

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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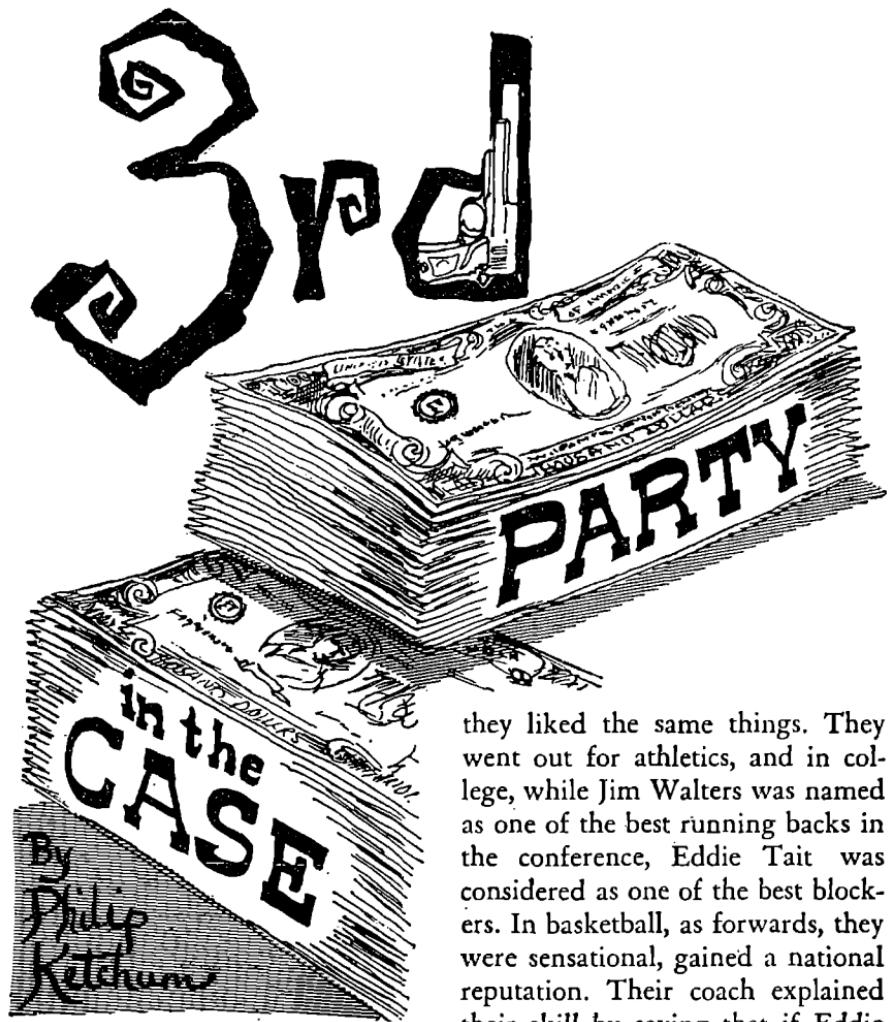
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THROUGH grade school, junior high, high school and college they had been inseparable companions, and of course, all the way, they maintained a casual rivalry. Their grades were average, their I.Q. rating exactly the same. In general

they liked the same things. They went out for athletics, and in college, while Jim Walters was named as one of the best running backs in the conference, Eddie Tait was considered as one of the best blockers. In basketball, as forwards, they were sensational, gained a national reputation. Their coach explained their skill by saying that if Eddie got the ball, he did not have to look to see where Jim was. He knew instinctively where to pass the ball. And this worked the other way. Their minds seemed to be completely attuned to each other. Their thoughts ran in the same

Greed has proven to be the downfall of many a criminal; it isn't smart to be greedy. The foregoing observations, made by one of the characters in this story, are as apt a comment as any, I am sure you will agree.



channels, their gestures matched.

