

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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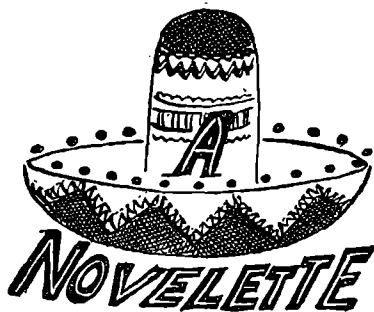
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RICHARD E. DECKER
Editor and Publisher

VICTORIA S. BENHAM, Associate Editor
G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

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NED BENHAM, Associate Editor

MARGUERITE BLAIR DEACON, Art Director



THE JAIL was made out of a combination adobe brick and concrete block, typically Mexican with the merging of the old and the new. The cell in which he was locked was made of the concrete block.



At one end was an open barred window through which he could see the beach and the motel. The other end was a barred door which swung on hinges out into the cool adobe brick office. The door to the outer office, which was always open, was in the wall to the left of the cell and during the day,

Raymond Packard could look through it and see the occasional car that travelled along the dusty road between Pornada and Ensenada, some twenty miles to the north.

Raymond Packard was the first guest to remain more than one night in the jail since the cell had been added to the building almost two years ago. Fat José Carrillo mentioned this at least twice a day, every time he brought in the tin plate with the tortillas, frijoles and pan; or when he strapped his huge revolver around his huge belly to accompany his prisoner to the out-

door *excusado*. Carrillo was the Chief of Police of Pornada. He was also the chief jailer and sole guardian of the peace in the small ocean-side town on the Baja peninsula. But Carrillo was friendly and seemed sincere in his regrets that he was forced to hold Packard a prisoner.

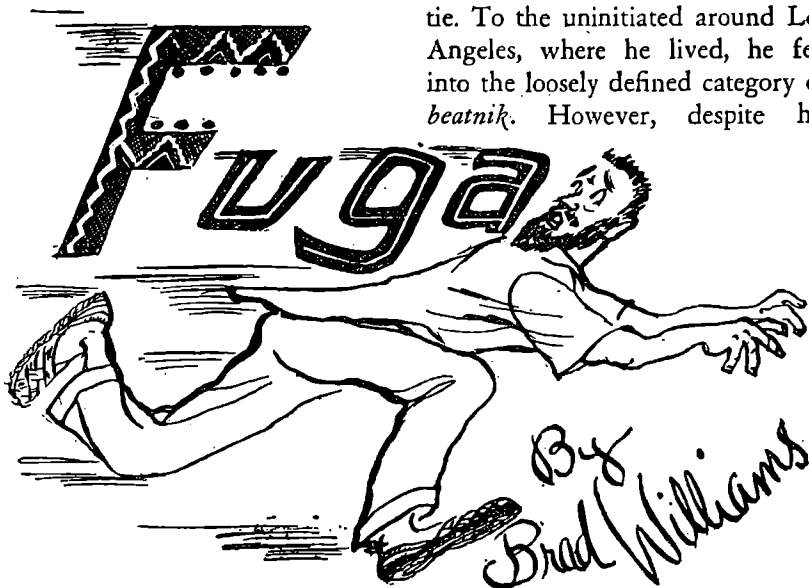
Flight may mean one thing to you and quite another to me. For example, the number of one's flight aboard a jetliner; or the ability to fly (with mechanical aids of course); or the imaginary excursions called flights of fancy. It has still another connotation in this story, and I shall allow you to discover it for yourselves.



"It is only because you are a gringo and you have killed a man," he apologized several times and in that order. "Never before in Pornada has a gringo killed a man and so I must wait for my orders from Mexicali and they must wait for instructions from Mexico."

Raymond Packard was thirty

years old. His last birthday had been a double anniversary of sorts as it had arrived on the start of his second week in the Pornada jail. Physically, he fell into the average statistical column of the tables published by the insurance companies, a little less than six feet tall, about one hundred and sixty pounds in weight. When dressed conventionally, if he held his head erect the end of his full beard extended just below the knot of his tie. To the uninitiated around Los Angeles, where he lived, he fell into the loosely defined category of *beatnik*. However, despite his



beard and a somewhat parallel attitude toward society, he did not consider himself as such. He was an artist. The insomniac had sold some of his canvases for as much as one thousand dollars, but proceeds from such sales were not his only income. He was retained by three advertising agencies in Los Angeles as a commercial illustrator and thus, he reasoned, he could not be classified as a beatnik. But of course this could change. These accounts probably would be lost long before he ever got out of Mexico.

Shortly before noon on the tenth day of his imprisonment, a police car drove into Pornada from the north, its wand of authority jutting out of the rear fender and whipping the air as the machine swayed on the rough road. Nervously, he watched the vehicle until it disappeared around the curve of the hill, then slowly he walked over to the cell window. The car took a long time to complete the circle and when it finally did appear, it did not immediately turn up the rutted path to the jail. Instead, it slid into a parking stall in front of the motel, stopping next to Ray's dusty convertible. Carrillo stepped out of one door. The driver, a giant of a man, rose up from the other side, his shoulders towering above the roof of the car. Both

men casually looked over the convertible, then strolled into the motel. They wouldn't see much after ten days, Ray thought dourly; blood on the cotton rug, broken shards from a tequila bottle. He watched and waited.

