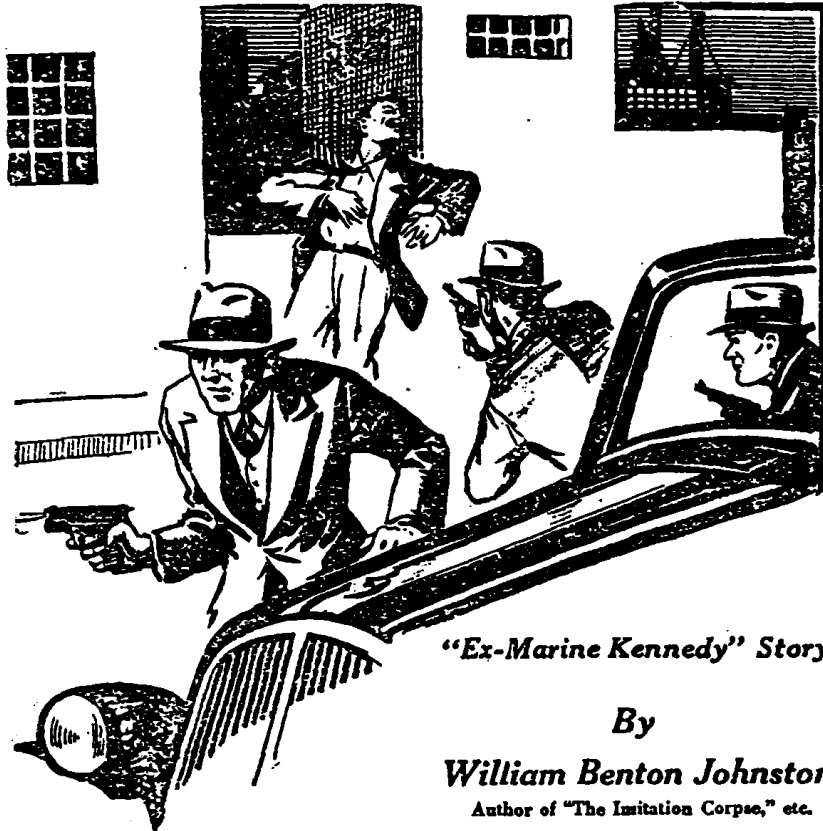


Ex-Marine Kennedy, F. B. I. agent, dug in against twenty murderous gangsters. Facing hopeless odds, Kennedy was counting on using . . .

The Eye of Death



"Ex-Marine Kennedy" Story

By

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MRS. MOLLY BROWN'S modest cottage stood on the outskirts of the little town of Barclay. It was a neat place, with orderly hedges and close-cropped lawn. In the rear there were clean, well-arranged chicken runs and row after row of apple trees. Just outside the front gate a sign announced the sale of apples, fresh yard eggs, blooded Minorcas and Plymouth Rocks.

A heavy, low-swung sedan pulled up before the cottage. There were four men in the car, and one of them said:

"This is the place, Butch. You and Mike go on in."

"You're sure the old Judy will be by

herself, ain't you?" Butch asked.

"Hell yes," the other replied impatiently, "she's a widow and nobody don't hang around."

Mike and Butch went along the walk and knocked on the cottage door. Mrs. Brown, a trim, gray-haired lady, came and smiled cordially at them.

"We want to buy some chickens," Butch said awkwardly.

"Come into the back yard, and I'll show you some beauties." Mrs. Brown opened wide the cottage door. "Just come right on through the house."

They went inside, and the moment Mrs. Brown closed the door. Butch grasped her

wrists and Mike stifled her scream with his huge, pudgy fingers. Butch took both her slender wrists in one hand, produced a roll of tape and expertly bound and gagged the frightened little woman.

"Take her back to the orchard, tie her feet and leave her out of danger and out of sight," he told Mike.

Mike shoved Mrs. Brown through the rear door, and Butch rummaged in the kitchen until he found a can of kerosene. He poured the fluid over the living-room rug and took a candle from his pocket. He lit the candle and carefully placed it upright in the middle of the kerosene-soaked floor.

Mike came in from the yard. "I put her in a ditch back of the orchard. Everything okay?"

"Yeah," Mike grunted, "the candle will burn down to the kerosene in about ten minutes. Come on, let's get going."