This led them to a little difficulty, for it was not unlikely that they would get interested in the same girl. They had several quarrels during college but they patched them up. At least they patched up all but one. In their senior year in college, a junior transfer named Lydia Baumer came to the school, and she was something special. They traded dates with her, both fell in love with her, neither wanted to give her up.

In the end, Jim Walters was the lucky one to marry her. Eddie served as best man. He stood through the wedding ceremony with a frozen smile on his face. Afterwards, he kissed Lydia on the cheek and wished her well. He tried to seem genuinely pleased. He put on a good act. Without much question no one but Jim Walters knew that he was boiling up inside.

Before Jim and Lydia went away on their honeymoon, Jim and Eddie had a brief meeting in one of the upper rooms of Lydia's

home. No one else was present.

"Well, Eddie?" Jim said.

Eddie shrugged. "What do you want me to say? I hate your guts—and you know it."

"I would have felt the same way, if you had married her."

"That's a lot of help."

"What are you going to do, Eddie?"

"I don't know—yet."

"What about the plans we've made?"

"I don't know."

Jim spoke slowly. "I don't have much money. Neither does Lydia. Neither do you. Before very long I'll be needing money, so will you."

"So we both need money," Eddie said.

"We work together pretty well."

"We tried two jobs."

"Weren't they smooth?"

Eddie motioned vaguely. "All right, I'll think about it. When you come back, give me a ring."

"We'll be back in two weeks," Jim said. "See you then."

He didn't offer to shake hands. Eddie said nothing more. He turned away, left the house, went

to the small apartment where he lived, and got out a bottle of bourbon, took a stiff drink.

He had another, and another, and another. He got bitter, profane. He could picture in detail just how Jim and Lydia would spend that night—and the next night, and the next, and the next and all the days that were ahead. He had more bourbon, but that did not help. He remembered a girl with whom he could spend the night, but he didn't want her. He wanted Lydia—only he would never have her. She belonged to Jim Walters. The hate he was feeling made him shaky.

He was twenty-three, tall, solidly built. His looks might have been average. He was not too handsome, his features were not unpleasant. He would not stand out in a crowd, but that was fine. There were times when he would not want to be noticed. In a way, this was true of Jim Walters. He wasn't flashy. He fitted into the crowd. What was special about him was the way his mind worked, quickly, decisively, and in a pattern which Eddie had learned—for he thought the same way.

A year ago when he and Jim had still been in college they had been taking a walk one night, grousing about being almost broke. They had been in the lower part of

town, had seen a man leaving a tavern, staggering, hardly able to walk.

"Let's help him," Jim said.

"He needs it," Eddie said.

They caught up with the man and as Eddie steadied him, Jim reached under the man's coat, took out his wallet. As the man started to cry out, Eddie cracked the back of his neck, stunned him. By that time Jim had taken the money from the wallet, had replaced the wallet in the man's coat pocket. Together, then, they propped the man in a doorway—and left him. Not a step of this had been planned, but when Jim had reached for the wallet, Eddie had known instinctively what Jim meant to do.

A number of times after that they pulled the same stunt, working quickly, efficiently, working as though by pattern. But this had not produced any real money. The average drunk usually had already spent his money. If they were going to take a chance, they might as well try something that would pay. They drove to a neighboring town one night, hit a liquor store which was open late, and drove away with nearly three thousand dollars. No trouble. They tried a filling station about four months later. That job had paid fifteen hundred. And they had no trouble.

Eddie had almost a thousand

dollars left, but of course a thousand dollars wouldn't last forever. Possibly, Jim had saved even more but two weeks of a honeymoon would be expensive. Unless he was badly mistaken, Jim would be broke when he got home. He could take a job, of course, but he wouldn't want to—any more than Eddie did. That meant they would have to try another job.

The bourbon was nearly gone, and Eddie was having a difficult time thinking clearly. But he was trying, and in his mind he was setting up two images of Jim Walters. One was the Jim who had married Lydia—and he hated that Jim with so much bitterness it made him sick. The other Jim was an efficient machine, thoughtful, clever, ruthless if necessary, and equal to almost any possible emergency. If possible, he would like to work with Jim—the machine. He would forget the Jim who was married to Lydia. At least, he would try.

