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# Gambler's CROSS

BY ROBERT MCKAY

*He made the choice . . . the choice between the bookie business and his girl friend. He went legit and got himself a lot of trouble.*

**W**HEN my girl told me I'd have to choose between her and the bookie business, that was one thing. But when I made the choice and then got fired from the first legitimate job I'd ever held in my life, that was something else. I didn't blame my boss; he had no choice. We were working on government contracts and I should have known it would be only a matter of time until a routine security check uncovered my record.

I packed my drafting tools, avoiding the glances of the men I had

been working with, telling myself I didn't care what they knew or what they thought. But I was remembering how the world had looked an hour ago, and wondering how things could go from great to lousy in sixty minutes.

I thought about Kathy and the way she looked the day I met her—in the public library where I was hunting for a biography of a painter. And if that sounds out of character for a bookie, perhaps it was. But I had been a reader all my life and I got interested in art while in prison.

When I asked her about the painter she looked up from her desk in the art room. "I'm not a librarian," she said, smiling, her eyes deep and brown and unafraid and soft. I fell into those eyes and disappeared without a trace.

She said something else but I couldn't hear her. Then she looked down at the papers on her desk and I fought my way slowly back to the surface. I floundered around for a while, not knowing where I'd been, just knowing I wanted to go there again. She looked up. I dove for those sweet brown pools, but this time they were covered with a thin sheet of ice.

I don't remember how I cleared those first big hurdles—telling her I was Jack Bailey, finding out that she was Kathy Clayton, that she was twenty-two, that she had worked as a clerk in the library since graduating from high school. Finally asking her for a date and having her say No, asking her again—No; and again and that time she said Yes.

I realized I'd be a dead pigeon if she knew I worked for a gambler. So I told her I was a roofing salesman, hoping she didn't know any more about roofs than I did.

And I damned sure didn't tell her that I had once done a stretch for burglary. Ex-cons had no place in Kathy's world. Anyway, the burglary bit was over and done with. Except for Sam Morrison, nobody in the city knew I'd been in prison.

I was only a kid when I got sent

up. I'm not making excuses, understand; but considering the home and the neighborhood I came out of, it's not too surprising that I landed in prison. My mother was the lush in our family. She drank herself to death when I was ten years old. My old man was just a good natured slob who was never able to do anything right.

At eighteen I graduated from the streets to the South Side Social Club. There I met Benny Massio and began to learn the burglary trade. Benny was an expert safe man—he could take a couple of special jimmies and a lead mallet and a cold chisel and rip the average burglar-proof safe in an hour.

I worked hard at burglary and—believe it or not—I never thought of what I was doing as "wrong." I knew I'd go to jail if I got caught, but what I mean is that my conscience never bothered me. In our neighborhood there seemed to be two choices for us kids: We could go to work and live the rest of our lives the way our fathers lived theirs, or we could join the Smart Money. The smart-money boys were the gamblers, ward politicians, loan sharks, and the big time pimps. Since it took patience and connections to get anywhere in those rackets, some of us who were in a hurry tried to cut a corner. We became burglars and stickup men.

When Benny and I got caught ripping the Standard Bakery safe the judge handed Benny ten years. I got

off with a five-spot because it was my first felony. Good behavior cut my fin to thirty-nine months. And in those thirty-nine months I learned a lot. Part of it I learned in the prison school by taking courses in drafting and engineering. The rest I learned from Dan Loftus, a bald headed forger with a face as honest as Eisenhower's. "You're a smart boy, Jack," he said. "You don't want to spend the rest of your life in the can, and that's what you'll do if you try to beat the cops. Why don't you hook up with the gambling syndicate?"

It sounded all right except that I had no connections, and you don't go to work for the Syndicate by filling out an employment application. But when my release date rolled around, Dan Loftus solved my problem. He was nuts about painting and art and he had taken a liking to me because I was maybe the only guy in the joint who would listen to his theories on art. He gave me Sam Morrison's name and sent word through the grapevine that I was on my way.

Sam Morrison was a Syndicate captain who handled all the action on the north side of the city Dan Loftus had sent me to. He started me out delivering punchboards and pick-and-win tickets. I'd been with him a year when I met Kathy. By then I was a collection man for the parley cards. My salary was two bills a week.

The trouble was I got hooked so deep on Kathy I began to feel guilty

about lying to her. In a moment of over-confidence I told her a little bit about the parley cards. Kathy went off like a skyrocket. In her scale of values bookies evidently ranked somewhere between child-molesters and dope peddlers. This made no sense at all to me and the windup was that we both said things that would be hard to unsay.