They went out, closed the door and strolled leisurely to the parked sedan. The driver started the motor, and the car moved quietly and unhurriedly into the village of Barclay.

"MARINE" KENNEDY, hard-boiled ace of the F.B.I. and former Devil Dog officer, lounged on the shady porch of Barclay's one hotel and idly watched a blue Ryan monoplane circle lazily overhead. Its motor made the G-man drowsy with its soothing, rhythmic drone.

On the trail of an elusive gang that had spread terror through three states, swooping down on small town banks adjacent to the mountains and then disappearing into thin air, Kennedy had chosen Barclay on a hunch and because the Ore and Metal National Bank there carried heavy deposits and stood almost in the shadow of the looming mountains.

As Kennedy watched the plane, the street scene before him changed in an instant from village midday lethargy to

pandemonium. A telephone operator at the central board suddenly began plugging in one 'phone after another and saying tersely into each one:

"Fire—fire—Mrs. Brown's house is on fire."

Men took up the cry along the street—"Fire—fire—Mrs. Brown's house is on fire."

Around the village, guns boomed out the alarm, clerks rushed out of the stores; professional men left their offices. Cars jerked away from the curb, wheeled about in the street and rushed away toward the Brown cottage. A score of young men, clumsy in their efforts to hurry, wheeled out a trailer hose wagon, hitched it to a waiting coupe and sped away.

The activity of the street ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Kennedy saw the terror of conflagration in a place which had no fire department, and he appreciated the complete cooperation of volunteers when he realized that he was the only man remaining on the streets of Barclay.

He left the hotel, feeling a little guilty and conspicuous. Then he stiffened when he saw a heavy, low-slung sedan parked before the bank, its motor running and a tense, furtive man crouched over the wheel.

The G-man instantly knew what was happening, and in the same moment, realized that he was hopelessly outnumbered. He figured that there were three or four men, probably armed with sub-machine guns, inside the building. He knew that he could not expect help from the deserted village. Perhaps there would be one or two employees left in the bank, but they would be locked in the vault by now.

Without another glance at the parked sedan, Kennedy strolled, with apparent nonchalance, along the street. Suddenly there came to him the advice a grizzled, sun-bitten, Marine captain had once given

him.

“When hopelessly outnumbered,” the old officer had said, “strike at the enemies’ transportation facilities—leave ’em stranded until reinforcements can be brought up.”

When he was opposite the sedan, Kennedy spun and leaped through the open front door with a speed that did not give the hood inside time to lift the automatic which lay on the seat beside him. Kennedy jammed his own .38 hard against the man’s ribs and snapped:

“Drive, mug—drive on down the highway.”

The man hesitated, his face a twisted mask of hate and fury.

“Drive on,” Kennedy snarled at him, “or I’ll blow your guts out.”

The car moved away from the curb with a jerk, gathered speed. Then the hood jammed hard on the hydraulic brakes. The car stopped so suddenly that the G-man, unprepared, was sent crashing into the windshield. His head smashed against the thick glass, and he was only vaguely aware that the driver shoved him through the door and shot the car backwards toward the bank.

Kennedy hit the pavement hard and was just shaking the cobwebs out of his brain when three men ran out of the bank door. He realized that his pistol had been lost just as a bullet screamed past his ear. A Tommy-gun began to chatter, and Kennedy went, in a headlong dive, to the sidewalk, rolling off its edge into a vacant lot. The Tommy sent a hail of steel after him, bullets ricocheted off the concrete with whining snarls; others kicked dust from the vacant lot into his face. One touched his chest and left a crimson streak across his shirt; another smashed, with a stunning shock, against his left shoulder. The force of it set his mind whirling, and as he straggled against the blunt, ebony fingers

of unconsciousness, the bandits leaped into the sedan and roared away.

FOR a long time, Kennedy lay there, his stubborn spirit pushing away the dark fingers which groped again and again into his brain. Women and boys gathered around him. Finally he brushed unconsciousness aside and staggered to his feet.

“I’m a federal officer,” he muttered, showing his shield. “Help me get a car.” He glanced down the highway, but his aching eyes saw no trace of the heavy, low-swung sedan. “Quick—a car,” he added imperatively.

A tall, red-haired girl caught his coat lapels and slipped the garment off, ignoring his protests. She tore his shirt to strips, and, with quick efficiency, made a hasty but effective pad which stopped the blood bubbling from his shoulder.