Jim and Lydia returned from their honeymoon and within a few days Lydia telephoned Eddie, to invite him to dinner. Eddie avoided this, offering a plausible excuse. If he was to work with Jim, the machine, he couldn't look at Jim, the husband. He could not risk seeing Lydia.

That same week, Jim and Eddie tried a payroll job. It worked out nicely, no complications, and they walked off with over fifteen thousand dollars. Split into two parts, they each had a year's income if you were conservative in what you spent. Eddie knew he wouldn't be able to be conservative. He doubted that Jim would. Anyhow, and just to get away from Lydia, Eddie took a trip to Mexico.

He tried Mexico City, and liked it. He flew on to Rio, and liked it there. He met a number of women but he didn't get seriously interested in anyone. After about three months most of his money was gone so he came home and telephoned Jim Walters.

"I've been expecting to hear from you," Jim said over the telephone. "How's your money holding out?"

"It isn't," Eddie admitted.

"Mine isn't either," Jim said.

"Have you got a job in mind?"

"I have two lined up."

"Worth it?"

"I think so. Where are you?"

"Downtown. Webster hotel."

"Remember Taggart's Tavern? Meet me there in an hour."

"In an hour," Eddie said.

Taggart's was on a side street. It usually wasn't crowded. Jim was there, at the bar, when Eddie came in, and Jim saluted him by lifting his glass. "Order your own

poison," he called. "Here's to you."

Eddie took beer. Then, he and Jim stood at the bar and didn't say much. Eddie was uncomfortable. He knew Jim felt the same way. Finally, Eddie made a try at covering the past few months. "I've been traveling. Enjoyed it but it cost. Carried a portable typewriter. I told people I was a writer."

"I've been selling insurance," Jim said. "Not much, but it's a cover. I play a lot of golf. You can spend money at home just as well as if you travel."

Eddie wanted to ask about Lydia, but he didn't. Jim looked in wonderful condition. Without any question, he and Lydia were getting along fine. In his heart, Eddie had known they would. He scowled at his beer and spoke gruffly, "Why not get down to business?"

"We'll take a booth," Jim said.

He was smiling as he made that suggestion, and he straightened up. Jim Walters, just as much as Eddie, was anxious to get down to business.

They talked for twenty minutes. The two jobs Jim suggested were in two suburban towns, similar to the town where they lived. One was an out-and-out robbery, but of a rather exclusive club where they might be able to make quite a haul. The other job was a payroll job.

Jim had studied both jobs. Neither was a pushover but if they worked quickly, got in and got out and didn't run into any bad luck, the results would be worth it.

Eddie didn't hesitate for a moment. He had decided ahead of time that he needed Jim Walters, his planning and decisive action. He knew Jim was uneasy about him, and he was uneasy about Jim. But if they were out on a job together, depending on each other, he knew he could count on Jim. He knew Jim felt that way about him. From a business standpoint, or from a criminal standpoint, they made a good team, a perfect team.

After their talk, they left, and Jim headed for home. Eddie went to his hotel, but on the way, bought a fifth of bourbon. He would need it tonight. Tomorrow he would meet Jim and for the next two days they would be together—but that was all right—that was business. Tonight, however, Jim was going home to Lydia and it wasn't easy for Eddie to remember that. Possibly, the bourbon would help. Of course it didn't.

Eddie checked out of the hotel the next morning. He took a cab to the airport, where he was met by Jim Walters who was driving a three year old car. It looked just like thousands of other old cars, nothing distinguished about it.

They drove to Rockwell, had lunch in a crowded cafeteria, drove on to Webber City and just after dusk entered the Wayfarers Club. This was just at the cocktail hour. A good many people were about, but it is doubtful if many noticed the two men who entered the club manager's office. He was easily frightened. He opened his safe and at that moment felt a blow on his head. When he awoke the two men who had frightened him were gone, and the safe had been looted. More than twenty-five thousand dollars was gone.