A quarter hour passed. The two men came out of the motel, slipped into the police car and presently the vehicle began to bounce up the road toward the jail. With an apprehensive sigh, Ray turned away from the window, pulled a comb from his pocket and ran it through his hair and beard. Then he sat down on the edge of his cot.

The two men came into the building like old buddies entering a bar, laughing at some joke told just out of earshot.

"Señor Packard," Fat Carrillo said proudly. "This is Capitan Eduardo Campeche." He turned the key in the cell door as he spoke, then pulled the barrier wide and with a flourish of his hand, ushered the giant inside.

Capitan Campeche smiled, as if the meeting was an honor, then leaned against the wall. "I am with the Secret Police in Mexico City," he said in flawless English, his voice a deep rumble.

"It hardly seems worth the trouble," Ray replied flatly.

The big detective shrugged slightly. "It is only because every-

one involved is an alien, Señor Packard. Sometimes there are inquiries on a diplomatic level."

"I don't think there will be in this instance."

"The girl is back in Los Angeles." Campeche stated fact rather than implied a question, and from his inside jacket pocket, he pulled out some flimsy papers on which there was typewriting.

"I do not know, Capitan Campeche," Ray answered carefully.

"She drove back to San Diego in the car of the decedent, one William Funk, abandoned it at Lindbergh Field there, and flew to Los Angeles, travelling under her own name, Lois Stuart."

"I have heard the Mexican police are extremely efficient." Ray took an Elegante from the pack in his shirt pocket and lit it. "I gave her the keys to Funk's car by mistake. I guess she was too frightened to come back to the room."

"She is not your wife?"

"No, Señor. Nor is she anyone else's . . . so she did nothing wrong."

The giant shrugged again. "Run through the action once for me."

This would be easy. It had been running through his mind for ten days and as many nights. A man had been killed and he had been the killer. "Lois is a model who works for me often," he said aloud

and slowly, speaking as if he had memorized the sequence of his story. "We finished working early Friday afternoon and decided to spend the weekend at the Papagayo, but because it was a holiday, there wasn't any room. We went on into Ensenada and there still wasn't any room."

"You and Funk and the girl?"

"No, Señor. We met Funk in the bar at Del Pacifico. It was he who told us about Pornada so we drove down here, each in our own cars."

"You knew him before?"

Ray shook his head. "But he was all alone. And he seemed okay, a little square maybe, but harmless."

"But that isn't why you killed him?"

A wit, Ray thought. There was nothing duller than a cop who thought he was a comic. He flicked the ashes from his cigarette into the cuff of his pants. "We went to the cantina in the middle of town after we checked in the motel," he continued aloud. "I was going to buy a bottle of tequila and then we were coming back to the room and have a nightcap and go to bed. But the cantina was a pretty live spot, so we had a few drinks there, danced, listened to the mariachis. When we got back to the motel, Funk went to his cabin; we went to ours. Lois had left her

sweater in the cantina, so I said I'd go back and get it. When I got out to my car, Funk was taking his suitcase out of his. When I got back, maybe fifteen minutes later, I noticed the keys were still in his trunk lock. I took them out, went to my cabin." He paused and inhaled deeply.

"Don't quit now," Campeche said, his lips pulled back into a faint smile. Like a feline, a cat playing with a mouse.

"It happened very quick. The door was unlocked. The lights were on. The nightstand was tipped over. Funk had Lois backed into a corner. Her blouse was ripped and she was struggling with him. I picked up the tequila bottle and hit him and he fell down. I didn't aim or anything, but I think the bottle hit him on the back of his neck and broke it."

The smile faded from Campeche's face. "You did, Mr. Packard," he said with a shrug. "How come she didn't scream when he first grabbed her?"

"I don't know. None of us made any noise. I know I didn't say anything."

"She just let him come?"

"She told me Funk came in a couple of minutes after I left. For a while he just talked and then just before I got back, he went after her." Again he pulled deeply on

his cigarette. "For a little while we thought he was just knocked out. Then we found out he was dead."

"Why didn't you go back with the dame?"

"Well . . . I was the guy who killed him. She hadn't done anything."

Campeche nodded and blew smoke from his cigar toward the ceiling. "And maybe you figured it was only second degree at the most . . . maybe justifiable homicide . . . so you would get off anyway?"

"I'm not a lawyer. I didn't figure anything."

"You'll have to stand trial in Mexicali." Campeche looked at the red end of his cigar thoughtfully. "The calendar's pretty crowded up there. It'll be a couple of years before the case will come up."

"Two years!"

"Maybe more."