For two weeks I fought with myself trying to decide what I wanted: the big money and the easy life—or Kathy? I couldn't have both. So I argued and fought and sneered and laughed and got drunk, and was right back where I started. I knew what I wanted and I also found out what I had to have.

I waited outside the library one day for Kathy. She frowned when she saw me, then shrugged and said, "Hello, Jack."

She looked just as she always did: porcelain fragile, nylon strong, glass cool, brandy warm. I let the wonder of her soak into me as though my eyes were sponges. I swallowed and said, "Let me drive you home."

She wouldn't look at me and her voice was uncertain. "Why are you doing this, Jack?"

I grinned, relaxed now, teasing her—feeling very good inside and knowing it was all right to tease her. "Come on! Don't be such a prude."

"I'm *not* a prude."

"How come you won't ride with an ex-bookie then?"

She shook her head and smiled, her lips quivering, her eyes filmed

with tears. "Are you sure, Jack? I mean are you sure that's what you want?"

I leaned forward and kissed her. Slowly the sounds of traffic filtered through the roaring in my ears. I lifted my head and met the interested gaze of an old lady in a velvet choker. She smiled encouragingly. I took Kathy's arm and hurried up the street to where I had parked my car.

When we stopped in front of the little house in the suburbs where she lived with her parents, I was reminded again of a minor puzzle that had bothered me from the beginning. The Clayton's house might have been called a cute bungalow thirty years ago; now it looked merely cramped and shabby. Kathy's father had his own business, a fair-sized camera store in the city, and he certainly should have been able to afford a better house than that for his family.

I had met him several times and liked him all right, except that he always seemed to be thinking of something else whenever he talked to me. He was about forty-five, a thin, bald man with tight lines around his mouth. I liked Mrs. Clayton better. She was cheerful and warm and had the same huge brown eyes and complete sincerity that had first attracted me to Kathy.

I used an old gambling connection to get a job as a junior draftsman and immediately learned that getting out of the rackets was a hell of

a lot easier than getting the rackets out of me. I tried to open myself up, to be warmer, to act the way the other square-johns acted. But a dark part of myself kept sneering at honesty, sneering at generosity, sneering at softness. I was changing, perhaps—but I had to work at it.

Three months later I asked Kathy to marry me and she said yes and then gave me the devil for spending too much on the diamond. Her mother kissed me and made me feel fine. Her old man controlled his enthusiasm. I didn't blame him for not being overjoyed; if I'd had a daughter like Kathy I'd have wanted something better than a junior draftsman for her too.

We set the date for February first. On December twentieth I came to work feeling great. And at 9:30 I was packing my tools and cursing my own stupidity for thinking I could cover up a prison record.

After taking my tools to my room I went out and walked around in the slush for a while. I ate lunch without tasting it and walked back to my room. Kathy's old man was there waiting for me.

I wasn't in the mood for any more surprises. I unlocked the door and went in the room and we hadn't even said hello.

"Jack," he said, "I've come to you because I'm in trouble. They sounded kind of funny at the plant about your being off today. You aren't in any trouble, are you?"

"We all got troubles," I said.

"What's your particular brand?"

"It's a long story and a messy one, but it all comes down to the fact that I need a thousand dollars before tomorrow noon. If I can't get it I'm going to have a bad-check charge against me."

I snorted. That camera business of his was worth maybe thirty-forty thousand dollars. A guy like Mr. Clayton should have been able to borrow a thousand bucks over the phone from any bank in the country.

"I know it sounds crazy, Jack. But my business is mortgaged for every dime it's worth. My house is mortgaged. My car isn't paid for. I'll have to clean out the cash register tonight to meet my payroll and unless we have a big day I won't make it.

"If my life depended on it, which is not impossible," he said with a tired smile; "if my life depended on it I couldn't raise a thousand dollars in the next twenty-four hours."

"Well, I can let you have the dough," I said. The breath went out of him in a long sigh. He told me his story, and in the end it didn't surprise me as much as it might have.

Mr. Clayton was a gambler. One of the suckers. In the early days, when he was netting four thousand a year from his store, he blew a thousand on the ponies. When the store brought him eight thousand he lost three thousand. The past year the store had earned twelve thousand and Mr. Clayton had thrown half of it to the bookies. "You've no

idea what the gambling fever can do to a man, Jack. It's worse than alcohol. It's a kind of insanity."

