

**Three Hundred Grand Is Worth Fighting for—But the Odds
Against Terry Black Are Tremendous!**



He fired from the hip

PAYOFF IN LEAD

By JOHN S. ENDICOTT

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THE man behind the wheel of the sedan drew up about a hundred yards from the entrance to the State Penitentiary

for Women. At precisely seven o'clock the big gates swung open and a woman walked out. She had a cheap suitcase in her hand. She

paused only a moment, spotted the car and walked briskly toward it. Now and then she turned her head as if she expected to see someone she feared.

The car door opened. The girl peered inside and made sure it was occupied by only one man.

“Are you Terry Black?” she asked in a hoarse whisper.

“That’s me. Hop in and let’s get away from this joint. I don’t like prisons.”

She got in beside him, studying his rather good-looking features, though his hard-boiled tagmark was pretty plain. He was, she judged, about twenty-eight or nine, slender and well dressed.

“Neither do I like prisons,” she said, with a smile as they sped away. “You ought to spend three years in one. Then you’d really hate ’em.”

He took a quick look at her. Joan Powers was not hard to look at—not even after three years of prison work. Her blond hair needed a permanent, but she had arranged it attractively enough. Her features were regular and her lips vivid.

“This is great,” she sighed, “riding in a car again. Three years is a long time. I’m glad you got my letter. I worried about that, with the prison censors.”

Terry Black shrugged. “They’re a bunch of dopes. I got it okay and I knew what you meant. Tell me the rest of it.”

SHE looked at him steadily, wondering if she could trust this man. Private detectives were usually not above taking everything they could lay hands on. Yet she had to chance it.

“Three years ago, as you know, I drove a car that was used in a stickup. The boys grabbed three hundred thousand dollars, tossed it in the car and we made a run for it. But the fools had killed two people in the bank and the cops came like a swarm of bees. The boys got out, trusted me with the money and

separated.”

“Then you drove somewhere, hid the dough and tried a getaway that didn’t work,” Terry Black said without turning his head. “You refused to squeal—said the boys must have hidden the money, and you took a three year rap. A dame like you would have got six months at the most if you’d talked.”

“You’re psychic,” she said, and smiled. “Tell me more.”

“The dough is safely cached. Nobody but you knows where it is and you want me to protect you until you can lay your hands on it. Which means the cops will be watching you—and so will the boys of the mob. What’s there in it for me if we grab the stuff and get clear?”

“Ten percent,” she replied. “That’s not bad—because you’re only half right. The cops think I told the truth about the rest of the mob having the money. I got the stretch because I wouldn’t tell who they were.”

Terry Black, hard-bitten private detective looked down at the girl and smiled.

“It takes nerve to go through with a thing like that,” he said, admiringly. “I’m on your side, Joan. Where do we go from here?”

“I like the way you handle things and I trust you—Terry Black. Maybe we can really do some business with that money. Three hundred thousand isn’t so bad. Or is it?”

Black stepped on the brakes and pulled off the road.

“You didn’t answer my question,” he said flatly. “What’s the next move? So far as I’m concerned, we’re partners in a deal. My take is ten percent—as usual. I’m no hijacker.”

He reached for the brake and tensed. A car was slipping up behind them—a small car with only one man in it. He was already climbing out and a gun glistened in his fist. Terry Black moved fast. He reached down beside the wheel and grabbed a gun from a spring holster fastened under the dash. With the same motion he flipped off the safety,

pushed open the door and vaulted out. A gun cracked and the bullet smashed into the fender of the car.

Black fired—three rapid shots. The approaching gunman spun on his heel, swayed a little and then plunged to the road.

“Wh—who is he?” Joan asked breathlessly. “Wait! I’ll come out.”

Black reached out his hand to help her out of the car. They made certain no other traffic was coming along the lonesome road and then stepped cautiously toward the man who lay on his face in the dirt. Black kept his gun ready, taking no chances. He turned the man over and grunted as he slid a hand under the fallen man’s shirt.

Joan drew back a step with a little cry of fear.

“Know him?” Black asked her. “He’s dead, so don’t worry about him if he’s one of the mob.”

“I—I never saw him before in my life!” Joan cried. “I—I don’t think he’s one of the boys.”