“I’m Myra Coleman,” she said calmly. “Here’s my roadster; come on.”

As the car sped down the highway, wind whipped and whistled around the windshield and revived the wounded G-man, blowing the vagueness from his shocked mind.

Suddenly the roadster came to a swerving stop, its brakes screaming protest. At a side road, a sign spanned the highway with its warning: *Detour—Bridge Down*.

“I didn’t know that any bridge was out on this road,” Myra Coleman exclaimed. “I came along here this morning and—”

“It’s a stall,” Kennedy told her. “Wait; I’ll move the barrier.”

“Never mind,” Myra cried, and sent the roadster crashing through the barricade and on down the ribbon of concrete.

They zoomed over a long, sloping hill and before them was a two-mile stretch of straight, level road. On each side of the highway, barren, rocky fields stretched into the distance. There was a speck on the

roadside far ahead, and as they sped toward it, the speck grew larger and larger until Kennedy said tersely:

“It’s the escape car—and I’ve lost my gun.”

The girl did not take her eyes off the road.

“Your automatic is on the floor; I picked it up from the street in Barclay.”

Kennedy grinned and felt around on the roadster floor until he found the gun.

“Stop about a couple of hundred yards away,” he advised. “I’ll go up on foot.”

“Huh,” Myra snorted scornfully, “do you think I’m afraid, Mister G-man?”

Kennedy looked at her gray-green eyes, her red hair and freckled, reckless face.

“No,” he chuckled, “I don’t think you’re afraid. Go in fast, slam on the brakes, duck under the cowl and leave the rest to me.”

She followed instructions with exactness, but when Kennedy whipped a slug into the sedan, there was no return fire. He leaped out and found the car empty.

He stood a moment, listening. The silence was unbroken, save for the exhaust of the roadster and the distant roar of an airplane motor.

“There’s no place for them to hide in these barren fields,” he told Myra. “They switched to another car. Come on; let’s get ’em.”

The roadster was away like a shot, its tires singing a reckless song of haste along the concrete. Then another barrier loomed up, a barrier with the same legend. *Detour—Bridge Down*, but facing in the opposite direction from which the other had been.

“There’s been no car along here since that barrier was put up—” Myra began.

KENNEDY stood thoughtfully beside the roadster, and suddenly the

significance of the airplane dawned on him. He remembered seeing the plane circling over Barclay before the robbery; remembered that it was a blue Ryan monoplane, probably with cabin space for five or six passengers; remembered the roar of the motor as he had stood beside the deserted escape car.

“They blocked off the road to keep it free of traffic,” he told the girl, “and the plane landed on this smooth, level stretch of highway. They set fire to that house in town, cracked the bank, drove around the detour sign, deserted their sedan and climbed into the waiting plane.” He spread his hands in a gesture of futility. “All right, let’s get back to Barclay and to a telegraph office. I’ve got to get in touch with every airport in this territory.”

Kennedy spent the afternoon in the Barclay telegraph office, and a sleepless night at the local hotel

He was staring glumly out the window next morning when Myra Coleman rapped on his door.

She said: “May I come in? How’s your shoulder?” and “What luck?” all in the same breath.

“Yes. Sore as the devil. Nothing.” Kennedy’s reply was glum. “I’ve contacted every airport, municipal and private, within a radius of five hundred miles—no trace of a blue Ryan monoplane or any other suspicious craft. This gang must have a secret landing place somewhere in the mountains.”

“That’s what I think,” the girl agreed eagerly.

She turned back to the door and called to a grizzled old man who hobbled into the room and stared at Kennedy with watery, myopic eyes.

“This is Uncle Billy Weston,” Myra explained, “he has something to say to you.”

Kennedy shook hands and motioned the

old man to a chair.

“For seventy years,” Uncle Billy said in a thin, quavering voice, “I’ve hunted and trapped the mountains. Ain’t but one level stretch of ground in the whole range, and that’s Bear Trap Hill, way back in the uninhabited section across the ridge on the Kentucky side.”

“Is it large enough to land a plane on?” the G-man asked.

“Huh,” snorted Uncle Billy, “it’s five or six hundred acres, flat as a flapjack. There’s cliffs on three sides a hundred feet high and so steep that even a bear couldn’t climb down—that’s where it got its name.”

“That’s it,” Kennedy said grimly. “Where is this Bear Trap Hill?”

