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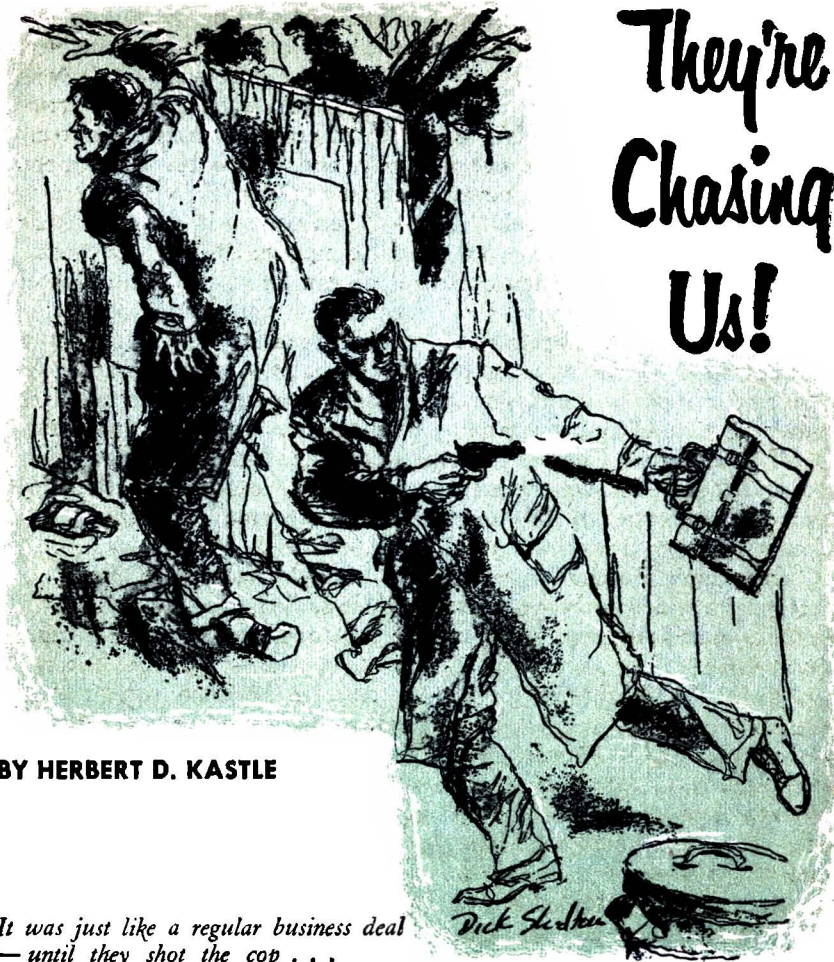
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# They're Chasing Us!



BY HERBERT D. KASTLE

*It was just like a regular business deal  
— until they shot the cop . . .*

ALL THE WAY BACK he was sick. His stomach churned and there was a throbbing pain behind his eyes. He drove slowly through the dark Brooklyn streets, though he wanted to race home. He had to

drive slowly. It would be one hell of a note to get tagged for speeding now!

He saw the cop leaning against the factory wall as he stopped for a light at Atlantic and Vanderbilt.

The cop looked cold. The cop suddenly stepped away from the wall and walked across the sidewalk and into the gutter. He came toward the car and Sid pulled the Smith & Wesson .38 Detective Special from his overcoat and put it on his lap. He put his right hand over it.

The cop walked behind the car and Sid picked up the .38. The cop kept walking, across the street, and Sid put the gun back in his pocket and lit a cigarette. The light changed and he pulled away, moving faster. He checked his rear view mirror, but there hadn't been a chase at the scene of the job and there wasn't any now.

Only one thing bothered him. Just how hard had Melvin hit that clerk? Murder was a tough rap. Of course, the damn fool had given Melvin trouble. Lucky Mel hadn't used his switchblade. That would have made it murder for sure.

He made a right on Pennsylvania Avenue and turned left when he hit New Lots. He went out past the old church and turned left again and pulled to a stop in front of a dark frame house. He shut his lights and twisted around in the seat and picked up the briefcase from the floor in back. He left the key in the ignition, got out, slammed the door without locking it, and began to walk. It was real cold, even for November. He pulled up the collar of his coat and walked faster. When he reached the corner, he looked back. There wasn't anyone moving

on the dark street. He turned left and walked four blocks to New Jersey Avenue. He went down New Jersey Avenue and reached the two-family house and climbed the steps. He opened the door and entered the dimly-lit ante-room and moved to the door on his left — the one that led to the ground-floor apartment. He pressed the button and chimes sounded.