I let that pass. The only thing that surprised me was that he and I had never run into each other in a horse room. But it was a big city, and he probably did most of his betting over the phone. "How come you need it by tomorrow noon?" I asked. I was afraid that a thousand dollars wouldn't help him any more than would one bucket of water if his house was burning down.

"I gave a bookie a post-dated check for that amount. I've owed him the money for a week but today he got nasty about it."

"You know you can stop payment on that check, don't you? Gambling debts aren't legal in this state."

"I know—and I'm afraid to try it. This is a violent and dangerous man I'm up against."

I frowned. The Syndicate was not usually in a hurry to kill the geese that laid the eggs with the hundred-dollar bills inside.

"Who is this guy?"

"You wouldn't know him, Jack. His name is Izzy Kline."

I knew him well and I understood now why Mr. Clayton was worried. Izzy Kline was a very bad actor who had recently been put in charge of the downtown horse rooms. He was a throwback to the old on-the-muscle gangster of thirty years ago. Touchy and impulsive as a grizzly bear. Mr. Clayton had a right to be scared.

"There's one more thing," he said

sheepishly. "Could I ask you not to tell Kathy? She has known about the gambling for a long time, but I'd hate to have her know that I borrowed money from you."

After he left I couldn't sit still. Why did things always seem to work out this way? The nice guys were weak and they got hurt. Bastards like Izzy Kline and Sam Morrison got rich. I had given up the rackets and now I was out of a job and tomorrow I'd be close to broke.

I thought of Sam Morrison chuckling over the rows of figures that came out of his adding machine. Many an evening I had sat in his office watching him count the thick wads of bills his collectors brought in. Most of the money went into a canvas sack that Morrison himself would later deliver to the main office downtown. Some of it went into a green cash-box.

In my mind's eye I saw Morrison stacking bills in the cash-box, swiveling in his chair to open the ancient safe, putting the box in the safe, slamming the door and twirling the combination. And in my mind's eye I saw myself peeling that safe like a can of sardines.

I'd get Mr. Clayton's thousand bucks for him, and I'd get some satisfaction for myself. But I'd have to hurry. There were tools I needed and preparations to make and it was already close to three o'clock.

Two hours later I was spreading my purchases on my bed. My biggest

problem would be the wrecking bar. It was three feet long and heavy. I also had another bar which was shorter and lighter, a ten-pound lead mallet, a cold chisel, a punch, and the best small hatchet that money could buy. And I had a flashlight, extra batteries, three leather belts, and several rolls of adhesive tape.

It took me an hour and a half to make a crude harness out of the belts and tape. The harness hung from my shoulders with loops under the arms to support the wrecking bars and a loop in front for the hatchet. The screwdriver and the mallet I shoved into the waistband of my pants and tightened my belt on them.

The street doors of Morrison's office building closed at nine o'clock. I made it out there by eight-thirty, parked a couple of blocks away and walked slowly toward the building. If any of the boys saw me now it was forget about the safe and just keep walking.

I took the elevator to the floor above Morrison's office and hid in a broom closet until ten o'clock. Then I hurried down the stairs and went straight to the door of the optometrist who had an office adjoining Morrison's. The door lock snapped instantly under pressure from the small bar. I couldn't go through Morrison's door because Morrison's door was bugged.

In less than half an hour I had a hole cut in the wall big enough for me to wriggle through into the

gambler's office. And then I discovered that ripping that safe without Benny Massio to point out the weak spots was a brutal, backbreaking job. At eleven-thirty when I pulled the last bolt my hands were cut and bleeding, my muscles ached from putting pressure on the big bar, and I was covered with sweat and powdered concrete.

My fingers trembled with exhaustion as I took off my gloves and counted the thin sheaf of bills in the green cash-box. Jesus! I wanted to split Morrison's smug face with the crowbar. His expenses must have run high this week. The money in the cash-box added up to less than four hundred dollars. I had gambled ten years of my life against three hundred and seventy stinking bucks.

Bending wearily to pick up my tools, I glanced into the safe and saw the canvas bag.

It shouldn't have been there. In all the time I worked for Morrison I had never known him to leave the bag in the office over night. Maybe he'd be back to pick it up!

Frantically I tore open the knotted mouth of the plump canvas sack and dipped into it for the six hundred and thirty bucks I needed. I pulled out a bundle of bills. They were fifties. I leafed off thirteen of them. The bundle looked as thick as ever. In the dying rays of the flashlight the money glowed more and more brightly green. I tried to drop it back into the bag but my fingers wouldn't let go of it.