Ray dropped his cigarette on the stone floor. His leg shook as he ground the butt with the sole of his huarache and he sensed a flush starting on his face. A jail term was expected . . . but to serve two years before he was sentenced was ridiculous. "Will I be able to get bail?"

Campeche slowly shook his head. "We wouldn't be able to extradite you from California, may-

be. We can't take that chance."

"A real great system," Ray said bitterly. "That's just a real great system."

"You should have thought of this before you clobbered a gringo in Baja. Don't forget, it costs us money to feed you . . . and you'll probably get sick on the food, so we'll have to treat you."

"For God's sake . . . this guy was molesting her!"

"It would have been better all around if you had let him," Fat Carrillo said and laughed.

Ray stared at the two men incredulously, not believing he had heard correctly. The Latins were supposed to be reasonable . . . more understanding than the Saxons for crimes of passion. "You don't understand," he protested, struggling to control his temper. "She isn't that kind of a girl."

Campeche shrugged indifferently, dropped his arm around Fat Carrillo's shoulders and guided him out into the office. "We're having a little trouble with the body," the detective said casually to the Police Chief. "It's still in Tijuana. Apparently this Funk had no relatives."

"There are no facilities here, Capitan."

"I understand." Campeche studied the papers in his hand for a moment, then stuffed them back

in his jacket pocket. "Let's go," he said. "We'll get the statements from the other witnesses before I take the gringo back."

Fat Carrillo nodded, hastily banged the steel door shut, pulled out the key, then scurried after the hard-boiled detective from Mexico City.

For a long time after the police car pulled away, Ray lay quietly on his bunk. He was stunned, more shocked, he thought, than he had been when he first realized that he had killed the greasy little Funk. Terrible as the taking of a life was, it had been both unintentional and justifiable. But this stupid gorilla Campeche obviously did not believe him. The puerile mind inside the big hulk had decided long ago that the killing was the outgrowth of some cheap shackup. Angrily, Ray smashed his fist into his palm and stood up.

He went to the window and looked out. A couple of cars, in addition to his own, were parked in front of the motel. From one of the cabins, a criada waved a shag rug as if it was a signal. Behind the cabins on the beach, a couple sunned, bodies close to each other. It would be a long time before he was that close to a female again, he thought bitterly.

Turning, he went across the cell to the gate and leaned against the

bars. The gate moved slightly and he leaped back, startled. It was open!

Ley de fuga! The Latin answer to capital punishment when there was no legal execution. "The prisoner was shot while trying to escape."

Skin prickling in sudden fear, he backed away from the door, moving toward the cot. Two years or maybe more before he was brought to trial . . . and what a mockery the trial would be. With his limited Spanish he would understand none of it. Pausing, he stared at the gate, now slightly ajar. Fat Carrillo was a lackey to the giant from the capital. His whole manner showed this . . . fawning . . . laughing obeisantly . . . so anxious to hurry after the captain that he had pulled the key out of the lock before he turned it.

Slowly, Ray shuffled toward the gate again and pushed it with his foot. The heavy gate squeaked as it moved outward under the steady pressure. Odd he had not noticed the squeak before. Nothing happened. But nothing could happen yet. Both Fat Carrillo and Campeche had climbed into the police car and it had driven away. There had been no break in the even purr of the engine, as there would have been had it stopped to let Fat Carrillo out.

Tentatively, he stepped into the opening and leaned against the jamb. It was about seventy miles and three cities to the border . . . and only one road between here and there; one road with nothing but a few dead-end and dirt paths intercepting. Ley de fuga . . . But there was no one in the jail. Cautiously, his heart thudding against his chest, he moved out into the office toward a war surplus type desk in the corner. Gently he pulled open the center drawer. Familiar car keys, attached to the equally familiar fish head clip lay on top of his wallet. Even the money was intact . . . little more than one hundred dollars.

Nervously, he wiped the corners of his mouth and his mustache with the back of his hand and moved toward the outer door. His huaraches squeaked loudly and he cursed the sudden impulse that had made him buy them in Tijuana on the way down. His clothes in the motel would have to be left behind, but they were a cheap price to pay for two years . . . two years in a stinking Mexicali jail before they would even bring him to trial. He stepped into the outdoors and slid along the adobe to the corner.

Pressing against the wall, he peered down into the town. The police car was parked directly in

front of the cantina. Down the center of the main street, an Indian with a serape and sombrero, bounced along on the high rump of a burro. A couple of other Indians lounged against an adobe wall, wide brimmed hats tipped low on their faces as if posing for a tourist's camera.

Quite possibly he could reach his car without being seen. No, he would be seen of course, but only by Indians and they would stare blankly at anyone who interrogated them . . . or would they? But what difference did it make? Assume he could get the car out of the hotel lot without the owner, Señora Hernandez, raising the alarm; he would still have to drive

it directly past the cantina to reach the highway. And there was only one highway between here and the border. There were no telephones in Pornada, but there was an aerial projecting from the rear fender of Campeche's prowler car.