Norma got there fast. She opened the door and stepped aside and he came in. He walked down the dark foyer to the kitchen. He sat down and put the briefcase on the floor and rubbed his hands together. He felt much better.

"Cold as hell," he said.

"Yes, Sid. How'd it go?"

He smiled and nodded. "Smooth," he said, and unbuttoned his coat. He stood up and she helped him get the coat off. She took his hat from his head and went out to the closet. When she came back, he was sitting again, rubbing his hands together again.

"Melvin?" she said.

"Fine. We split up, like usual. He'll ride around a while — check us until he's dead certain no tail's around. He should be here in twenty minutes, a half hour."

She let out her breath and came around the table and sat down facing him. She was a tall, round-faced woman in her mid-thirties, not pretty and not plain. She had a good figure; slightly on the fleshy side but still good in that she had slim legs, a

narrow waist, flaring hips and large breasts. Sid looked at her and suddenly wet his lips.

"Norma," he said. "We got a few minutes —"

She stood up and went to the stove. There was a coffee pot perking over a low flame. She picked it up and carried it to the table and put it on the gray formica top. She went to a closet over the sink and opened the double doors and took out three cups and carried them to the table.

"Norma," Sid said, and his voice was a little hoarse. "It isn't fair you should only be with Mel."

She looked at him, and even as she made her full lips come together in a tight line of disapproval, her hand rose to her short-cut brown hair, patting it, arranging it, and her hips moved so that she went into the traditional hippy stance of a woman seeking approval, seeking to arouse desire.

"Mel's my man," she said sharply. "It isn't my fault Tina left you. You know how it was — me and Mel, you and Tina. Three years."

He nodded. "Sure. But I never really went for her. I always went for you." He looked up at her, eyes slipping down and then returning to her face. "Honest, baby," he said, and when he took a drag of his cigarette his hand trembled.

"Now you cut that out," she said, but the words were delivered without strength. "I don't want trouble between you and Mel." Her voice was thick. His eyes moved over her.

"There won't be no trouble," Sid said, and ground out his cigarette into a small, square ashtray. "He won't know. Maybe we can tell him, later, and make some sort of arrangement."

"That isn't decent," she said. But her eyes were on his.

He shrugged. "Mel understands how it is. You aren't married. We'll all three get along fine. I'll bet he even laughs when we tell him."

"We won't tell him," she said. "There isn't going to be any arrangement." She stepped forward, toward the closet, reaching out to shut the double doors. "So please forget it," she said, and then stopped as his hand stroked her. She stood there, rigid, and then slapped his hand away. She reached the closet and closed the doors and turned back to the table. "You been without Tina four months now," she said, and cleared her throat. "That's why."

Sid stood up and reached her in a single step. He pulled her against him and kissed her hard, so that her head was pushed back and her body arched into his. The kiss lasted a long time and his hands moved over her body insistently.

She slipped her lips to the side. "You love me?" she murmured.

For a second his thin face twisted, as if he were repressing laughter. "Now, Norma," he said. "You know I do. Why else would I want you?"

"Aw, hell," she said. "I don't even know any more what makes

love." She moved her lips back into line and gave herself to his kiss, gave her body to his movements.

Sid let her go and rubbed his face nervously. "C'mon," he said, and pulled her into the foyer and then into the bedroom.

"No," she said. "Mel will be here. Let's wait —"

He caressed her, moving his hands gently at first over the curves of her body. Her breath was coming faster and she sat down on the bed. He sat down beside her.

"Come on," Sid said. "Come on, baby."

"No . . ."

He let his hands grow stronger, not so gentle now. Very slowly he let her relax back, lying on the bed. She was breathing rapidly. Her eyes closed and then she was holding him . . .

Later, he came out of the bathroom and looked in the bedroom. He heard her in the kitchen and went there. She was pouring coffee in two of the three cups. He went up to her and kissed her on the neck and said, "Hello, baby."

She smiled, but then moved away. "You hear the doorbell before?"

