

Suddenly

A play
by David Jacklin

From the screenplay
By Richard Sale

PERUSAL COPY ONLY - CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS
8th draught

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CHARACTERS

Tod Shaw, sheriff of Suddenly, California, age 35

Ellen Benson, a recent war-widow, age 30

Peter “Pop” Benson, her father-in-law, age 70

Peter “Pidge” Benson III, her eight-year-old son

Jud Kelly, a television repair-man, age 20

Johnny Baron, a war-veteran and hit-man, age 30-35

“Birdie” Conklin, a small-time “gun-moll” 25-35

Bart Wheeler, another small-time hood, age indeterminate

THE SETTING

Between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon, mid-summer,
in the town of Suddenly, California, not long after the end of the Korean War.

There is no intermission and the action is continuous.

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NOTE

There is a clock on stage that chimes the hours on two occasions. I have tried to set the way-points in the story so that the clock chimes happen in real time – one half hour after the beginning of the show and one-and-one half hours in. This is based on a run-time of one and a half minutes per page. To achieve the timing of the chimes, set the clock so that it says 3:30 exactly at curtain time. Otherwise, you have to have a fake clock and a production assistant slowly (or slyly) revolving the clock hands from behind the set.

Pre-show: all fictional western and cop show themes and trailers. 50s styles.

Durango. The Man With the Gun

Colt .45 He’s the Kid – Kid Colt!

The Shining Star

other trailer about farmer who doesn’t want to fight but must.

Cattle drivers exerting their rights over others – they’re the good guys

Cop shows:?

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Suddenly

A play

(The home of the Benson family, in Suddenly, California. In the centre is the main living room, with a sofa, two arm-chairs, a television, a bureau and more. To the SL side is a bedroom, accessed through a door DL. Just above that is a hallway, leading off to other, unseen rooms. To the SR side is a kitchen, accessed through a door DR. There is a door to the outside above the kitchen area, SR, and a large picture window UC, with curtains. Behind the window, we see shrubberies, flowers and a lawn, fading into the distance toward the town of Suddenly, about a quarter mile away. A clock (that can chime) in the living room reads 3:30 p.m.)

(The front door opens and PIDGE enters, carrying a bag of groceries. After a moment, TOD crosses in front of the picture window, stopping in the middle to speak to someone off whom we can't hear.)

TOD: Sorry, where did you want to get to? ... Three Rivers? About two miles to the first main intersection, then turn left, it's about 60 miles. This town? Suddenly ... No, that's its name: Suddenly ... Yeah, it's a little slow for that name, these days. The town council is thinking of changing the name to 'Gradually' ... All right. My pleasure. Come back, again!

(TOD walks out of sight, then reappears at the front door, as PIDGE comes from the kitchen and the door.)

Hello there, Pidge.

PIDGE: Hi, Tod.

TOD: Where's your mother?

PIDGE: We bin shopping. I gotta get more stuff from the car. Wanna talk to her?

TOD: Yeah, sure.

PIDGE: Tod?

TOD: Uh-huh?

PIDGE: Well ... no, I guess not. *She* wouldn't let me.

TOD: Who's *she*?

PIDGE: Mom, of course.

TOD: Well, then you'd better say Mom, Pidge. It's kinda not polite to say 'she' like that, especially about your mother.

PIDGE: Well, anyway, *she* wouldn't.

TOD: You know, I bet I can guess what's on your mind.

PIDGE: Bet you can't.

TOD: Well, now let's see. Was it an ice-cream soda you were talking about?

PIDGE: Uh, not a bad idea but that's not it.

TOD: You wanna go to the movies?

PIDGE: No, it's a war picture. Mom won't let me see war-pictures.

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TOD: Boy, oh, boy, this is tougher than I thought. I got it! A baseball bat.

PIDGE: I got a bat – and a glove – and a ball.

