

# MANHUNT

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**M**Y BUSINESS is committing murder. And there's only one way for me to be a success. I never kill anybody I know. That makes it easier.

The word was passed to me that I was needed for a job in New York City. I flew in from Milwaukee. I'm an out-of-town gun, but I know my way around most of the big cities.

The waterfront was having a jurisdictional strike. I was hired to get rid of the opposing dock union leader. Two thousand dollars for the job, a thousand before and a thousand after. I didn't ask any questions about the strike. That was their business. The less I knew the better.

The bird dog pointed out James Harrower, put the finger on him for me. A tough guy, he told me. Like a lot of union leaders. Harrower packed a gun, all the time. I was to do the rest alone. I wanted to pick him off as he crossed the sidewalk from his HQ over the greasy Greek restaurant to his car.

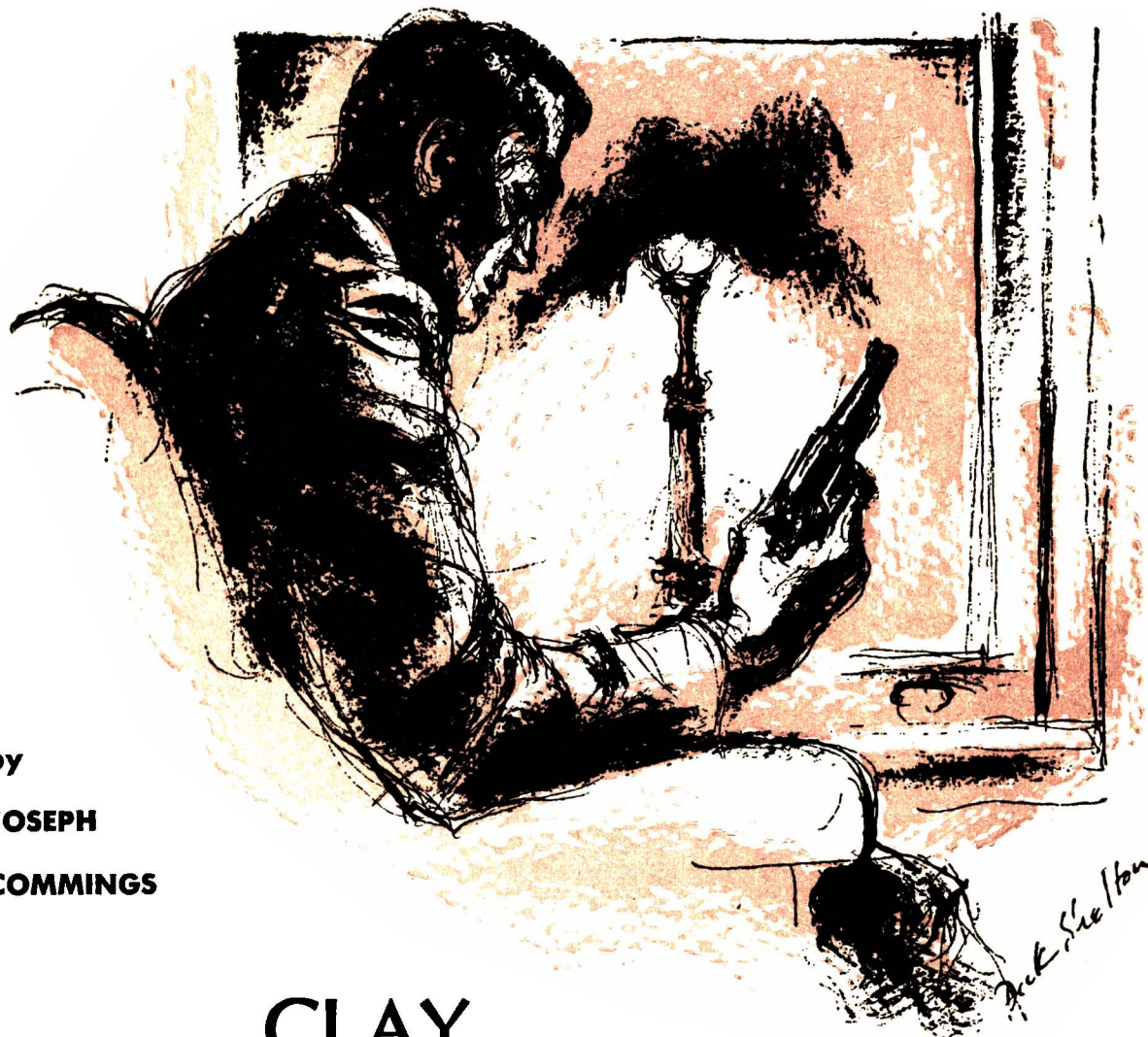
I wasn't nervous, didn't even smoke. I had my gun resting on the seat beside me in the car. I didn't use an automatic like some of these cheap junkies. An automatic can't be accurate over fifteen yards. I used the .38 calibre Police Positive I'd taken from a dead cop in Las Vegas. I had killed him.

After the shooting, I'd ditch the car I was driving.

by

**JOSEPH**

**COMMINGS**



**CLAY**

**PIGEON**

*I've got an easy job. Not too much work, and good pay. I kill people.*

It'd been doctored so that it couldn't be traced.

Harrower came out of the HQ. Damn the luck, he had several of his boys with him and I couldn't angle a shot in among them. I work clean, and I didn't want any loose ends like those boys lying around.

They drove off, I tailing them. They took Harrower to Penn Station and dropped him off into more crowds. He went on alone. I quit the car, deserted it, and followed Harrower into the jammed terminal, the revolver in my topcoat pocket.