Jim and Eddie spent less than eight minutes in the Wayfarers Club, most of that time sauntering toward the club manager's office, or walking away. They were in the club manager's office just a little more than three minutes. In the next thirty minutes they were twenty miles away, and had checked into a motel. They had several drinks, then a good dinner.

"If we can do as well tomorrow, we ought to be set up for the next year," Jim said. "How do you feel, Eddie?"

"You're thinking we shouldn't try this too many times," Eddie guessed.

"That's it," Jim said. "We work by pattern. If we tried this too many times, the police would see the pattern, would start after us. I think

if we are clever about this, if we handle only about a couple jobs a year, we could get by for a long time."

Eddie nodded. This was sensible, he knew. If they tried another job, and another, and another, and another, sooner or later they would run into a trap. Greed had proved to be the downfall of many a criminal. It wasn't smart to be greedy.

"You ought to settle down," Jim said. "You ought to dabble with some kind of job. Take me for instance. I sell insurance. People don't wonder if I spend a little money. I'm supposed to sell a policy now and then."

Eddie smiled sourly. "Didn't you know I was a budding writer?"

"You need something more ordinary. Why don't you settle down somewhere and advertise that you're a tax consultant. You wouldn't have to take any jobs—say you were busy."

"I'll think about it," Eddie said.

Jim looked at his watch, then stood up. "Have to make a telephone call. I'll see you in the room."

"Sure," Eddie said. But he was scowling as Jim walked away—to telephone Lydia. That was the person he was calling. Eddie could sense it. Lydia! He could see her in his imagination—tall, slender, beautiful, smiling, her eyes spar-

kling. Where would he ever find another Lydia? But of course he never would. It was time to dig out the bourbon.

The payroll they were interested in was to be delivered in an armored car. But five minutes after the payroll was delivered and after the guards left, Jim and Eddie moved in. It took them less than five more minutes to cower a small office force, pick up the payroll money, and leave. They had practically no trouble at all.

They made a good haul. Twenty-five thousand from the club and thirty-two thousand from the payroll totaled fifty-seven thousand. Divided, Jim and Eddie received twenty-eight thousand five hundred, each. Not bad for two days' work.

In the mid afternoon, Jim dropped Eddie at the airport. From there, Eddie would take a shuttle plane to Washington. There was no more indiscriminate crowd than those on a shuttle plane.

"Don't know exactly where I'll go," Eddie said. "I'll drop you a card."

"Put some roots down somewhere," Jim said. "You might even get married."

"I might at that," Eddie said.

But he didn't mean it, and as Jim drove away he watched the car until it was lost in a curving

ramp. His smile was gone. His lips had tightened. And inside, he felt the same bitter hate as on the day Jim and Lydia were married.

During the next five years Eddie did settle down—in a way. That is, he took a modest apartment in Miami Beach, and spent most of his time there. He tanned himself on the beach. He went swimming. He took up golf. In the evenings he tried the dog tracks or jai alai. A number of women moved into and out of his life. One he thought might become permanent, but after a trial she could not measure up to Lydia, or at least to his conception of what Lydia was like. Once or twice a year he would hear from Jim Walters, and would join him. They averaged about three jobs a year—and never did they have any trouble. Jim picked the jobs very carefully. They moved in quickly, then moved out. They averaged close to fifty thousand dollars a year, each, on what they picked up this way.

At the beginning of the sixth year of their partnership, Jim telephoned Eddie from Cleveland. He never telephoned from his home, or from near there: And he never said much which might have been revealing. He was very cautious about what he said.

"How's the sun down there?" he asked. "Wish I could get there, but I can't."

"It's been a hot summer," Eddie answered. "In fact, I could stand a little of your autumn weather."

"It has been pleasant here," Jim said. "I'm going to get away next weekend, head for the hills. But that's all the time I can give up. When I make it to Miami Beach I want more than a few days. I'll try to make it next year."