BLACK placed his gun on the dead man’s chest and began searching the body. He grunted again and straightened up, taking the gun along.

“You dope,” he growled at the girl. “This guy was a copper. See the badge? A detective-sergeant. Now we’re in for it! He must have tailed us, and how do we know he didn’t report the car—or me too, for that matter? We’ve got to get out of here.”

“And—and leave him there—like that?” Joan pointed a trembling finger.

“What do you want me to do?” Black demanded irascibly. “Lift him up and do a Lambeth Walk? He’s dead, I tell you, and there’ll be more of his breed along any minute. Get in that bus.”

She popped into the car and they drove off with a clashing of gears. For two miles neither said a word. Then Joan eyed Terry

Black with a cunning look.

“How does it feel to be a cop killer?” she asked pointedly.

“I don’t feel any different. And what are you asking crazy questions for?”

Joan pushed blond hair up under her hat.

“Maybe you’ll do just as I say—or the cops might get a nice little phone call. You going to play ball?”

Black grimaced. “Did I say I wouldn’t? But listen, Joan, don’t take me for any sucker. You’re a paroled convict. Any crime you commit isn’t petty and because you were in this car with me, you’ll burn, too—if they land us. Swallow that and shut up.”

Joan’s hand shook enough to extinguish the match she had raised to a cigarette.

“I was only kidding, Terry. I—I wanted to see how you’d react. Listen! You and I have three hundred thousand dollars—three hundred grand! We can get it and jump the country. How does that sound?”

“Until the dough is in my hands and we’re on a boat five hundred miles from port, it sounds crazy. I.. Duck!” Black ground out the last word. “There’s a bus pulling out of a side road. I might have known those mugs would lay in wait for us.”

Joan all but swallowed her cigarette as she slid beneath the dash. Terry Black laid his gun on the seat beside him, grasped the wheel with both hands and gave the car every ounce of speed she had. The car following rolled along, losing little ground.

Ahead of them city lights created a rosy glow against the cloudy sky. Black wet his lips, took the next corner on two wheels, zigzagged madly and tramped on the brake. He turned sharply, drove up on a newly mowed lawn, made a complete sweep and headed out again.

The pursuing car swept around the corner at full speed. It rocked dangerously,

landed back on all four wheels and the brakes began to screech. Terry Black shot away from that yard, headed toward the city. He turned out of the side street and before the pursuers' car could turn, he was within the limits and making fancy turns to throw anyone off his trail.

"Boy!" Joan said fervently. "That was driving. We steered 'em off all right. That was Mar—" She bit her lip in exasperation. "That was the boys. They're after me and they'll stick. What are we going to do, Terry?"

"Run for it to a neat little hideout I've picked. I figured this might happen, so I rented an apartment."

"You think of everything, don't you? It's all right with me. We need a hideout."

And Black added grimly: "One error now means either the chair for both of us, or a blast of lead from the guns of your former pals. You positive you know where that dough is hidden? Nobody could have grabbed it during those three years you were cooped up?"

"I'm positive I know where it is and I'm ten times more positive that it hasn't been found," she answered quickly.

BLACK spoke without looking at her.

"Another thing. We can't visit this hiding place where you put the money until we're certain we're not watched. It's going to be tough fighting the cops and those hoods too. Trouble is, somebody may have snitched. Did you talk in prison?"

"Not much. A girl's got to talk, Terry. I only said I was getting a good private detective to protect me. Maybe I mentioned your name once or twice."

Black groaned. "Then we're in for it. They'll have checked on me, perhaps found I rented this apartment. They'll pay us a visit if that's the case. But with three hundred grand waiting, I'll leave those birds, far behind, Here we are."

He parked the car in a dark section of the street, helped Joan out and led her toward a large, fifteen-story apartment building. He started her through the revolving doors, paused outside a moment and looked around carefully. Then he went in.

When they reached the apartment. Joan surveyed it with wide eyes. It was nice! Terry Black had a reputation for doing things the whole way. Furnishings were new and of the best. There was food enough in the kitchen for a month.

Joan studied the private detective a moment, "Terry—you're worried. Do you think things are as bad as that?"

"Worried?" Black grimaced. "Not me. Not after having just knocked off a cop and taken a powder from three or four of your old playmates. Now let's get down to business."