Gripping his car keys tightly in his palm, he pushed away from the wall. The heat from the sun struck him like a hot Santa Ana wind and the glare turned his eyes into mere slits. Defiantly he stopped and turned toward the town, daring the ley de fuga. The sounds carried clearly. A seagull cried raucously, as if sounding the alarm. Surf crashed on the sandy shore and from the town, the clop of the burros' hooves on the hard packed earth of the street drifted toward him like an erratic slow beat of a finger on a bongo drum.

With a deep breath, he moved toward the motel, carefully placing one foot in front of the other. The couple on the beach parted. The man rose, then helped the girl to her feet and waited as she tugged at her bathing suit. They strolled toward the motel. A cabin door opened and again a white shag throw rug was shaken vigorously . . . a signal? Ray paused, glancing around him desperately. No one seemed to notice him.

Suddenly an engine roared alive and he wheeled toward the town.



A combined cloud of dust and burning oil boiled into the air from the exhaust of an ancient bus parked in front of the post office, one cloud bursting below another as the unseen driver rhythmically pressed down on the accelerator. The unmuffled engine sputtered loudly like a string of fire-crackers every time he released the pressure on the throttle.

Abruptly, Ray wheeled again and ran back toward the small jail. He veered around it like a deer in flight, then slid down the hill. He ran across the small mesa to the dirt highway and then, panting, slowly began to walk toward the north. Before he had completely caught his breath, the bus sputtered around the hill which hid the town.

Ray turned, stepped out into the road and held up his hand. The bus slowed and stopped. A rooster in a crate on top of the vehicle crowed feebly in protest.

"Donde vas, Señor?" The driver grinned. "Where are you going?" "Ensenada."

"Two dollars, Señor." The youthful pilot goosed the engine again as Ray stepped into the vehicle.

"It is very expensive," Ray said, remembering that he should bargain to allay suspicion.

"One-fifty," the driver agreed.

He pocketed the money, then shifted gears as Ray slowly lurched his way back into the machine.

A dozen people on the bus stared at him with flat, expressionless faces; all Indians, with black button eyes. The females wore rebozos around their shoulders despite the heat. The men sat stiffly in the hard seats, their backs to the windows. Only the seat across the rear of the bus faced toward the front. There was a space in the middle.

Dust swirled from under the double rear wheels, skidded around the square stern of the bus, then hung over the road like heavy fog. It completely obliterated the highway, its sides and everything behind it. But it was ostrich security. Ray could not see back beyond the dust, but the dust cloud could be spotted for miles.

Two years . . . or maybe more. How long did he have? Usually, during the daytime, Fat Carrillo dropped by the jail about every three hours. With Campeche in town, he might check more often, to boast of his efficiency. Campeche had said they were going to check witnesses. There were only two . . . the young Mexican bartender in the cantina and Señora Hernandez, whom he had asked to call the police. How long would it take to interview two witnesses? . . . a half

hour? He glanced at his watch, then smiled wryly. He didn't know how long he had been gone because he had forgotten to look at it when he started. The bus roared on, not moving very fast despite the noise and illusion of speed.

Approximately a half hour later, the dust cloud disappeared and the ride became smoother as the wheels struck asphalt. The pavement had ended about seven miles from Ensenada, he recalled. It was almost too easy. As the thought occurred, Ray turned and looked out of the dusty rear window. Far down the road, another cloud of dust boiled up behind a small dot, moving up fast.

He slouched down in his seat, head even with the grimy plastic upholstery. The bus slowed and Ray, looking ahead, watched the driver staring through the rear view mirror. His eyes dropped down toward Ray, speculatively, then back up to the mirror and then the bus veered over to the right slightly as a car whooshed past on the left. But no siren sounded. The bus driver did not brake his vehicle. Instead, he slowly resumed his speed.

With a partially concealed sigh, Ray straightened and tipped his head slightly, trying to see through the forward windshield. The car was out of sight. A young Indian

at his side turned and stared intently toward him.

"Por Castro?" the Indian asked presently in little more than a whisper, his face expressionless.

Ray smiled and stroked his beard, then slowly shook his head. The Indian looked away.

The bus puffed into the outskirts of the city. Traffic increased. A blue and white patrol car slid past the window. Cops, in khaki uniforms, waved them through the intersections. The bus turned a corner and jerked to a stop in front of a depot. It was precisely three o'clock.

Everything seemed normal. Tourists and Indians drifted past on the street. Ray paused beside the driver. "Do you go to Tijuana?"

"In maybe two hours, Señor, there is another bus that goes to Tijuana."

Two hours . . . two years or maybe more. Time was twos plus maybe. He swung down onto the sidewalk. In two hours the alarm surely would be out. Carrillo would remember the bus that had left Pornada and the bus driver would remember the man with the beard he had picked up on the highway near the jail. And there still was only one road north. At any one of a hundred places along the fifty mile stretch a roadblock could be

set up, with no way to by-pass it.