I stuffed the fifties in my pocket, picked up the money bag and the tools, and wriggled back through the hole into the optometrist's office. It was quarter to twelve.

Down the back stairs I went in a soft rush, and out into the cold sweetness of the night. I didn't meet a soul on the way to the car. In my room I stripped, standing on newspapers to catch the cement dust. After a shower I counted the money. The bag held \$23,000 including the fifties I had pocketed. I started to feel very jumpy.

By two o'clock I was twenty miles out in the country, burying the money and tools near a deserted picnic ground Kathy and I visited that fall. The earth was frozen so hard I had to chop a hole in it with the hatchet and crowbar. I burned my clothes in one of the stone barbecue pits. With more time I could have found a better place to stash the money, but the big thing was to get rid of all the evidence in a hurry. It would take an eye witness to convict me now, and I sure wasn't going to squeal on myself.

The next day Mr. Clayton accepted the thousand dollars with a kind of dignity and quiet determination that surprised me into thinking he might still have a chance to kick his habit after all.

I went to the Clayton's for dinner that night, and since Mr. Clayton was working late there were just the three of us. I was lifting my last forkful of dutch apple pie when the



front door opened and Mr. Clayton lurched into the dining room, his face white as snow and sweat running down his cheeks as though the snow was melting.

At first I thought he was sick drunk. He couldn't talk—just made wheezing grunts. When we got him into the bedroom and out of his sweat-soaked clothes and I saw the way his stomach looked, I knew what had happened to him as surely as if I had seen every punch. The big red and purple bruises scared Kathy and her mother. But when they wanted to call the doctor, Mr. Clayton grabbed his wife's wrist and shook his head. "No!" he grunted. "No doctor. Be . . . all . . . right."

After his tortured muscles relaxed he told us a story of being strong-armed by a gang of hoodlums and robbed of his wallet. It wasn't much of a story, but I guess it was the best he could come up with and he stuck to it.

"I want to talk to Jack," he said finally. The women looked at each other and then Kathy looked at me with a look that said she suddenly realized I might be mixed up in what had happened to her father.

"Where did you get those fifty-dollar bills, Jack?" asked Mr. Clayton as soon as we were alone.

"From a friend of mine. Why?"

Wincing, Mr. Clayton hitched himself up on the pillows. "Well, Izzy Kline came back this evening and told me that they had been stolen from a Syndicate safe. He

took me to a hotel room and two of his men half killed me because I wouldn't tell them where I got the money." Behind the pain and the questions in Mr. Clayton's eye there was an amused and glittering spark. My opinion of Kathy's dad zoomed. But his loyalty was all wasted effort. Kline and Morrison would check everybody associated with the Claytons, and when they came to Jack Bailey they would stop.

"What made him think those bills came from a burglary?"

"I don't know, but they must have been marked in some way. He seemed very positive." Mr. Clayton shook his head grimly. "These are bad men, boy. Maybe you'd better leave town for a while."

"How come you didn't call the cops?" I asked.

"They threatened my wife and daughter, Jack. That's why."

"And that's why I can't leave town, Mr. Clayton. The whole deal's a mistake and I know how to straighten it out." I grinned and stood up. "OK?"

He looked worried now, and anxious. "I don't know, son. These are evil men. Be careful . . ."

I went out of the room feeling good that he called me son, and feeling bad about the beating he had taken for me. Kathy and her mother jumped up when I came into the living room.

"Did he tell you what really happened?" asked Kathy.

"No."

"Did he tell you about the gambling?" This from Mrs. Clayton.

"A little," I said cautiously.

And then they took their hair down and told me all about their problem child. They laid it on the line—warning me that I was coming into a family that included an irresponsible lunatic.

I listened with half my mind, pretending it was all news, trying desperately to figure my next step. There was no question that I would have to give the money back. My problem now was how to do it without ending up dead.

It was snowing when I came out. Big soft flakes dropping straight down. I couldn't figure any smart plays on the drive home, but then everything was taken out of my hands when I started up the stairs to my rooming house. Two men came quickly across the street. Sam Morrison said, "We want to talk to you, Jack." The other man was Izzy Kline.

They walked me across the street to Morrison's black Cadillac. Morrison got behind the wheel and Izzy pushed me into the back seat and climbed in after me. It was warm in the car and light enough so I could see the hard gash of Morrison's mouth and the shine of his slick black hair as he turned to face me. Izzy's face was a pale round blob under his gangster-style fedora.