"What's the hurry?" she asked. He reached up and took her hand. "We've got to make a try for the dough. This hideout is only in case we can't connect right away. Why not get started now?"

Joan stood up. "What's the rush?" she asked idly. "I've thought it all out. When you have three years to concentrate on one subject, you generally get it straight. If we don't make a move, the boys will think I got the money and escaped. After awhile they'll relax. The cops will stop looking for you and we can walk out, pick up the money and get away clean. Meanwhile this is a perfect spot. You don't know how perfect because you haven't spent thirty-six long months in an eight-foot cell. And stop worrying. The wrinkles are half an inch deep in your forehead."

He began pacing the floor.

"I can see your side of it," he mumbled, "and I give you credit for being smooth enough to think it up. But me—I've got to have action. I just can't wait around. If the cops ever track down this place, our number is up. I'm worrying about you, too. They won't give you the slightest break."

When I got this place, I didn't figure on killing a cop. How about it? Let's get going."

She shook her head and lit a cigarette.

"No, Terry, I've been cooped up too long not to enjoy this place. We're perfectly safe here and we'll stay—until I give the word. I'll promise you this: If anything happens, I'll take you to the hiding place in thirty or forty minutes."

He glared at her and then shrugged. "You hold all the cards. I'm nothing but a stooge for a blonde."

"But a beautiful blonde," she purred and smiled up at him.

He laughed at that one as he walked over to the window and stood staring down at the street through a slit in the curtains.

JOAN flung her cigarette down angrily and arose.

"Anybody would think I was poison!" she raged. "Stop worrying, will you, or you'll have me wearing out a path in the rug."

"Quiet!" He held up his hand, checking any further flow of irate words. "There's a bus just pulled up—a big black one just like the sedan we got away from. Joan, when you talked in prison, you spilled too much. Those hoods checked on me—found I'd hired this place. Now they've spotted my car. We've got to—"

"Turn around and grab yourself a chunk of ceiling," a voice rasped from behind them.

They turned swiftly. Two men were inside the room. They had opened the door with some kind of a pass key and accomplished it so noiselessly that neither Terry nor Joan had even heard the scrape of metal against metal.

The larger man was a huge fellow with bristling eyebrows and thick, wide lips. His companion was small, seemed almost shriveled beside him. His mouth was a gash cut through milk-white flesh. There was

absolutely no color to his lips.

Terry and Joan raised their hands.

"Marco!" Joan cried with forced eagerness. "Am I glad to see you! Terry Black has been trying to find you for the last week. I wanted things to be all set when I got out, so we could get the money. Gosh, Marco, it's good to see you again."

"Yes it is," Marco drawled sarcastically. "You'd rather see anybody in the world but me. And don't try the hokum, Joan. You pulled that plenty when you ran with my boys. You two-timed us and it's going to get you one nice hot wad of lead—unless you talk."

Terry Black stepped forward and Marco slugged him with the barrel of his gun. Black calmly wiped blood off his face.

"You and your gunnie are a pair of fools," he told Marco. "Joan's on the level. We even had to knock off a copper so there wouldn't be a trail for 'em to follow. The dough is safe and ready for a split. How many ways I don't know, because Joan hasn't told me how many of your boys were in that stickup."

"Nice little place you got here, Joan." Marco disregarded Terry's words and looked around approvingly. Then he snarled: "Come on, Black, spill it! Where's the dough hidden?"

The detective shrugged. They were getting careless now. Only that flour-faced mug by the door worried him. Terry Black had a hunch that hood would shoot and would glory in the sight of his victim slumping to the floor. Marco was too busy watching Joan to be as great an immediate danger as White Face.

"Well?" Marco demanded of Black. "Do you talk or do I let Smalley blow your damned head off?"

"I don't know where the stuff is," Black said steadily. "Joan didn't tell me. In fact, she refused point-blank. Said she wouldn't talk until you got here. This is a fine

way to show your appreciation, Marco. We could have lammed after we left you high and dry down that side street.”

“Why didn’t you stop then?” Marco snapped.

“Smart guy,” Black derided. “In the first place I had just bumped a copper. How’d I know that car wasn’t filled with more cops? And you wouldn’t have listened to reason then anyway.”