"Next year then," Eddie said. "Don't get lost in the hills."

"I won't. Take care of yourself," Jim said. Then he hung up, but the mention of getting away for a week-end was a signal. Something was cooking—another job.

Eddie packed a brief case. He carried very little baggage. Extra underwear, one shirt, shaving material, and a gift package. The gift package held a gun. His gun. The gift wrapping was just a way to carry it. Then, after he had packed Eddie had to make a telephone call, break a date. That was simple enough. In another hour he was at the airport, waiting to board a plane to New York.

No one met him in New York, but then he hadn't expected to be met. Jim couldn't have known what plane he would take. Anyhow, to get to where he and Jim would meet was no real prob-

lem. A taxi carried him to midtown Manhattan, and the Statler. Through Jim, a reservation was on file. Eddie went up to his room, telephoned for a bottle of bourbon and ice, and sat down to wait.

He did not have to wait too long. Jim came in right after the bourbon and ice. He was carrying a light top coat and a newspaper and he tossed them on the bed.

"Drink?" Eddie suggested.

"I'll fix it," Jim said. "Any problem about getting away?"

"Had to break a date," Eddie said. "But she wasn't really important."

"What did you tell her?"

"Said I had to go to New Orleans. She hates it there. Anyplace else, she'd have liked to tag along."

"Ummm," Jim said, and poured a drink. Then he said, "Eddie, I sure hope you covered your trip. I'm supposed to be in Cleveland, from where I telephoned. It's set up definitely, that I'm there, but not where I can be reached by telephone."

"I'm covered," Eddie said. "No one knows I'm here. Used another name. Didn't know anyone on the plane. What's up?"

Jim took a deep breath. "This is big—mighty big. If we put it across, we're really set. That's why I asked if you were covered. How will you leave?"

"Shuttle plane. Safest would be to take the one to Washington."

"No. Make it the Pennsylvania, and a coach. You can stand it on a railroad as far as Washington. Could be the airports will be watched."

"I could stay here for a time."

"No, I want you out of town."

"How will you get back to Cleveland?"

"I'll take a bus to Boston, fly to Cleveland from there."

Eddie poured another drink, but then hesitated. "Do we do the job tonight?"

"Yes, tonight," Jim said.

Eddie put the drink aside. "You might mention what we're going to do."

Jim nodded. He sat down on the edge of the bed. Gradually, during the past five years, he had put on a little weight. He wasn't actually fat but at least he was heavier, his neck thicker, his face more puffy. In a contrasting manner, Eddie was thinner, and deeply tanned. He drank too much, he had lived pretty loosely, but physically he was still in good shape.

"We just fell into this," Jim said, and he motioned to the newspaper on the bed. "Not a word of it in the newspapers, yet. Or to the police or the F.B.I. I got it by accident. Couldn't believe it at first, but it's true."

"What's true?" Eddie asked.

"Have you heard of T. T. Halburton?"

"Who hasn't? Doesn't he own half of Texas?"

"Just part of it, but it's all in oil. Lives there, but he has an apartment in Manhattan, too, on the Avenue—penthouse. His married daughter lives with him and she has a daughter. I mean, she did have a daughter. She's been kidnapped."

Eddie was frowning. "When did this happen?"

"Three days ago."

"How old is the girl?"

"About eleven."

"I don't want to cut into a kidnapping. You ought to know that."

"We're not cutting into it," Jim said. "We'll stay on the outside—but we'll pick up the ransom money."

"And what will happen to the little girl?"

"Eddie, she's already dead."

"You mean the kidnappers—"

"They didn't want to take any chances with her. They killed her—smothered her I think."

"How do you happen to know so much about it?"

Jim motioned with his arm. "As I told you, I just fell into it. I was out a couple nights ago, noticed a man in a tavern who was loaded,

picked him up and we walked out together. He started talking, mumbling what he had done, about a little girl and a lot of money. Eventually he mentioned a few names—T. T. Halburton, Mike Ellender, Herm Keller. You know who Halburton is. Mike Ellender and Herm Keller are two hoods. Eventually I got the full story. It almost scared me."