He shook his head. "But I figured he must have been around."

"Naturally. It's almost half an hour since you walked in. He'll know, Sid."

Sid sat down and sipped at his cup of black coffee. "Naw," he said. "I'll tell him we were playing safe.

I'll tell him I thought I spotted a tail and didn't want to answer the door until I was sure it was safe."

She sat down and lifted her cup, but the chimes sounded. She got up and looked at Sid and said, "Damn!"

He said, "Go on. It's all right. You know me and Mel."

She left the room. He dug cigarettes from his pocket and lit one and took a drag. As he exhaled smoke through his nostrils, Mel came into the kitchen, taking off his coat and hat. He gave the clothing to Norma and sat down in her chair and gulped her coffee.

"Cold outside," he said, and then leaned back and squinted his eyes at Sid. He looked very much like Sid, except he was older. They were both medium-sized men, slender, with light brown hair and long, thin faces. Sid was thirty-four, Mel a few months shy of forty. But Sid ran the operation. They were brothers.

"So," Sid said. "What took you so long?"

Mel reached across the table and helped himself to a cigarette from Sid's pack. He lit it and smiled. "I froze myself ringing that bell. Then I figured I'd better take a fast walk before someone wondered why I couldn't get into my own place."

Norma came into the kitchen and stood near the doorway. "Maybe you should carry keys —"

Sid said, "No keys on a job. Nothing on a job except a car, a gun, a briefcase. That way if one is caught the others —"

"Right," Mel interrupted. "But I was freezing and I decided to take a walk. I gave you two some extra minutes." He smoked and smiled.

Sid looked at him. Norma said, "How about something to eat?"

Mel shrugged and said, "Let's not play stupid games. I saw it coming. It's okay with me." He shrugged again.

Sid examined his hands. Norma said, "I didn't mean to, Mel. But no hard feelings?"

Mel smiled at her. "Honey, we've had almost three years. It's time for a change. I'm glad you're going to be around, and I hope you won't get mad when I bring someone else around."

She shook her head. "Let's eat, huh?"

"Right," Mel said, and rubbed his hands together. "How about it, Sid? What'd we make?"

Sid looked down and saw the briefcase lying there. He shook his head in amazement and glanced at Norma. He hadn't even thought of the haul. That woman was going to make him happy.

He picked up the briefcase and opened it and dumped its contents on the table. Norma was at the stove, banging pots, opening cans. She hummed softly as she worked and she turned to smile at Sid several times. Sid managed to smile back at her as he put the money into denominational stacks — ones, fives, tens, twenties, fifties, and five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"One thousand eighty-three," he said.

Mel had been leaning forward, excited. He slumped back, slammed his left hand on the formica. "Such a big store. Such a careful casing. It looked like twenty-five hundred to three grand for sure. Bigger than a Key-Food. Bigger than a Bohack. A big, big place. How the hell —" He stopped and shook his head and put out his cigarette. "And maybe a murder rap too."

"Sure," Sid said, putting the money back into the briefcase. "You hit that clerk real hard. Did you check him after?"

Mel nodded. "He was breathing. But his head was bashed. I don't think so, but he could croak."

Sid closed the briefcase and put it on the floor. "Makes no difference. We aren't going to get caught."

Mel said, "Right. And even if we are, we're not going back to the pen."

They looked at each other, nodding, grim-faced. They'd been up twice before. They'd spent a total of eight years in prison — five for Mel and three for Sid. They'd had enough.

"Better call Tony," Norma said, coming to the table and putting down three large plates.

Mel said, "I'll do it. Where'd you park the Pontiac, Sid?"

Sid told him. Mel went out into the foyer and picked up the phone from the low table. He dialed, waited, said, "Let me speak to Mr. Guerino.

That you, Tony? Mel. Those cars are ready to be picked up." He told Tony where they were and said, "Replace them right away — tonight. And make them *good*. That '50 Pontiac had no pickup. Give us a couple of hot ones, see?" He listened, said, "Don't you try upping the ante on us, mister. Two hundred a car for a few weeks is clear gravy. Sure, sure. I know all about your risks. What do you think we take, chances on a punchboard? Stop crying and tell me what to look for. And nothing flashy. Black jobs." He listened again, said, "Okay," hung up and returned to the kitchen.