Marco relaxed still more but Smalley, by the door, just listened with a scornful expression. Terry Black leaned against a table, putting the flat of his hand on its smooth surface. Three inches from his fingers was a plaster statuette of a giraffe, a crazy monstrous caricature, but heavy and easy to grab.

MARCO was standing close to Joan. Smalley was looking their way now and Black went into action. The giraffe went sailing across the room. Before it landed against Smalley’s startled face, Terry Black was lunging for Marco.

Marco tried to get his gun up. Black kept it down, pointed at the floor. He brought up his right fist in a beautiful arc. It clipped Marco on the chin and the big man reeled backward. Black snatched the gun from his hand, seized Joan’s arm and propelled her toward the door.

Smalley was trying to get up off the floor and fumbling for his gun, which had dropped from his limp hand. The private detective stopped long enough to kick him under the chin. Then he and the blonde girl raced into the hallway. Footsteps on the stairs warned them others were coming. Joan peered down.

“Two more of Marco’s mob!” she whispered. “We can’t go that way.”

“Up!” Black urged her. “Up the steps. Never mind the elevator. There’ll be a man in each one. We’ve got to reach the roof. It’s our only chance.”

They ran up the stairs until they reached the top floor, panting. A narrow stairway leading to the skylight was fully exposed and a man was halfway down the steps. Marco had blocked every exit!

The guard on the steps saw Black and Joan instantly. A gun in his fist exploded and the bullet tore a chunk of plaster out of the wall. Black fired from the hip. The gunman dropped off the steps and landed with a hard thump.

Black was at his side in a moment, His quick eyes had already noted an empty apartment door open and he dragged the man inside. He was quite dead.

Below, they could hear the others running up while Marco’s voice urged them on. Someone stepped out of an apartment to register a protest at the racket. A gun banged and a man screamed. Marco was not stopping at anything now.

“Get into that closet, Joan!” Terry Black pointed across, the empty apartment. “Stay there until I tell you to come out.”

Joan obeyed and Terry was ripping the necktie from his collar before she had closed the closet door. Ripping off his tie he knotted it to the cravat of the dead man, pushed the apartment door half closed and stepped behind it. He held the end of the necktie in one hand, his gun in the other.

Marco barged by the door, skidded to a halt and came back. Terry Black tugged on the necktie and the dead man’s body rose slightly, as though he was resting on one elbow. It was an astonishingly real tableau in the semi-darkness. “Roof!” Black croaked. “Got away—over—roof. I’m—all right.”

“Okay, Joe,” Marco answered. “We’ll be back for you.”

The rest of the mob followed Marco to the roof steps. Black sped across the room, motioned to Joan and they ran lightly into the hallway. The elevator was on the floor level, the door open. Apparently one of Marco’s

boys had taken care of the operator. Joan clung to Terry's arm as they shot toward the street level.

"That was wonderful!" she told him. "Only you should have plugged Marco. Then we'd have no more trouble."

There were several people in the lobby, but none paid any attention to Black and Joan as they hurried to the door. One minute after they stepped to the sidewalk, a policeman ran by them. He looked over his shoulder queerly, but dashed on into the building.

TERRY BLACK jumped behind the wheel of his car and Joan clambered into the seat beside him. They pulled away from the curb, took the next corner, straightened out after they hit an avenue and the hard-boiled private detective let her roll.

"Did you see the way that copper looked at me?" he asked. "One more second and he'd have recognized me. They're wise. Now do you see we must get the money and run for it?"

"I—I saw him." Joan shivered. "I'm sure he knew you. They'll have an alarm out in a minute. We got away from Marco all right, but I don't like cops any more than you do. Okay, Terry, follow my directions and we'll have the dough in a few minutes."

He headed for the outskirts under her orders. Joan talked, mostly to keep her nerves composed.

"The day of the stickup Marco had me drive the car because a good-looking blonde at the wheel of a car parked outside a bank isn't as suspicious as some ratty-looking mobster. It was my idea, but Marco thinks it was his. We made our getaway, but those radio cars got on the job almost at once, and they began to cut us off. Marco and the boys got out, one by one, and slipped away. Soon as I was alone, I knew I had to hide the money. So I kept looking for a likely spot and luck was with

me. I found the best little safe deposit vault in the world. Cops and Marco's boys have searched three years to find the stuff and I'll bet they were only two feet away more than once."