He had a commuter's ticket. I didn't know where he was going. I got on the train, in the same coach, with him. When the conductor came along punching tickets, I told him I hadn't had time to stop at the ticket window.

When he asked, "Where you going?" I said, "All the way."

By now, it looked as if I'd have to go all the way.

The conductor gave me a punched ticket and took my money.

I didn't take my eyes off Harrower. From now on I'd be glued to him till I got my chance. He read an evening newspaper. He didn't seem worried. He was somewhat plumpish and clear-skinned. Good living. Not bad looking. The kind of guy who has a buck and knows how to spend it right to live cozy. Well, whatever he had, he wasn't going to take any of it with him.

He got off at Massapequa. I got off behind him.

It was twilight. The bright lamps of the station were lit. There were people around. He walked to a low-slung ranch wagon in the parking zone. There was a good-looking woman at the wheel. She greeted him with a kiss. He got in and they went sweetly up the road. Looking sharply, I managed to see the name *Whitebirches* designed on the door of the wagon.

I wasn't in any hurry. I strolled around and in three-quarters of an hour I found *Whitebirches* on a quiet street.

Harrower was in his shirt-sleeves, sprinkling the reseeded lawn with an orange plastic hose. There were two kids playing around the side of the elegant split-level house, a boy and a girl, and the boy was riding a red tricycle.

I heard Harrower's wife call to him from around the back.

I faded into the shadows of the bordering oaks and soon lined up Harrower, his wife, and a neighbor couple, all gathered around an outdoor barbecue pit. I could smell the aroma of grilled steaks. I could nearly taste the charcoal flavor in my mouth. I told you this guy knew how to live.

The friends from over the back fence were all chatting and laughing. I could hear snatches of talk. Harrower was going to plant more shrubs. "*Viburnum plicatum*," he said with a laugh. "Oriental snowballs." He'd even learned to call some of them by their Latin names. His wife chimed in to say

that she was going to try to take prizes with her zinnias this year in the garden club.

They sent the kids into the house early to go to bed.

The spring night was chilly and I turned up my coat collar.

There was always somebody with him. But I could wait. I wanted to get him alone.

At last the barbecue broke up. The neighbors went home and the Harrowers went into their house and closed the door.

I was cold. I went back to Massapequa and rented a room, but first I had a snack in an all-night drug store. I was starved.

Next day was Sunday. Harrower didn't go into the city. He took the family to the little Episcopalian church in the ranch wagon. I had to walk. I stood outside the church and listened to the hymns. After the service Harrower, his wife, and the two kids came out and he bought Sunday papers from the hawker on the corner. He gave the kids the funnies. Then he drove them down the street to the bakery and waited outside, smoking an old bulldog pipe at the wheel of the ranch wagon, while his wife went inside to buy rolls and cake for breakfast.

Then they all drove home. I didn't have a chance at him. Too many people around.

After breakfast he went out in back in old pants and shirt and pattered around with his horticultural kit. His kids were out there too, and so were those damn neighbors. The boy kid had an archery set and Harrower showed him how to shoot off a few arrows. One of the arrows came skimming over close to me and I had to duck farther back among the oaks and birches to avoid being seen.

Harrower walked over toward me to get the arrow. After he pulled it out of the birch trunk he stood there for a long moment, relighting his pipe.

I remained hidden, watching him in a fascinated way. I forgot my gun till it was too late. He'd walked back again and joined his wife behind the house.

Why the hell didn't I get him when I had the chance?

I was slipping. I watched him all day and I didn't get another chance. I was slipping.

He went in for dinner late in the afternoon. I crept as close as I dared to the house to look in on him. After dinner the whole family sat around and watched TV. His wife was a little tardy, because she had to wash up the dishes in the kitchen.

It got dark early and nobody went out again that day.

I went back to my room.

I sat there in the dark, just staring out at the auto lights going by in the street. This wasn't me. This wasn't me at all.

I took out the Police Positive and looked at it in the gloom. Why hadn't I used it on Harrower this

morning when he came over by himself to get the arrow? I'd hesitated—and missed a good set-up. Was I losing my nerve? No, I wasn't losing my nerve. I could kill the first punk that stepped in my door.

But this was something else. I wouldn't *know* just any punk. But I was getting to *know* Harrower. Before this, it was just see 'em and shoot. I'd studied Harrower too long. White birches, good-looking wife, boy on a red tricycle, barbecued steak, oriental snowballs, zinnias, Episcopalian church, funnies, the old pants and the old pipe, the good living.

I had too many things to remember about him.

What was I going to do about it?

I went to bed and tossed all night. When I dozed off I had bad dreams.

I was up early, getting dressed, shivering in the cold morning.

I knew what I had to do. I didn't even stop for breakfast. I walked straight to Harrower's house, heading for his front doorway. The walking warmed me. I felt better.

I turned in across the newly reseeded front lawn. Harrower was at the garage door with his wife,

opening it. Both had spring coats on.

"Harrower!" I said. My voice was hoarse, unused.

Both of them turned to look at me.

I was going to walk right up to him and tell him he was in danger. I'd been hired to gun him, but I'd changed my mind. To hell with that gang in New York. The laugh'd be on them. I had their thousand and they'd never find me again. I'd warn him.

I was playing it straight. I'd even left my gun back in my room.

"Harrower!"

Harrower's face turned grim. He dug into his pocket and came up with a .32 in his fist.

I'd scared him. He'd reached for that gun of his automatically.

I heard his wife scream.

"Harrower!" I started to run toward them faster.

I knew him. I couldn't kill him.

But he didn't know me!

I heard a sound like a pinprick exploding the universe.

*He could kill me!*

