhand. I didn't know what, but that backhand said out loud to me, 'There's a message here somewhere, if you can find it.' It took me some time. There was no

code in it, I was certain of that, for a while. Then, when I put it under the microscope, I got it."

"Got what?" roared Malloy.

"It was between the lines," Hastings said. "Literally between the lines. I marked those black lines on the paper with the point of the pencil. I did it in Morse code with dots and dashes. Of course, inasmuch as the pencil lead was the same color as the lines they weren't visible to the naked eye. But I knew that if Garnett couldn't figure a code out of it he'd use a microscope. Which he did. It was easy enough to read them."

Hate blazed in Malloy's eyes. He roared a fearful curse which ended in a shattered sob. Roughly they dragged him away.