An older woman, shaped like a squashed S and wearing a woolen dress over a plethora of undergarments, stopped and peered at him as if he was a sidewalk canvas. He scratched himself as he brushed past and then laughed at her sudden gasp. Now that he was an outlaw he could afford to be completely antisocial.

He walked diagonally across the street, paused in front of a small bar, then entered. The signs were all in English. A bartender briskly polished a mahogany counter in front of him. "Yes, sir?"

"A beer and a hamburger."

"Sure."

It was like a Hollywood drive-in. The hamburger, almost instantly placed in front of him, was soggy and cold. The beer was excellent, however. "Where can I rent a car around here?"

The bartender shrugged. "There are many taxis, sir."

"I want a U-Drive-It. Like I could leave in Tijuana."

The bartender shook his head. "There's a bus that leaves around five. Tomorrow morning there's a plane."

"I don't want to wait."

"A cab would take you up, sir. Probably would want about twenty-five or thirty bucks. It's fifty miles up there."

"I know, and well worth it."

A cab might be the answer at that. He glanced at his watch. It was only an hour's ride to the border and if he continued lucky he might get across the border before Fat Carrillo got back to the jail. Finishing his beer, he dropped a dollar bill on the bar and went back to the street. He started to cross, then jumped back on the sidewalk with a sudden catch of breath. His heart pounded furiously as he slid behind a parked car for cover.

Leaning against the wall of the bus station was the giant Campeche, rolling a fresh cigar between his thumb and forefinger.

From any other angle, Ray thought wildly, he would not have seen the detective. The giant was leaning against the far wall and in such a manner that he could look through two windows to the main entrance of the depot. There was no sign of Carrillo. Nor was there any sign of the police car. Swearing softly, Ray backed away, keeping the parked car between him and Campeche's line of vision.

Something moved in back of him and he wheeled around. A young girl, tourist type, sidestepped, then tipped her head, looking at him curiously.

"Excuse me," he muttered. He moved past her and strode rapidly

to the end of the block. As he turned the corner, he broke into a half run, heading toward the ocean, only half aware that he again was swearing softly, monotonously under his breath.

Ensenada was a small town. There was no place to hide for long. If Campeche was looking, so were all the other police. They knew their quarry was in Ensenada . . . the bus driver would have told them this.

He ran across the street toward the Hotel Bahia, then abruptly slowed to a walk when he noticed a barber in an open doorway watching curiously. There was no way out. The highway would be watched. The airport would be guarded . . . the bus station sealed. But there was no place to stay. As soon as the exits were bottled, then the canvas of the town would start. And he knew nobody in Ensenada.

Far ahead of him, a police car turned into the waterfront street. He veered between two buildings and down a flight of steps leading to the beach.

"You wanta see a good show, Mister?" An urchin on the bottom step jumped up, leered, then shrugged and sat down as Ray silently passed.

Fifty miles to the border. But who in hell could walk fifty miles?

He paused and glanced over his shoulder. Apparently no one saw him as a fugitive . . . yet. At least, there was no sign of pursuit here. If he followed the coast north, it would be at least sixty miles to the border. At five miles an hour, it would take twelve hours. How fast did a man walk on sand? Behind him, a siren wailed and again he glanced back. The urchin jumped to his feet and scrambled up the stairs.

He mastered an impulse to run. A running man attracted attention. Sand spilled into his huaraches and he took them off, carrying them in his hand. This would appear normal; a tourist out for a walk along the shore. But sixty miles barefoot was impossible. The siren wailed louder and again he looked back. A fire truck raced through an intersection then turned up the winding road which led to the high hilled residential section overlooking the community.

To his left, a large sloop skilfully glided into the harbor, tacking between the breakwaters. Another half dozen yachts lay at anchor in the sheltered water and from one, hi-fi music drifted into shore. He could sail. He could steal a boat and sail it to San Diego. But they would capture him before he passed the jetty. He walked on.

Within an hour he was tired. No

one walked anymore. The sand gradually disappeared, turning into slippery pebbles covered with moss and seaweed. Pausing, he put on his huaraches, conscious that he could still hear the sounds of Ensenada behind him, a distant auto horn, a faint cry. He could not stop.

About now, possibly, a policeman was entering a small bar. "Yeah, he was in here a while back . . . guy with a beard, yeah. He had a hamburger and a beer."

Or the huge Campeche bent over to talk to a small urchin. "Si, Señor. He went over there," pointing north along the shoreline.

He jumped up onto a large, wet piece of driftwood. His foot slipped, throwing him from the log to the wet stones. He lay quietly, panting, looking out to sea. The sun, a huge red ball, was flattened on the bottom where it struck the ocean. Rolling on his elbow, he looked back toward the land. Dusk was very near. High overhead, an invisible jet plane moved slowly through the sky, its vapor trail a fire streamer, reflecting the red from the sun. The sun gathered speed in its plunge and now he could actually see the curvature of the earth in it. An orange dwarf . . . a very small, unstable star which could explode at any second. It looked now as if it was

slowly being extinguished as it dipped into the ocean. What had happened and what would happen was unimportant. He started to rise, then froze as a light flashed on the bluff behind him. It was a car reflecting the dying glare of the sun in its windshield.