Eddie was glad he hadn't taken another drink. He was listening carefully to Jim's story. So far it had come out in a very tailored fashion. It might be true, and again it might not. For the moment Eddie was puzzled. He should have been able to guess, instantly, whether or not Jim was telling the truth. Possibly their thinking had grown apart. He looked up and said, "Go on, Jim. What happened?"

"I didn't get the story all at once," Jim said. "It came out in chunks. I had to put it together, but when I put it together it fits like this. Mike Ellender, Herm Keller, and the drunk I was with, kidnapped the little girl. They had her in a car—took her out on the island—and on the way she was smothered. They buried her near Farmington, drove back to a motel—the Briarcliff. You know where it is."

"I know," Eddie said. "Go on."

"Well, that's about all—except another name was mentioned. Ben Cosgriff. He's a private detective, but he's in on it for a cut of the ransom. He telephoned T. T. Halburton, said he had received a telephone message from the kidnappers. That got Cosgriff to Halburton and it puts the ransom money into Cosgriff's hands. If the police stay out of the picture, and the F.B.I., Cosgriff will pick up the money—and deliver it. That's where we step in. We'll take the money."

"One question," Eddie said. "If you learned all this three days ago, what's been the delay? I thought kidnappers worked fast."

"Three days—that's fast," Jim said. "It took T. T. Halburton a day to get over the shock, then a couple days to gather half a million dollars, in old bills."

"And how do we check on the delivery of the money?"

"That was easy. I happen to know Cosgriff's wife. She plays golf. We've become good friends."

"Did you say half a million dollars?"

"Half a million. How do you like that?"

"I like that very much," Eddie said, and he laughed.

But at the same time he was thinking harder than ever in his life. There was something wrong

with Jim's story. It was too coincidental, too pat, too impossible. He took a deep, shaky breath, glanced in the mirror, there he could see Jim watching him, a sardonic expression on his lips. An old truth came back to his mind. Jim had never liked him any more than he had liked Jim. From the very beginning they had used each other. They still did, but what if the time ever came when they didn't need each other—

"I've brought you a gun," Jim was saying. "I have another for myself. Cosgriff is no pushover."

"I don't like guns," Eddie said.

"We're talking about half a million dollars," Jim said.

Eddie scowled, but accepted the gun. It was a .32 automatic. Its clip was filled. Eddie tried the gun's mechanism. It seemed in perfect shape.

"Just put it in your pocket—in case," Jim said. "I'll go ahead of you, stop Cosgriff. You move in. If you can slug him, drop him, okay—but I warn you he's fast. He will be carrying a suitcase. I'll take it, we'll walk around the corner, grab a taxi. We'll make a couple changes before we get back here."

This was about as far as they went in making a plan. They set up an objective, outlined an approach and an escape. The details of the action they fitted to the

needs of the occasion as they arose.

The telephone rang. Jim answered it, seemed to be talking to someone named Helen and while this brief conversation continued it occurred to Eddie that if Jim could pick up half a million dollars, he wouldn't be needed any more. On the other hand, if he could take the half million, he didn't need Jim. Then he smiled wryly. If he was thinking that way, the same possibilities had occurred to Jim. Through a flash intuition Eddie could see what was ahead. Probably, with no trouble, he and Jim would pick up the ransom money. But what would happen then? What did Jim have in mind? He could feel a surging excitement. If this was the end of the road for one of them, he didn't mean to be the one to be dropped.

Jim hung up the telephone. "That was Helen Cosgriff. We have about five minutes before we have to leave."

Eddie frowned. "Does she know the score?"

"I don't know—but she won't waste any tears over Ben Cosgriff."

"Maybe she's interested in you?"

Jim laughed, and there was almost a taunting note in the sound. "At least I'm not interested in her. Lydia is all the woman I'll ever need. If you've been waiting for her, you're out of luck."