TOD: *(Opening up a paper bag he's had behind his back and extracting a western-style cap gun with holster.)* Is that it? *(He hands it to PIDGE.)*

PIDGE: Oh, yeah, that's it! Thanks, Tod! Ain't it a beauty? See there? "Durango"! Ah, but, it's no use. Mom won't let me have it. She doesn't like guns.

TOD: I know.

PIDGE: I wish my dad hadn't been killed in the war.

TOD: So do I, Pidge. Your dad was a great guy.

PIDGE: I thought you liked Mom?

TOD: I do, Pidge, but your dad was still my friend. Look, Pidge, what are you going to do with this? Stick up a filling station? Shoot up the town?

PIDGE: Heck no, I'll be a Sheriff, and I'll catch all those horse thieves and cattle rustlers and commies. Just like you.

TOD: Don't get a lot of cattle-rustlers these days.

PIDGE: *(Looking at the toy gun.)* It's great, Tod – but what about Mom?

TOD: I think we can talk her into it. I mean, you do want to be a peace officer.

PIDGE: We don't have much time. Here she comes.

TOD: Hide that.

(PIDGE puts the gun and belt into the paper bag as ELLEN comes to the front door with two bags of groceries.)

ELLEN: Oh, hell ... *(One bag begins to slip.)* Oh!

TOD: *(Grabbing the bag before it slips completely.)* I got it.

ELLEN: Thanks. Hello.

TOD: Hi. Can I give you a hand?

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ELLEN: Thanks.

(He takes the bags and follows her into the kitchen. As she unloads, PIDGE plays with his cap gun outside.)

TOD: Goin' to church tomorrow?

ELLEN: Of course.

TOD: What say I pick you up about a quarter to eleven, huh?

ELLEN: You never give up, do you?

TOD: Ellen, I know how you feel, believe me, I do ...

ELLEN: Do you?

TOD: ... and I've tried to understand, but ...

ELLEN: I haven't asked you to understand, Tod. I haven't asked for anything ...

TOD: I know.

ELLEN: ... but you still won't give up. Why won't you?

TOD: *(After a beat.)* 'Cause I'm in love with you.

ELLEN: *(A little shocked at him stating it so baldly.)* Tod! ... please don't say that.

TOD: Why not? It's true.

ELLEN: Don't.

TOD: Ellen, it's three years since Pete died. You can't be a widow forever.

ELLEN: Don't you understand? No one can take Pete's place. Not with me and not with Pidge.

TOD: I'm not trying to take Pete's place. I'm trying to make a place of my own.

ELLEN: Tod, you've been wonderful – to both of us – but I can't help how I feel.

TOD: Ellen. *(Touching her shoulder gently.)* How do you feel?

ELLEN: Like I can't move on. I can't.

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TOD: You've got to stop doing this to yourself.

ELLEN: Why?

TOD: Because you're doing it to Pidge, too – and to me. You're digging a big black pit and pulling all of us down with you.

ELLEN: Tod, please! Just ... not now! Not now, please. *(She sees PIDGE playing outside with his cap gun and opens the front door.)* Pidge! Where did you get that? Come in here!

TOD: I bought it for him, Ellen.

ELLEN: How could you?

(PIDGE comes inside.)

TOD: We hoped you wouldn't mind ...

PIDGE: 'Cause I'm gonna be a sheriff, like Tod.

ELLEN: Take it off.

TOD: Ellen.

ELLEN: I know how I feel about *that*. I can't stand seeing him *play* with a gun.

TOD: Guns aren't necessarily bad, Ellen. The boy's gotta learn that.

ELLEN: Depends on who uses them ... and what they use them for.

PIDGE: Tod carries one, doesn't he?

ELLEN: Don't get smart with me, Pidge.

PIDGE: Doesn't he?

ELLEN: Yes.

PIDGE: Well, then ...

ELLEN: Ask him if he's ever used it.

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PIDGE: Have you, Tod?

TOD: In Suddenly? No. No need for that around here.