Instinctively, he threw himself on the pebbles, pressing close to the large piece of driftwood that had toppled him. Then, wriggling like a worm, he pulled himself up to the end of the log to peer around it. The car was a silhouette with a long wand riding up in back of it, swaying back and forth lazily on its powerful spring. The door opened and another shadow stepped out . . . a giant shadow that moved to the edge of the bluff. Both hands raised to its eyes and the shadow pivoted. Binoculars, sweeping the beach! Frantically Ray burrowed back in the pebbles. Then he stopped, fearful that the breeze would carry the sound of his movement up the slope.

Presently the sun disappeared. For a brief moment, the horizon glowed. Then this light slowly faded away and as if this was a signal, the offshore breeze freshened. For a long time, he lay motionless, straining for some sound . . . a step crunching on the gravel to foretell his discovery . . . the sound of a car starting to signal

that he had not been seen. But the surf was too loud. After a while he could no longer stand the suspense and he sat up abruptly. The police car was gone.

But behind the spot where it had been parked was a faint red glow, flashing like a rotary emergency light on a police car. He jumped to his feet and ran along the shore. The pebbles turned back into sand as he rounded a small point. He halted. Here the shoreline curved in a small crescent and scattered along the beach were a dozen gaily striped cabanas, the bright reds and whites bright even in the dusk. The Papagayo. Red light from a huge neon sign at the resort flickered over the canvas beach shelters at the bottom of the hill. For a long moment he stared incredulously, first at the cabanas, then up the winding steps to the hotel and finally on the dial of his watch. Four hours had passed since he left Ensenada and he had travelled less than seven miles . . . an average of two miles an hour. At this speed, Tijuana was thirty hours distant. A jet plane could make three round trips between Los Angeles and New York in the same length of time. This was ridiculous. The road would be safe at night. There was little traffic and when a car came, he could see it in plenty of time to leave the

road. He decided to take a chance.

Boldly he walked up the stairs. Only a half dozen cars were parked outside the resort. Up here, sounds carried clearly. A girl, out of sight, giggled. Glasses tinkled on the patio to a soft mariachi background. Glare from the sign and floodlights extended from the top of the stairs, across the parking lot to the wall of the hotel.

"Señor."

He jumped, spinning in the direction of the voice. It belonged to an older man in a dirty khaki uniform, a guard for the parking lot.

"Andele," the watchman said, flipping the back of his hand contemptuously. "Move on."

Grimy pants and shirt, slept in for ten days; huaraches over dirt-encrusted feet. Small wonder, Ray thought bitterly, that the guard saw only a tramp in front of him. "Ya mi voy," Ray said sullenly, shuffling toward the exit. "I'm going." At the gate he paused and looked back. The guard had followed him and now he, in turn, stopped, staring speculatively. "Go shine your cars," Ray said angrily.

Again the guard flicked his hand as if brushing away a troublesome insect. Eleven days ago it had probably been the same flunky who bowed and scraped when they drove into the place. Ray spat on the ground, then stepped out onto

the road leading to the main highway.

It was easy to move along the highway at night. There was little traffic and few sounds. The few cars there were, hurtled by. At first, when the road was straight, he heard the distant scream of the approaching engine about the same moment he saw the headlights as a single white pinpoint on the highway. There was more than enough time to leave the road and hide in a barranca. Later on in the night, the highway began to curve lazily through the hills and then he heard the engines long before he saw the lights. Finally he did not bother to leave the pavement, staggering on and on, his mind dull, projecting no thought other than the placing of one foot in front of another.

Eventually he became aware that he was thirsty and when this thought penetrated his conscious mind, the thirst became overbearing. After a while he saw a faint flickering yellow light far off the road and he turned into the field, heading toward it. A wire fence struck him across the chest. A horse neighed and galloped away with a quick pounding of hooves. Bending over slowly, he eased through the strands and stepped in mud. He wouldn't have to go to the house. Almost at his side was

a livestock watering trough. He dropped to his knees and dipped his mouth to the water like an animal and when slaked, crawled a few feet away on his knees, then stretched out on the soft ground.

Somewhere nearby a dog barked loudly and then the outcry was joined by another. He was wet and the sun was red through his closed eyelids. His neck was stiff and his body ached in a hundred muscles. Rolling over on his stomach, he opened his eyes. Two curs bolted backwards and their barking became more frenzied. A short distance in back of the dogs, a teenage boy stood silently, staring, his face a blank. Then, as Ray struggled to his feet, the boy turned and started to run.

"Alto!" Ray cried, his voice a harsh rasp. "Stop!"

The youth obeyed, turning around.

"It's all right, friend," Ray said, rubbing the back of his neck. "I was drunk."

"Borracho?" The youth tipped his head curiously, like a puppy.

"That's right . . . one great big borracho last night."