“Fifty miles north of Ends ville,” Myra replied readily. “There’s no road within ten miles of it, but the trail will do for walking. Come on; the roadster is full of gas and waiting.”

Kennedy shook his head.

“Listen,” he said, “I appreciate what you’ve done, but I can’t take a girl—”

“Listen yourself,” Myra flared at him. “I haven’t any folks, and I’m a school teacher on vacation. All my life I’ve taught dirty-faced mountain kids their ABC’s and dreamed of adventure. You G-men may have stopped Capone and Machine-gun Kelly, but you’re not stopping me. I’m in on this fun.”

Kennedy looked at her curiously.

“Fun?” Suddenly he grinned and said: “All right, all right; let’s go.”

THEY helped Uncle Billy down the hotel steps, told him good-by and got into the roadster. Myra settled down under the wheel and ate up the miles toward the tall, frowning mountains—and toward Bear Trap Hill.

Presently, they left the concrete and took a winding gravel highway through the foothills. Finally the gravel stopped, and

they bumped along a rutted road until the roadster came to an impassable place.

“Here’s where we start walking,” Myra explained.

“No we don’t,” Kennedy told her emphatically. “You’re in the F.B.I, now, young lady, and you’ll have to obey orders. You are to stay right here. If I’m not back by sunset, you are to go immediately to Ends ville and bring the sheriff and a posse to search these hills.”

Myra glared at him a long moment, her gray-green eyes stormy with protest. Then she surrendered.

“Okay, mister,” she agreed.

Kennedy examined his automatic and extra clips of ammunition.

“The old .38 looks a bit puny in these hills,” he observed.

“Up the trail about a mile,” Myra told him, “you’ll find a neat, well-built log cabin. A queer chap lives there, a sort of a hermit—a naturalist and a gun crank, he has every kind of weapon imaginable. He’ll lend you a rifle.”

Kennedy grinned admiringly at her.

“You know all the answers, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she agreed ruefully, “except how to get into this scrap.”

Kennedy said: “Take it easy, lady.”

“Good luck,” she answered and watched him walk rapidly along the trail and finally disappear in the tangled laurel and sumach....

The trail was little more than a winding pathway up the mountainside. Kennedy’s shoulder throbbed painfully, and his body was drenched with perspiration when he reached the naturalist’s cabin.

There was no response to his knock, but the door was not locked. Kennedy went inside and was surprised that the cabin was clean and well furnished: rough, bright rugs on the puncheon floor, a huge fireplace and comfortable chairs. On the walls a

collection of guns such as the G-man had never seen: bell-mouth fowling pieces, clumsy European muskets, slender, long-barreled Deckards, a Colt carbine with its unique, revolving cylinder; a repeating Henry, modern N.R.A. match rifles, and a ponderous double-barrel express.

But the weapon that caught the G-man's eye was a compact Springfield, equipped with a twelve-power telescope. He took the deadly rifle from its hooks and balanced it in his hands with an old sense of familiarity. There drifted through his mind thoughts of Cuba, Hawaii, the Philippines, the Virgin Islands, Haiti and far-away China. A Marine with a Springfield in his hands!

Kennedy thought of discarding the telescope, then decided against it. He stripped off his coat, and, with the spell of distant lands still strong upon him, took off his shirt and slipped a bandoleer of cartridges about his bare shoulders.

He hung his coat on the rack where the Springfield had been, assuring the cabin owner safe return of the rifle and went along the pathway humming:

"From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli,
We fight our country's battles, on the land and on the sea,
First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean,
We are proud to claim the title, United States Marines."

Involuntarily Kennedy fell into the old marching step, and the pace carried him swiftly and doggedly into the heart of the mountains until at last, he saw before him Bear Trap Hill.

It rose high above the other peaks, and on three sides, sheer walls of granite rose more than a hundred feet. On the south a narrow valley was the only means of ingress or egress.

KENNEDY worked his way through heavy underbrush to the south pass and climbed a jutting rock. Before him spread the plateau atop Bear Trap Hill: a square mile of level ground covered with short grass. On the north rim of the plateau, there was a clump of trees; and the G-man, studying them through the rifle 'scope, gave a grunt of satisfaction. There in a hangar made like an arbor of tree branches, was a blue monoplane.