Black grunted something unintelligible. Joan gripped his arm.

"If you don't stop worrying," she chided, "you'll have me in a stew too. See that cemetery? Park outside the gates. The dough is right there."

"In a grave?" Black asked thunderstruck.

"No, you fool! They'd have looked into any graves that were newly dug the day of the stickup. The cops knew I had been around the cemetery. That fence is made of cement, Terry. It's two and a half feet thick. The day I rode by, workmen had just dumped fresh cement to make that wall. I buried the bag of money in the soft cement. Next day they poured some more on it and after it had hardened, they took away all that wooden framework—and there was my dough, nice as could be."

Terry Black grinned at her. "Boy, was that smart! But we've got to work fast now. Once I thought a car was tailing us, but it disappeared. I'll bust the lock on the gate, duck inside and swipe a sledge hammer or a pick. You find the section of wall where you buried the stuff and I'll dig it out."

He left her there so she could examine the wall and determine the exact hiding place. Inside the cemetery, he ran across the lawns, skirted tombstones and located the tool shed. He broke the lock easily, took out a pick and a heavy hammer. When he returned, Joan was waiting, watching the road nervously.

"It's right here." She pointed to a section of the wall. "Hurry! I—I'm afraid, too. You've got me as worried as yourself."

Terry Black hefted the sledge hammer and let go. But the cement was adamant. He used the pick, swinging mighty blows for they

were necessary.

They were far from any house and the noise he made meant little. Twenty minutes passed before the pick sank through a layer of cement and cut the sides of a leather bag. Joan gave a cry of exultation.

THE detective dug faster until he had cut away the whole section. But the bag was imbedded fast. He slit the sides of the leather container, scooped out sheafs of bills and Joan picked them up from the ground. She made two trips to the car with her arms full of cash. She was picking up another load when Marco's voice startled them.

He and four of his men had slipped quietly through the cemetery gates. They were lined up now, guns covering Black and Joan.

"Nice work," Marco gloated. "Keep going, Black. Soon as you get every bill out of that wall, we'll pay you off—in lead."

Terry Black raised his hands. Joan shivered and babbled something. In her mind revolved only the thought that three years of silence had served her nothing. At the moment when safety and success seemed nearest, defeat had come like a bombshell.

"You fooled me once," Marco told Black. "I give you credit—only you weren't so smart on the getaway. We had a guy parked in a car outside. He saw you leave, trailed you here and then phoned me. We slipped into the cemetery by climbing the fence down the street. You were so busy hacking away at the wall that you didn't see or hear us. Come on—use the pick some more. Be sure there ain't any dough left in that wall."

Black bent down, grasped the pick and estimated his chances of hurling it. There just were not any chances. Not when five guns covered him and the men behind them were extremely watchful now that they had recognized the detective's slippery nature.

Marco walked up to Joan and grasped her arm roughly. She gave a little cry of pain.

Marco laughed.

"Aw, don't be so scared. If it wasn't I liked you, Joan, I'd line you up against the wall with that rat and blast you down. That's his finish. You going to behave?"

Joan did not reply. She could not, for her lips were paralyzed with terror. She knew, too well, that her own life would pay for the run around she had given the gang.

"It's all out," Terry Black said calmly. "Every bill."

"Walk ten paces to the left," Marco ordered. "Then stand like you're made of cement too. Smalley, grab the dough. Put it all in our buggy. Snap it up before somebody comes along and we have to do some more killing."

Smalley obeyed promptly. Then Marco signaled his men. They drew close together in one line. The detective, his back against the cement wall, found beads of sweat running down his face. Marco laughed raucously.

"Just like they do in war, huh, Black? Stick you up against a wall—and blooey, you're dead! Ready to take it, sucker? Boys, shoot all at once and then lam. Five guns will make a hell of a lot of noise. Keep squeezing the trigger until you've fired three or four times. We want to be sure this guy is stone dead."

The five guns came up and centered. Joan, still gripped by Marco's brawny arm, thrust her face into his coat and began to scream.

"If you're making it look like the shooting of a spy," Black Said, forcing calm into his voice, "why not do it all the way through? They give a man about to be shot a cigarette, or a drink, or at least a blindfold. I don't want any of those. All I ask is half a minute with Joan. I—I fell for her, see? I—I just want to—kiss her—good-by."