The boy shrugged slightly and hissed to the dogs who immediately fell silent.

"Do you have coffee?" Ray nodded toward the small house in the distance. "I'll pay you."

Slowly the youth raised his hand and held his thumb and forefinger about a quarter inch apart. Sign language . . . Wait for a minute. Then abruptly he turned and ran toward the house, the dogs loping along at his heels.

It had been a mistake, Ray thought suddenly with a nervous glance toward the highway. The parents would ask questions. They might have a radio and surely the news had been broadcast that a gringo murderer had escaped from Pornada and was believed heading toward the border . . . a killer with a long beard.

Turning, he sloughed his way through the mud to the fence and then across the marshy grass to the highway. Either the huaraches had shrunk during the night or his feet had swollen, for the leather bindings cut painfully into the back of his feet and beneath his ankles. He sat down and tried to pull them off. They wouldn't move. Angry red skin bulged painfully both above and below the bindings. He fumbled in his pocket for his penknife. It was gone. So was his loose change. But his wallet was still in his hip pocket.

An engine started . . . an old one with no exhaust muffler and he traced the sound to a Model A Ford pickup truck at the house of the young boy and his dogs. It

bounced along a dusty sideroad to the highway, two persons in the front seat, and when it reached the asphalt, it turned north in his direction. Wincing with pain from his bound feet, Ray hobbled erect as the truck drew abreast and stopped.

It was the same boy, but the driver was very old, probably his grandfather. Neither said a word; they made no gesture.

Ray pointed to his feet, held one foot up, then made a scissoring motion with two fingers. The boy nodded gravely, pulled a switchblade knife from his pocket and passed it down, handle extended.

Trusting souls, Ray thought wryly as he slid the razor sharp blade under the leather binding. No pressure was needed. The leather strap parted as if it was paper. "Your truck was made the year I was born," he said aloud.

"Mandel" the old man said.

"Never mind." His feet free from the Indian shoes began to tingle and itch, the way a limb tingled after it had fallen asleep. Slowly Ray folded the knife and passed it back. Roadblocks or not, he could walk no further. Pulling out his wallet, he extracted a twenty dollar bill and held it up. "Tijuana?"

The boy nodded and plucked the bill from his hands as if it was

a ripe cherry on a tree. He looked at it carefully on both sides, then slid across the seat and motioned for Ray to climb in. The seat seemed incredibly soft. The pick-up lurched forward.

Ahead of them, a small black sedan swung wide on a curve. It had the appearance of a police car and Ray tensed, glancing toward his companions with quick suspicion. The car whooshed past. Two fishing poles pushed out of a rear window. He sighed and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. It was caked. Bending forward, he tipped the rear view mirror in his direction. At first he stared in disbelief. Then he shook his head and laughed. His hair, his beard, his face were plastered with mud. Shirt and pants were the same. He looked like a ghoul in a Grade B horror picture. The old man smiled politely and turned the mirror back.

Shrugging, Ray rubbed dried mud from the crystal of his watch . . . a little after nine. If his luck held, he should be at the San Ysidro border station in an hour. It was only an hour's drive from Ensenada in an ordinary car. The distance he had walked should make up the difference for the slower speed in the clunker. As soon as he crossed the border, he could shower . . . call Lois collect.

She would come down and get him. His head dropped forward and he fell asleep.

A horn blared almost in his ear, jolting him upright, instantly alert. He was on the outskirts of Tijuana. He was almost safe. The boy smiled and nodded politely. The Mexicans were always very polite, like the Japanese, he thought, looking at his watch. Quarter past ten. And like the Japanese, one never knew what they were thinking. There had been no roadblock. But this was logical. Police rarely kept roadblocks up for more than a few hours. The quarry had either got through by this time or was not going to try.

The old man shifted to a lower gear to climb a small hill. A convertible of the same brand, but thirty years newer, paused at the exit of the Sierra Motel as they approached. A Hollywood type blonde looked up at him as they passed. Her mouth fell open and red fingernails flashed up to a heavily rouged mouth.

"And you too," Ray said aloud, then turned to the boy and gestured for a cigarette. The boy shook his head and shrugged.

The truck caught the green light on the main street and turned

left toward the center of the city. A neat, young Mexican girl on the sidewalk turned to stare at him and with a nervous sigh, Ray slid down in the seat to avoid such attention. The truck sputtered past the Fronton Palace, down past the cellar night clubs and the honky tonks and the markets that stretched for blocks under arcades. The streets became more crowded and a few stared at him curiously, but not with alarm. Then the old man made an abrupt U turn and stopped directly in front of the Ceasar Hotel.

"Tijuana," he said quietly.

"No, no." Ray replied quickly, sitting up. "United States . . . Los Estados Unidos."

"No tengo papeles," the old man replied firmly.

"A la linea," Ray protested, trying to control his rising temper. "To the line."

"Tijuana," the boy echoed. Ominously his hand slipped into his pocket . . . the pocket with the switchblade knife.