Kennedy was about to slip down from the rock and hurry back to the waiting roadster and to Endsville for local officers, when he saw that men were rolling the plane out to the level field. Instantly the G-man visioned a picture of another stolen car, another robbery—perhaps one or two or three lives snuffed out by gangster guns.

He turned back to the rock and patiently waited until the plane was rolled into position and left standing still. In that interlude of waiting, he counted eighteen men moving to and fro among the distant trees.

Kennedy trained the 'scope on the monoplane; the lenses were powerful and clear, and he could see the motor parts plainly. He judged the distance with a practiced eye, took note of the afternoon breeze and made adjustments for windage. Resting the rifle on the rock before him, he trained it until the crosshairs of the 'scope centered on the oilpan of the airplane motor. Holding his breath, he squeezed the trigger with a slow, gentle pressure.

The spiteful crack of the Springfield whipped through the mountain recesses and the recoil sent fingers of pain clutching at Kennedy's wounded left shoulder, though the butt of the rifle nestled in his right.

Men began running about the plane like bewildered ants around a disturbed ant hill. Kennedy manipulated the rifle bolt and calmly fired shot after shot, sending steel slugs smashing into that distant motor until,

through the 'scope, he saw a black pool of oil form and widen on the ground.

"That stops the flying," he muttered grimly and turned his attention to about twenty men who were rushing out across the open plateau toward his hiding place.

Kennedy grinned derisively at the weapons they carried: short carbines, two Tommy-guns, automatic pistols. One of the men opened up with a Tommy, sending a sputtering hail of slugs that fell, spent, into the grass. The carbines also tried and found the range too great.

Kennedy, remembering innocent bank clerks murdered by this ruthless gang, seeing again the weeping family of a slain cashier and the cold, set features of officers killed in line of duty by these very guns, swung the Springfield until the crossed hairs of the 'scope centered on one of the men.

He squeezed the trigger again, and the man with the Tommy went down as if felled by some unseen hand. Deliberately, with cold, methodical precision, Kennedy moved the rifle and fired again and again—and each time, an unerring slug dropped one of the men who did not have the sense to lie down or dig in. Instead, when four of their number lay huddled on the plain, the others turned and ran.

"Fools," Kennedy said, contemptuously, and dropped two more before they reached the shelter of the trees.

He caught glimpses of the mob huddling together for a hurried conference. After a while, they tried another sortie—and lost two more men to the deadly, long-range Springfield. Then they retreated to the trees, and quietness spread over the plateau where crumpled forms of gangsters lay unmoving.

"I've got 'em," Kennedy exulted. "They can't climb down the steep granite walls, the plane is definitely out of commission and they can't get to this pass.

At sundown, Miss Coleman will drive back to Endsville and bring in the sheriff and deputies."

Kennedy's thoughts came to an abrupt and stunning halt. Sundown! Suddenly he realized that the shadows of evening were spreading, long and dark, over the hills; that in another hour night would drop like a sable blanket—and in that darkness, the men across the plateau could crawl up on him, could ignore the death-dealing Springfield and have him at the mercy of their rattling Tommy-guns. A quick fringe of sweat formed on his brow; then he grinned a cock-sure, dauntless Leatherneck grin.

THE EX-MARINE left his rocky rifle pit and walked across the valley, openly contemptuous of the puny sub-machine guns which rattled from the distant trees. The pass was almost a quarter mile in width, and the G-man measured the distance with yard-long steps. On the edge of the cliff, he found a small pine and strapped his luminous-dialed wrist watch to its slender bole, about two feet from the ground.

Leisurely, he strolled back to the rifle pit and began chipping, with his heavy clasp knife, a groove in the hard rock. When the groove was completed, Kennedy placed the forestock of the Springfield in it and trained the cross-hairs of the 'scope slightly to the south of the wrist watch and a little above it, adjusting the sights for the exact distance measured by his counted steps. Then he dug a bole in the hard ground, fitted the rifle butt firmly into it and covered it with soil, packing the dirt firmly and topping it with a heavy stone. With his belt and a bandoleer strap, he bound the rifle firmly to the trenched rock, then fired three experimental shots and found that the Springfield was held with vise-like rigidity and that the recoil did not

change the sight alignments.

Satisfied with this, Kennedy settled down to wait.

Twilight crept quietly into the mountains, and dusk came down on a stillness like that of some vast cathedral. Kennedy watched the plateau until the last rays of light faded, then stretched out in a prone position and glued his eye to the rubber cup of the rifle 'scope.