ELLEN: Just take it off, Pidge. Give it to me.

PIDGE: Aw, gee! *(But he does so, anyway.)*

ELLEN: Thank you.

(ELLEN takes the cap gun into the bedroom SL and leaves it on the dresser.)

TOD: Sorry, Pidge. *(TOD starts to leave, but stops at the doorway as ELLEN comes back.)* Ellen. I know how you feel. You don't want him playing with toy guns; you don't want him to see war pictures – but these things exist ...

ELLEN: Glorifying death and destruction, cruelties, tortures ...

TOD: Ellen. He's gotta know that the world is a mean place and that terrible things happen in it – and then he can fight against them, when it's his turn.

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ELLEN: His turn!

TOD: Sooner or later, it'll be his turn. It's always the way. You can't wrap him in cellophane.

ELLEN: I can try, as long as possible.

(She goes back toward the kitchen and TOD follows.)

TOD: Church tomorrow, Ellen?

ELLEN: No, Tod. I'd better not go with you.

TOD: I can't go on asking and being turned down.

ELLEN: Then stop asking.

(The wall-phone in the kitchen begins to ring. ELLEN enters the kitchen and picks up the receiver.)

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Hello? ... *(Surprised.)* Mr. Hawkins! ... Yes, he is. Just a minute. *(Holding the receiver out to TOD.)* It's Ed Hawkins at the train station. For you.

TOD: Ed Hawkins? *(He takes the receiver.)* Hello, Ed. What's the word? ... A telegram? From where? ... No kidding? Read it and I'll copy it down. *(He looks around and ELLEN hands him a pencil and paper. He writes the following down.)* Go ahead. ... Sheriff Tod Shaw, Suddenly, California. ... Confidential code: 'Hangover'. ... Special train number 10.19 carrying ... hold it a minute, Ed.

(He covers the receiver and looks at ELLEN.)

Ellen, I'm need to make some phone calls after this. Can I use your phone?

ELLEN: Be my guest.

TOD: And ... can you step outside while I do ... and keep Pidge out there, too?

ELLEN: You're kidding.

TOD: Please.

ELLEN: What's going on?

TOD: Top secret. *(He grins as if it's a joke.)* You'll find out soon enough. Step outside, Ellen, please, and take Pidge.

ELLEN: All right.

TOD: Where's Pete?

ELLEN: I don't know.

TOD: If you see him, don't let him come in until I say so.

ELLEN: All right.

(She exits at the front door and, through the window, we see her talk to PIDGE, then they move out of sight.)

TOD: All right, Ed. I've got it up to "Special train number 10.19 carrying ..." *(He writes the next phrase down as he speaks it.)* "... the President of the United States ...". Go on from there. "... will arrive Suddenly 5 p.m. today ... President will detrain and drive to White Springs Ranch ... Will require adequate transportation ... Appreciate cooperation your staff with Secret Service operators ... arriving Suddenly, Train 20, 3:45 p.m. ... Carney, Acting Chief U. S. Secret Service." No mistakes, huh? ... Good. Say, Ed, nobody else knows, do they? ... All right. Let's just keep it that way. Just to double-check: what's that code word again? ... 'Hangover'. Good. Now, remember: nobody knows about this until after it's over ... You'll have a big story for Betty, tonight ... Thanks, Ed ... Goodbye.

(He pushes down the hook, lets it up and dials "0".)

Hi, Rose, it's Sheriff Shaw. Get me State Police Headquarters in Wetherby ... *(He looks at his writing and chuckles.)* 'Hangover' ... Hello, this is Sheriff Shaw at Suddenly. I need to speak to Captain Aaron.

(A train horn is heard, distantly.)

There's number 20 at the 66 crossing ... Hello, Andy. It's Tod Shaw ... I've got a message here; the code word is 'Hangover' ... Yep. Now, I'm gonna need five of your cars, two men and one Thompson gun to each car, and ... Oh, you did, huh? ... Swell ... Right, thanks ... Yeah, they'll need a limousine ... No, I'll get hold of Iz Kaplan over at the garage here and get his Cad ... Right ... Thanks.