"I want that twenty-three G's, Jack," said Morrison in a conversational tone. I didn't answer, and Izzy

swung his right fist in a short awkward punch that caught me high on the forehead and jarred me.

"Cut it out, Izzy!" said Morrison sharply. "I told you we were going to handle this one my way."

"A-a-ah! There's only one way to handle a smart punk," said Izzy in his hoarse, slurring voice. "And you're a smart punk, aren't you, Bailey? A smart, safecrackin' punk!"

"I want my money, Jack," said Morrison, still speaking softly. "And that's all I want. Can you pick it up in five minutes?"

I shook my head.

"Well, bring it to my office before ten in the morning. I've got a late date that can't wait." He grinned like a shark.

"Listen, Sam—we've got this smart punk now. Let's get the money now. How the hell do we know where he'll be by ten o'clock tomorrow." Izzy was disgusted and in a boiling rage.

"He'll be there." Again I saw the quick glint of Morrison's teeth. "You'll be there, won't you, Jack?"

I nodded.

"We don't even have to make any threats, do we, Jack?"

I shook my head. No he didn't have to make any threats. And I knew I was very lucky to be getting off like this. Morrison wasn't doing it out of the kindness of his heart; I decided I was getting a break solely because Morrison wanted to make Izzy toe the line.

"You almost got Clayton killed.

You know that?" said Morrison.

I nodded again. He didn't have to go on with this.

"That's a very pretty girl, Jack. You're a good picker. You want to be sure you take care of that girl, Jack."

"Now look, Sam—!"

"Take it easy, Jack," said Morrison, still smiling. "Nothing's going to happen to the girl. We don't even know the girl." He reached over and opened the door for me. "See you tomorrow, Jack."

In my room I sat in a straight chair for a long time, full of murderous and helpless anger. I hated and feared and despised Sam Morrison and Izzy Kline. Their arrogance, their naked cruelty—they took the guts out of a man and left him weak and ashamed.

And I had been one of them. I realized that in truth I had been one of them until tonight. Izzy was close to the mark when he called me a smart punk. The burglary had been absolutely inexcusable and I felt sick now at how easily I could have been caught and the price I'd have had to pay. As it turned out I wasn't paying anything. Mr. Clayton had payed. And Kathy and her mother had payed.

Sitting there in my room with it all in my mind—all bright and sharp where I could take a good look at it—I watched the lure of the smart money dissolve. I understood for the first time and for all time that going for the smart money meant going

along with Sam Morrison and Izzy Kline. It meant *being* a Sam Morrison or Izzy Kline.

I stood up and put my coat back on. I was feeling pretty good, not worried now and I grinned to myself, admitting it, not afraid anymore. I didn't know why I was suddenly not afraid, but I knew I wasn't.

The snow had stopped and the night was colder now, and very still and clear. There was no moon, but the stars were winking icy clear and the night was filled with pale light that came up out of the new snow. My car door creaked as I opened it. And as I put the key in the switch, the door opened again and Izzy Kline with a gun in his hand came in and sat down beside me.

"We'll go get the money now, smart punk."

I looked at him—the pale blob of face under the wide hat brim, the short barreled revolver in his hand. "Don't try nothin'" he said. "I'd get almost twenty-three G's worth of kicks out of killing you."

On the way out of the city I considered wrecking the car. But Izzy would pull the trigger and he was too close to miss. I figured I was safe until Izzy actually had the money in his hands. Then he would kill me, of course; and dump me in the woods. And in the morning Izzy would have the money and Morrison would think I had skipped town and God have mercy on Kathy and her mother and dad.

When we turned under the trees

onto the rutted dirt road that led to the picnic area it was like driving in a tunnel. The star shine didn't get down through the bare branches of the trees and at the edge of the headlights was nothing but blackness.

I stopped the car and snapped off the lights. Izzy said, "Hey!" in a hoarse, startled voice. "Sit still!" he yelled. Then the light from the snow began to seep dimly into the car and he said, "Ain't you got a flashlight?"

"No," I said hoping he wouldn't open the glove compartment where the flashlight was.

"Give me the keys," he said. I handed them to him. "Well, let's get the dough," he said, opening his door. I got out on my side and we stood looking at each other over the hood of the car in the faint, ghostly light. It was cold in the woods—no wind, but cold enough to bite through my coat immediately. Izzy shivered and jabbed the gun at me. He wasn't wearing gloves and he had his other hand deep in the pocket of his black cashmere coat. "Come on, he snarled, confident again. "What the hell we standin' here for?"