"He still trying to squeeze us?" Sid said, speaking around a mouthful of food.

"Yeah. Wants to raise us fifty per car. Damn louse!"

"Eat up," Norma said, sitting down at the table, between them.

"I got to put his payoff in one of the cars," Mel said. "He might get there fast, for a change."

Norma got up and took his plate and brought it to the stove. "Okay. I'll kept it warm for you."

"Give me four bills," Mel said to Sid.

Sid kept chewing and reached down and dug into the briefcase. He looked up. "Think he might stand still if I *really* gave you four bills?"

Mel shrugged. "He'll squawk, but maybe not too loud. Let's try it. Why should *we* have to risk passing the C notes?"

Sid took out four one-hundred-

dollar bills and looked at them. "He'll yell," he muttered. "He'll yell his head off. But let him." Then he shook his head and put the four bills back in the briefcase. He pulled out a pack of twenties and counted off ten and handed them to Mel. He added four fifties and said, "We've got to keep him happy. We can't take too many chances. We're both lousy on car heists."

Mel put the money in his pocket and went into the foyer. He got his coat and hat from the closet and put them on as he walked to the door. He went out of the apartment.

Sid and Norma ate the ham and canned vegetables and drank coffee. As they were finishing, the chimes sounded. Norma went to the door and then she came into the kitchen and went to the stove for Mel's plate. Mel came in a minute later, sat down, said, "We got bills to pay. There's that stupid bet you made on the nags, and the rent, and Norma's expenses."

Sid lit a cigarette, leaned back, nodded. "We'll end up with about four hundred. That's got to carry us until we do another job."

Norma brought Mel's plate and sat down to finish her coffee. "We never seem to get ahead," she said. "Why is it?"

Sid smoked and said, "We haven't hit a big payoff in a long time."

Mel swallowed a mouthful of food. "We never hit a really big one."

"What about the eighteen grand in '47?"

"So? We never got to spend it, did we?"

Sid shrugged. "I was just mentioning it. If we hadn't been nailed, that would have put us way ahead."

Norma cleared her throat and said, "Did you boys ever think —" She looked down, smiled in an embarrassed way. "Maybe you two should go straight."

Sid looked at her. "Maybe. And we've thought of it plenty. But it's no good. It's too late."

"It's never too late," Mel said dramatically, making his voice deep. "Never, my son." He looked at Norma. "That what you're thinking?"

Norma said, "Well —"

"We've got records," Sid said, smoking contentedly. "We'd starve. This way it isn't so bad."

Norma said, "I used to think we were way ahead of everyone. Now I know different. There are people on this block who make sixty-seventy bucks a week and live as good as us, maybe better."

"Nice to know," Sid said. "But one day we hit a big payoff and then we go out to Florida and maybe break in on the rackets. Then we drive Caddys, drink champagne and you wear mink."

She smiled. "Yeah. That's it. The people around here live regular, but they can't ever get out of Brooklyn. We've always got a chance of making it."

Sid nodded. "Our ceiling is unlimited. There's no telling what —"

The door chimes sounded. Sid picked up the briefcase and ran softly to the foyer closet. He grabbed his overcoat and dropped the briefcase while he got into his coat. He retrieved the briefcase with his left hand, drew his gun from his overcoat pocket with his right, and stepped aside for Mel. Mel got into his overcoat and drew his Luger. Norma stood in the kitchen doorway, watching.

"Take it easy," she whispered. "You two are always so jumpy —"

Sid jerked his head at the door. Norma shrugged and walked past the brothers, face worried but not frightened. She shook her head slightly, as if to say it was a neighbor or a charity collector or someone else quite normal and harmless. She got to the door and said, "Who is it?"

"Telephone repairman," a deep voice said.

Norma turned her head, and now she was frightened. Sid moved his gun, pushing it toward the door, and mouthed the words, "Talk, we'll check." He repeated the exaggerated lip movements until she nodded that she understood. She turned back to the door and said, "I didn't call for a repairman. Our phone is all right."

Sid ran softly to the bedroom as the voice answered peremptorily, harshly. He reached the window and put his gun in his pocket. He opened the window and crawled out, awkward in the heavy coat and with the briefcase in his left hand. He dropped



three feet to the back-yard's hard earth, and Mel came right behind him. They crouched low and ran toward the fence on their left, passing the end of an alley.