THE drama of that appealed to Marco's warped senses. He clucked his tongue in mock

sympathy, gave Joan a hard shove and sent her reeling toward Black. She could hardly stand and her makeup shone like gaudy paint on a white canvas.

Terry Black took her into his arms. She put her own about his neck. He moved his lips toward hers and then spoke in a whisper.

“When I say ‘duck,’ drop flat. Hear me? It’s the only way.”

He kissed her then and slowly turned her around until his back was toward the gang. Marco and his four men eyed the proceedings with relish. It made them feel as though they were great humanitarians, giving the condemned a last moment with his beloved. It was like the movies and they gloried in it for, after all, they were the foremost participants. Then, too, the car was loaded with three hundred thousand dollars worth of currency that could be spent freely, for none of the bills had been listed.

“Okay,” Marco growled. “Joan, come back here.”

“Duck,” Terry ground out and put all his weight against Joan.

They dropped to the ground and a second later the night silence was filled with the din of exploding guns. Marco seemed to be almost cut in half as he pitched to the ground. Smalley’s body jerked as bullets tore into him. The others merely slumped sideward.

From the cemetery gate streamed a horde of blue-uniformed men, led by a captain.

“Man, that was close!” The police captain wiped the sweat from his face. “I thought we’d have to let the girl have it too.”

Joan was staring at the score of police. Her eyes ran along the top of the cemetery wall to the gate where eight men with rapid-fire rifles had watched the proceedings. Other policemen were examining the firing squad.

“Smalley’s dead—so’s Marco,” a sergeant reported. “The other three are

wounded, but I’m afraid they’ll live.”

“Here come the ambulances,” the captain said and sirens shrieked closer and closer.

The first car to stop was a coupe. A man jumped out.

“Hey, Tommy, it’s a boy! Eight and a half pounds. A boy!”

Terry Black gave a whoop of delight. He kissed Joan, almost kissed the captain and threw both arms into the air.

“Wow!” he shouted. “A boy! That’s swell! Ain’t that swell, Captain?”

Joan suddenly seized both of Terry Black’s arms and looked up at him.

“You’re a stool pigeon,” she snapped. “You’re nothing but a rotten, low-down squealer.”

Terry Black, alias Tommy Dolan, did not lose his wide grin.

“No I’m not. I’m a cop—a detective-sergeant. Your letter was picked up by the censors. We stowed the real Terry Black away and I took his place. Joan, did you hear that? It’s a boy! Hot dog!”

“Terry—or whatever your name is,”—Joan shook him—“have you forgotten—the cop! The one we left in the road?”

A husky-looking man laughed loudly and moved forward. Joan saw him in the light of many flashlights. She gave a little cry and wilted.

“It—it’s—him,” she moaned and pointed a shivering finger. Then her eyes were clear again. “So it was a plant! You didn’t plug him at all. Terry, you’re still a rat.”

THE ertswhile Terry Black laughed.

“That was just to make you hurry things along. I figured if you thought you were in on a cop kill, you’d want to get the dough as quickly as possible. The apartment was just a spot for us to go for a few minutes while the rest of the boys picked up our trail. I didn’t figure on Marco, although we wanted him,

too. We never were sure who pulled that stickup.”

Joan sighed deeply. “Okay. I know when I’m licked. I know why you were so worried, too. Your wife in the hospital and a kid coming and all.” She reached up and patted his cheek. “Never mind. I’m only jealous of that woman who is the mother of your son. And Terry—or whatever your name is—thanks for saving me. I know now that it was just a trick, that saying good-by, so I’d be clear when your men started to shoot.”

Terry Black lost his smile for a moment. She was just a woman who stood before him. A woman still beautiful and brave

in defeat.

“Sorry, kid,” he said gently. “You’ll have to go back to prison, but not for too long, I hope. So far as the murders during the stickup are concerned, the D. A. won’t press that now—if you’ll talk. I’m sorry I had to fool you.”

She threw both hands into the air and laughed a little hysterically. Then she walked up to the captain.

“Okay, skipper, take me away. Put me behind bars where there are no men. Me—who kept the boys on a string for years and years—getting taken for a nice little ride by a new papa. Prison will look good to me.”