For more than an hour he waited, tense and alert, knowing that the success of his scheme depended wholly upon instant action at precisely the right time. So he was ready when the luminous face of the watch suddenly became dark. The G-man knew that in that instant something had come between him and the watch—and knew that that something was one of the mobsters crawling stealthily out of the valley. He touched the Springfield trigger and a scream of mortal agony blended with the report of the rifle—then silence.

Kennedy worked the rifle bolt and kept his eye on the luminous watch dial, which had again appeared in the 'scope lens.

Again the light went out, and again Kennedy fired.

There was an interval of waiting. Then the body of another crawling man blotted out the watch face. Kennedy squeezed the trigger gently.

Then the gangsters changed tactics. From out the darkness, Tommy-guns, rifles and pistols spat a rain of slugs at Kennedy's rifle flash. The G-man hugged the ground as the snarling bullets sought for him with deadly fingers. Two jerked savagely at his clothing, and, with his rifle permanently fixed, he could but lie and wait, praying that the gangsters would neither see the luminous dial of the watch nor have the nerve to creep up on his hiding place.

THE WATCH went unnoticed, and the mobsters had no guts to advance on one who shot with such uncanny accuracy into the darkness. Instead, they kept their distance and showered his rifle pit with an unceasing hail of steel. Finally one of the bullets crashed into his wounded shoulder, and, in spite of himself, Kennedy let out a yell of pain. A thousand spots of light burst inside his head, and he slumped forward across the Springfield.

In that moment of semi-consciousness, he imagined himself back on the bloody fields of the Philippines; saw the rush of brown bodies through tall grass; saw the flash of machetes and heard the answering crash of Marine rifles. Words of the old hymn came to him, and somehow he thought of the verse his proud buddies had added to that song for him:

*In their haunts of old Chicago, to their scattered last domains,
Kennedy has fought the mobsters, from the East Coast to the plains.
Stamping out their vicious rackets, smashing up the gangland schemes:
He belongs now to the G-men, but he came from the Marines.*

The words wafted him from unreality to reality. Those tough Leathernecks had appreciated his work with the F.B.I. Hell, they were depending on him to uphold traditions, to—

With a desperate effort, Kennedy dragged his head up and peered into the 'scope just in time to see a dark shadow blot out the luminous watch dial. With shaking fingers he yanked the trigger, but his ears did not hear the yell of pain on the plateau below; for he fainted from shock and loss of blood, even as he instinctively pulled back the rifle bolt.

Dawn touched the hills with gray light, and Kennedy had a half lucid moment, remembering a jumbled chorus of voices and the touch of hands on his body. He

made a desperate attempt to snap out of it, raised himself to his hands and knees, then collapsed and plunged into darkness again.

When he next pushed aside the black curtain, afternoon sunrays were against a west window. He realized that he was in bed; that Myra Coleman stood beside him.

He smiled at her, a twisted, white-lipped smile. The weakness of his voice surprised and disgusted him when he asked:

“How many got away?” he whispered. “Not a darn one,” she told him proudly. “We found you at dawn, taking a beauty nap with a Springfield rifle for a pillow. Out on the plateau there were the crumpled forms of six good gangsters. In the narrow pass we located two more good ones and two wounded. The other eight beat it back to the woods; they were not taking any of a fellow who could shoot a gnat’s eye out in pitch darkness. The sheriff’s posse took them without a struggle. Say, mister, what have you got—owl’s eyes?”

Kennedy grinned wanly.

“Didn’t you find the watch?”

“Watch?”

“Yes, it’s an old trick, young lady. Devil Dogs used it in No Man’s Land. I strapped a luminous-dialed watch to a scrub pine across the trail and trained the stationary rifle just to the right of it. When somebody came between me and that dial, the light went out—and I yanked the trigger. Simple as that, see?”

Myra whistled in amazement.

“Brains—as I live and breathe,” she exclaimed admiringly.

“Help me up,” Kennedy asked weakly. “I’ve got to wire the chief.”

Myra pushed him back to the pillows.

“Be quiet,” she told him. “I’ve already sent in the report.”

Kennedy stared at her.

“You wired the chief?” he asked incredulously.

“Yes, I wired the chief.”

“What on earth did you tell him?”

“I told him,” Myra replied impudently, “that the Marines have landed and have the situation well in hand.”