Footsteps pounded up the alley, a voice shouted, "Back here, Carl! The yard!"

Inside the house, Norma screamed, and upstairs a window opened and Mrs. Krantz said, "What's the matter?"

Sid reached the fence and threw the briefcase over and leaped up and clawed his way to the top and over. As he hit the ground there were three or four shots, close together, almost blending. Mel screamed and fell heavily beside him.

"Hit," Mel said. "Sid. I'm hit!"

Sid found the briefcase and said, "Get up. You're okay. Get up." He began to run toward the alley, but stopped and looked back. Mel was getting up, moving toward him, breaking into a staggering run. Sid waited, grabbed Mel's arm, dragged him along as he sprinted down the alley.

Just as they reached the street, a shot blasted behind them. Sid shoved Mel on, drew his .38, fired into the alley three times. He faced the street again and saw that Mel was almost at the corner of New Lots. He caught up with him, heard shouts, glanced back to see two cops erupt from the alley. He turned the corner, and sent a slug back at them, and knew they'd dive for cover for at least a few seconds. One of them coughed.

"My car's on the next block," Mel panted as Sid came up to him again. "Go on ahead—get her started."

Sid pulled him along, saying, "We can make it together."

"Go on!" Mel said, trying to shake loose. "Go—"

A man and woman stepped out of a doorway and stopped, looking at the two men running toward them.

"Go on," Mel said, and raised his Luger. "I'll use the broad for cover."

The couple had begun to turn back, but Sid was on them and said, "Stay still or you're dead."

The woman made a crying sound as Sid ran by. He reached the next corner and looked back. Mel was swinging with his Luger and the man was going down, limp. The woman screamed, and then Sid was around the corner and running fast, eyes straining to spot the black Chevy sedan. He was a third of the way down the block when a thought made his stomach knot. What if Tony had already changed the cars? Mel had talked to him, and Mel hadn't told Sid what the replacements would be. Sid wouldn't be able to recognize—

He saw the Chevy just then, on the other side of the street, and used every last ounce of strength to reach it. He opened the door, got inside, threw the briefcase over his shoulder and fumbled for the ignition. The key was there and he turned it and got the Chevy started. He swung out into the

street; then shifted into reverse and backed toward the corner.

"Sid!" Mel's voice called.

Sid stopped and leaned across to open the door. Mel came staggering up, pushing the woman ahead of him. She was tall and dark-haired and she seemed too frightened to scream. As they got to the car the woman twisted around and tried to break away, but Mel grabbed her arm and pulled her back. She screamed once and he hit her with his open palm. Then she was quiet as Mel shoved her in front and slammed the door and reached for the rear door. Sid leaned over the still woman and pulled up the little button on the rear door. Mel opened it and climbed inside.

Sid turned to the road and shifted fast and had the Chevvy doing sixty before they reached the corner. He held his breath and kept going, straight across the intersection, and didn't breathe again until they reached the other side. He made the next three blocks the same way, and even though it was almost twelve he felt they were lucky not to get hit going across intersections that fast and without lights. On the fourth corner he made a right and at the next corner another right and then pulled to the curb and shut the ignition.

The woman was sitting rigidly, breathing fast. Her eyes were closed. Sid slapped her as hard as he could and she gasped and turned to him. He slapped her again. She started to scream but he clamped his hand over

her mouth. "Don't try anything funny," he said. She twisted in the seat and, keeping one hand over her mouth, he hit her in the stomach with his other fist. The first time, she jerked and struggled, but he found the right spot with the next blow and she went limp. He let her go. Then he looked in back and saw that Mel was lying on his side on the seat. He said, "How is it?"

Mel groaned. "Hurts like hell."

"Where?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you."

"Sure. I'll bust a gut." He turned and pushed the woman's head down so it wouldn't show above the window. He lay down too, head on her body, and said, "Make me laugh."

"In the can," Mel said, and groaned again. "Not too bad because I think the bullet went through, sort of sideways when I was up on that fence. Isn't that a laugh?"

"A scream," Sid said, and froze as a car tore by. "You bleeding much?"

"Like a pig. You got any idea how to stop it — where do you tie the tourniquet?" He made a laughing sound.

"We'll get you to Phil Gargen," Sid said.