"I almost forgot what Lydia looks like," Eddie said.

But he was lying. He could remember Lydia too well, and inside, right now, he was raging, resentful of what Jim had said. He looked away at the wall, briefly, not at all sure Jim had been truthful about his relationship to Lydia. At first, of course, they must have been close. But in six years things could have changed. With money and time on his hands, had Jim been faithful to Lydia? He doubted it very much.

"Time to get started," Jim said, and he stood up.

"All right with me," Eddie said.

He put the .32 in his coat pocket, and casually he felt the lumpy object under his shirt and to the side. The gun from the gift package in his briefcase. He had put the gun there before Jim arrived. He was glad the extra gun was there.

Jim and Eddie never had an easier job. They closed in on Ben Cosgriff, slugged him, took the suitcase he had been carrying, and after that Jim put a bullet through the man's head. That was so that later he couldn't identify who had taken the ransom money. Half a minute later, Jim and Eddie were out of the apartment lobby and around the corner. In another forty-five minutes and after changing

taxis they got back to the Statler and up to Eddie's room.

Every instant since they had picked up the money, Eddie had been tense, on guard, but Jim had scarcely glanced at him. He was tense, too, but Eddie expected that. As he unlocked the door to the room his tensions tightened. Whatever was going to happen between him and Jim Walters, would happen in this room—and very quickly. It occurred to him that Jim was just waiting for him to be careless—but he didn't intend to be careless.

Eddie had clicked on the lights as he opened the door. Now, he and Jim stepped inside, and Eddie stopped to close the door and to turn the door lock. He stayed there by the door, and said, "Jim, you can spread the money on the bed, or on the table."

"The bed will be all right," Jim said, and he walked that way, his back to the door.

Eddie spoke again. "I'm holding a gun. Maybe that's because I'm a little nervous."

"I knew you'd want all the money—and that you'd pull a gun," Jim said. "That's why I brought you one that wouldn't work."

He left the suitcase on the bed, whirled around, his own gun in his hand. A thin, tense, triumphant smile pulled at his lips.

Eddie glanced down at the gun he was holding. He could have smiled, too. The gun he held wasn't the one Jim had brought. It was the one which had been under his shirt—it would work perfectly.

"Had to do this," Jim said. "You see I'm neck deep in this kidnapping. Had to have someone who can carry some of the heat. You will do very nicely. That is—"

Eddie sensed a movement in the door to the bathroom. He heard the sharp crack of a gun, and Jim stiffened, uttered a sharp cry. He twisted half way toward the bathroom but then collapsed, his gun slipping from his hand. He fell against the bed, slipped to the floor.

In a rather vague manner, Eddie noticed the way Jim fell. He realized he was dead, but he hardly thought of that. He stared at the woman in the bathroom door—Lydia! Tall, slender, still beautiful. Of course she wasn't smiling now, but in time she would. And her eyes right now were hard with anger, but in time that look would disappear.

He lowered the gun he was holding, whispered the woman's name. "Lydia—Lydia—"

Lydia was staring at the figure on the floor. She spoke, but she seemed to be speaking to herself. "I should have done this long ago. You were never any good—never. That little girl you killed—"

"Jim did that!" Eddie gasped.

"Yes. But that's only part of what he's done. This time I followed him—to Cleveland and back here. This time—"

"If the years were bad for you, they were bad for me too," Eddie said. "We'll make up for them."

For the first time Lydia raised her head, looked at him, her eyes uncompromising, steady. "What did you say, Eddie?"

"I said we would make up for the bad years. I love you, Lydia. I always have."

She shook her head. "Love? What do you know of love? You are a copy of Jim—and nothing else. You belong with him."

As she was speaking she raised her gun, leveled it straight at him, and fired it.

Eddie had started toward her. He tried to cry out her name but the sound of the shot muffled what he said. A stabbing, blinding pain tore through his chest. This couldn't be happening. It was impossible. Lydia—Lydia—Lydia—