"I got nothing to dig with," I said.

"A-a-ah, you just dug the hole last night. What's to dig."

"I buried it deep," I said. "And the ground froze today. I need some kind of a tool." He stared at me, his face a dim expressionless blob. "I'll get the jack handle," I said, moving to the rear of the car. He came around on the other side and

watched me fish the hinged jack handle out of the black cave of the trunk.

I walked away from the car into the woods toward the place I had buried the money. Izzy followed closely. The ground looked different with the new snow on it and at first I wasn't sure myself where the hole was. Then I saw the big oak tree I had used for a marker. I walked past it about fifty feet and stopped and looked around. "This snow has changed everything," I said.

"Why, you smart punk!" Izzy's voice was loud and ragged.

"I'm not kidding you, Izzy," I said moving on. "I thought I knew right where—" He kicked me, hard, in the back of the thigh. Falling, I twisted quickly and looked up at Izzy. He stood with legs planted wide, squat and shadowed and threatening, the gun a black smudge in his hand.

"Get up," he said in his hoarse, slurring voice. "If you don't find that hole, you smart sonofabitch, I'm going to shoot you in both knees and leave you here to freeze to death."

I got up and limped in a circle, studying the ground. For half an hour I worked back and forth, stopping occasionally to probe a mound of snow. Izzy switched the gun from his right hand to his left, blowing on his free hand, opening his coat and putting his hand under his arm to warm it.

"Dammit, Bailey. I can't take

much more of this." The words came out stiffly, as though his lips were frozen in a straight line. I could hear his teeth chattering. And I knew it was now or never. It wasn't a question of getting away from him. I could have dived into the trees with little possibility of being hit by a bullet from his gun. But he had the car keys and he would get back to the city and to Morrison long before I would.

Turning to my left, I worked toward the small clearing around the oak tree. "Hey! This is it!" I said, poking at the snow.

"You sure?" His voice was petulant. The cold and the lonely darkness of the woods were getting to Izzy. Now if I could just keep him on the hook a little longer . . .

I started digging furiously with the jack handle. By wasting most of my energy on the iron-hard ground at the edge of the hole and gouging out only an occasional frozen clod from the real hole, I managed to work myself into a sweat without deepening the hole more than a few inches. Izzy stood perhaps fifteen feet from me, shuffling his feet clumsily, shifting the gun from hand to hand, breath steaming as the cold bit deeper into his bones. I was loose and warm now.

The next time he shifted the gun to his left hand I did the same with my jack handle—and with my right hand I flipped out the loose clods of dirt in the hole. My gloved fingers closed on what I was looking for.

I glanced up, looking off to the side of Izzy, and shouted, "*Don't shoot, Sam!*" The oldest trick in the book; but Izzy, in his frozen reverie, automatically jerked his head around. I ripped the hatchet out of the dirt and threw it at him. And in the same motion I dove for him, swinging the jack handle. The hatchet hit him first. His revolver blasted once, lancing flame at the sky.

Then he was falling away from me, silently, the gun flying from his hand as he fell backward full length in the snow. Holding the jack handle like a club, I circled him and grabbed the gun.

"All right — get up!" He didn't move. Like a lumpy sack he lay dark against the snow. The wide-brimmed hat had fallen off and his head looked too big. As I watched, his head grew bigger. When I went close to him I was glad the light was bad. The hammer head of the hatchet was sticking out of his face where his left eye should have been. The hatchet handle curled tight against his neck. Blood made a widening black splotch in the snow.

In the dim, pearly light under the trees everything was black and white and impersonal. Then I saw the steam rising from the black pool of his blood and the earth seemed to tilt under my feet.

I turned away from him and got the canvas money bag and the rest of the tools out of the hole. Then I went back to Izzy, knowing I had

to have the hatchet, wishing I could just leave it there. As I walked toward him I felt a gust of wind. The clearing darkened as though someone had dropped a huge blanket over it.

With the wind came snow-thick driving snow that laid a film on Izzy's body even as I bent and wrenched the hatchet free. I

scrubbed the hatchet in the snow as well as I could, and picked up the bag and the tools and headed for the car.

At the edge of the little clearing I looked back. Izzy was a vague mound in the driving whiteness. I was sorry for a lot of things; but I hoped it would be a long, cold, snowy winter.