Two Mexican pitchmen on the street moved toward the curb in front of the truck. A police whistle trilled shrilly, jerking Ray's attention to the corner. A traffic cop gestured irritably for the old man to get out of the no parking zone.

"Andele," the old man said softly and revved the noisy engine. It

backfired as he eased the pressure on the gas pedal and the explosion turned a dozen heads in their direction.

The whistle shrilled again angrily and the cop started to walk toward them.

"Okay, okay," Ray muttered, then pressing his lips to muzzle his temper, he stepped down on the hot pavement.

The truck lurched into the traffic before Ray stepped up on the curb, racing away as if seeking escape . . . escape from what? One of the pitch artists began to laugh and then was joined by his companion. A middle aged couple with a pinched expression of distaste, paused and stared at him. A street photographer leaned against his gaily caparisoned burro and began to giggle. The traffic cop pushed back his duck billed cap and looked over curiously.

Two cabs were parked diagonally at the corner. Lips still compressed tightly, Ray strode to the nearest one, soles of his feet burning on the hot pavement, pulled open the rear door and jumped in.

The driver, a tough pachuco type, leaned over the back of the front seat. "Where to, buddy?"

"The border."

"Five bucks, buddy."

It was no more than a mile to the border. In Tijuana, the fare should

be no more than fifty cents. "Let's go."

"I don't think you got a fin, buddy."

Contemptuously, Ray pulled out his wallet and removed a ten dollar bill. He snapped it in front of the driver. "You get me there in five minutes and I'll double your fin."

The cab hurtled back in the street, then U-turned and raced down the thoroughfare.

"But don't get us pinched," Ray said sourly, looking back through the rear window. "Either way you get the sawbuck."

The driver nodded, but didn't slow. Tires screamed in protest as the taxi skidded onto the old bridge over the dry Tijuana River then sped toward the border. Ahead of them, just beyond the other end of the bridge was the high arch that marked the Mexican-United States boundary line. On the right side of the arch, a half dozen lanes moved through stalls operated by the U.S. Border Patrol. On the left was the Mexican port of entry.

"Way over to the right, friend," Ray ordered, again glancing back. There were no signs of pursuit. "And as close to the line as you can get."

"I can't go beyond the turnaround, buddy. That's about fifty

yards." The cabby pulled sharply to the right as he swung off the bridge, then braked dramatically along the curb. "Four minutes flat," he announced happily.

About a dozen cars were in the two open lanes leading into the United States. Two Border Patrolmen leaned in windows of the forward vehicles. Another stood on the steps of the Customs Building. Taking a deep breath, Ray nodded, opened the door, then passed the ten dollars to the grinning driver.

He stepped out on the sidewalk and glanced across the small square toward the Mexican port of entry. Two khaki clad guards leaned casually against a pillar. Another waved a tourist through. It was normal. He glanced over his shoulder and froze motionless.

Strolling toward him with a sadistic grin on his face was Campeche. He was only twenty yards distant, his huge body moving with a dreadful feline grace . . . a big cat stalking the immobile lamb. His slow walk was almost hypnotic. So supremely confident he was that he even slowed his pace as he narrowed the distance between them. Ray thought of a wild rabbit, held motionless by the glare of onrushing headlights on a highway.

Then someone began to giggle,

and the giggle broke the spell. He caught a brief impression of a laughing peddler, holding two clay souvenir bulls in his hand as he wheeled around and ran.

His feet slapped the pavement hard, but the pain came in his chest from his tortured breathing. *Ley de fuga*. At this instant, the pistol was being aimed at his back. Ray dodged, jerking first one way and then the other. Campeche wouldn't dare shoot this close to the border, unless he was sure of hitting his target.

Then incredibly the shadow of the arch fell across him. Arms went around him, wrenching him around in a complete circle, then pushing him hard against a wall. Gasping for breath, he followed the arm on his chest up to a shoulder, down to a badge. . . . The U.S. Border Patrol! He was in the United States.

His feet began to burn. A sharp pain lanced his side and his head began to pound unmercifully.

The cop slowly released his grip and backed away, saying nothing, looking at him curiously. Gradually he became aware that everyone

was staring at him now. No one laughed. They all stared, as people will stare at the scene of a fatal auto accident.

Only one person moved . . . Campeche. The big detective, still grinning, walked slowly right up to the arch, then stopped and leaned against one of the stanchions.

"I'm not in Mexico anymore," Ray screamed the words involuntarily.

The big detective nodded slowly, then began to chuckle softly. "Tell me, Mr. Packard," he said presently. "Tell me just one thing."

"What?" Ray's body began to tense. The giant was clever, as well as sadistic. He would pull some trick. Ray glanced around quickly for the Border Patrolman, then frowned suddenly. His own convertible was parked just beyond one of the stalls. His suitcases showed plainly in the rear seat.

"Why in hell didn't you drive up?" Campeche asked.

Ray looked again at his car, then back to the giant. Then, slumping down on the sidewalk he sobbed uncontrollably.