"He won't touch us on the run," Mel said. "You know that. It'll have to be a straight doc, and a gun job."

"No matter what," Sid said. "We'll get you a doc."

The woman sighed and stirred. Sid raised himself and rabbit-punched her. She quivered and went limp.

Sid said, "We can't ditch the car with you hit. We'll have to take our chances." He opened the door and shoved the woman. She fell to the gutter. He jumped out, grabbed her under the arms and dragged her to the sidewalk. Then he got back in the car and drove off, still without lights.

They reached the Manhattan Bridge at one-fifteen, after sticking to side streets and doing some backtracking, and Sid had his lights on. They drove over the bridge and down Canal and up Broadway. They reached the small hotel near 8th Street, and Sid parked on the dark side street.

"He won't do it," Mel said, voice tired.

Sid leaned over the seat and found the briefcase. He picked it up and opened the door. "He'll do it."

"Don't try to make him," Mel said, raising himself on an elbow. "He's as tough as any con."

"I won't try anything. I'll just use the dough. He'll do it."

"That's our stake. How we gonna live?"

Sid got out and said, "We'll worry about that later." He closed the door and walked toward Broadway. He came back about ten minutes later, minus the briefcase. A tall, heavy man was with him. The tall, heavy man got in back; Sid got in front.

Phil Gargen said, "Get moving."

Sid turned his head. "It's bad enough you want to do it in the car, but driving yet!"

"You heard me. Or do you want your money back?"

Sid glared at him. "Listen, Doc—"

The doctor opened his small bag and put his right hand inside and kept it there. "I'm listening."

Mel said, "Sid, for God's sake, do like he wants or call it off."

Sid hissed through his teeth and started the car and pulled slowly away from the curb. He drove across Broadway and kept to dark streets for the next twenty minutes, trying not to hear the harsh breathing and occasional low cries coming from the rear. Then the doctor said, "Okay, take me home."

Sid drove back to 8th Street, parked, turned his head. The doctor was looking at him, right hand in his bag. Mel was lying on his side, eyes closed, face all screwed together in pain.

"He'll be fine in a few days," the doctor said. "Just get him to bed soon, let him sleep, give him one of these if he feels pain." He handed Sid a small bottle. "All he needs is the time to regain lost blood. That bullet did nothing more than tear a gash in his right buttock." He opened the door and got out, hand still in his medical bag. "Drive away, boys."

Sid looked at him through the window. A gun in his bag, the money upstairs in his room, everything covered. A sweet seven hundred bucks for twenty minutes work. "Bastard," he said quietly, and drove away.

"Where we going?" Mel said, sounding groggy.

"Florida. We'll get another car tomorrow. We'll stop at a motel in a few hours so you'll get your rest."

"Forget the motel," Mel said. "We ain't stopping 'till we're ready to heist a car. I'm okay. Just tired. Phil gave me a shot."

Sid nodded and kept driving. "Poor Norma," he said. "Poor kid."

"She'll be all right," Mel said. "She won't serve time."

"Maybe," Sid said.

"What about dough?" Mel said, voice sleepy. "How much you got?"

"About thirty bucks in my wallet. And you?"

"Eight-ten."

"Not good," Sid said, and drove in silence a while. Then he remembered something. "Hey! You put the four hundred for Tony in *your* car, didn't you?" There was no answer except a soft snore. Sid opened the glove compartment with his right hand and felt around, still driving. He found the envelope and pulled it out. The four hundred dollars in twenties and fifties was there.

He shoved the bills into his overcoat pocket and lit a cigarette and put on the radio. It was a hot mambo. Then he thought of Mel and turned off the radio.

About two hours later, Mel roused and said, "We okay?"

"Sure," Sid said.

Mel sighed. "We're not going to make it this time. You hit a cop in that alley."

"We'll make it."

"No, Sid baby. No. This car, me slowed down, things not breaking right."

Sid smoked and said nothing.

"How'd we ever get started?"

Mel mumbled. "How'd we ever get into this?"

Sid kept quiet and soon Mel was sleeping again.

They might make it, Sid thought. There was a chance. Then a quick job, maybe a grand or two, and a new location. Sure, they'd be all right.

His cigarette tasted bad. He threw it out the window and peered into the darkness, driving fast. It sure was a lousy road.