(He hangs up again, then dials a number.)

Hello, Iz. It's Sheriff Shaw ... No, I can't hold on, Iz. I need you now ... I want your black Cadillac at 4:30 ... Right, the limousine. Park it at the station, backed in ... No, nobody's getting married ... Especially not the sheriff! ... Don't be funny, Iz. This is police business ... Listen! Don't tell anyone. Just have the Cad at the station at 4:30 ... I know you don't get it. You're not supposed to. Black Cad at the station, 4:30, Iz. No slip-ups.

(He hangs up again, then dials a number.)

Slim, it's Tod. I need everybody on duty in twenty minutes ... Everybody, even if they just got off shift. Captain Aaron of the State Patrol's sending five cars and ten men in from Wetherby. Watch for them ... I'll tell you when I get back. Just call everybody and get them back in, now ... About ten minutes, I think. Right.

(He hangs up the receiver, crosses into the living room and opens the front door, calling out.)

Ellen! I'm done now. You can come on back in.

(ELLEN returns with PIDGE, who goes to the living room. ELLEN and TOD go to the kitchen. TOD gets his notes.)

ELLEN: Can I put my groceries away, now?

TOD: Be my guest. I've got to meet a man down at the train station.

(He starts to leave but ELLEN stops him.)

ELLEN: Tod ... I know you mean well ...

TOD: Mean well about what?

ELLEN: About Pidge – and me.

TOD: Well, I do, but ...

ELLEN: ... but I'm just not ... not ready ...

TOD: Yeah, I know. I've got to go.

(He goes to the front door, just as PETE steps in with a electronic tube box in his hand.)

PETE: Oh, hi, Tod! What's up?

TOD: Just on my way.

PETE: Uh-huh. *(He holds up the box.)* TV's bust. Probably a rectifier.

TOD: A what?

PETE: One of these tubes.

ELLEN: *(From kitchen.)* Please call Jud and have him come up and fix that thing before you wreck it.

PETE: Wreck it! I'll have you to know I built a television *transmitter* in '38, before you even knew what television was.

ELLEN: *(At kitchen door.)* Yes, but did it work?

PETE: I don't know; I never did finish building the receiver.

TOD: 'Bye, Pete. Goodbye, Ellen. I'll stop by later and let you know what the fuss was about.

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ELLEN: All right.

PETE: What fuss? *(But TOD has left.)* You two have a spat?

ELLEN: We didn't have a spat; we just ... never mind. I wish you'd call Jud.

PETE: I don't wanna. Besides, it's time and a half on Saturday.

ELLEN: It's cheaper than what it'll cost by the time you're finished with it.

PETE: Stop taking it out on me, just 'cause you and Tod had a fight!

(PETE goes behind the television and begins to examine the works. The distant sound of a train pulling into a station is heard under the next page of dialogue. She crosses into the kitchen, where PIDGE sits at the table with a glass of milk and reads a comic book.)

ELLEN: I got cake!

PIDGE: Don't want it.

ELLEN: Pidge darling, I got it for you.

PIDGE: Because you wouldn't let me wear my gun.

ELLEN: I didn't even know you had ... Never mind. Drink your milk, darling.

PIDGE: *(Under his breath.)* Sissy.

ELLEN: What?

PIDGE: That's what the guys call me, 'cause my mom won't let me have a gun.

ELLEN: I don't care what they call you. I'm your mother and I know what's best for you. *(PIDGE gets up and crosses into the living room.)* Pidge! *(Following him.)* Pidge, don't walk out when I'm talking to you.

PIDGE: *(Flopping on the sofa.)* I thought you were finished.

PETE: The boy's just disappointed, that's all, Ellen.

ELLEN: Dad, please stop interfering.

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PIDGE: First you cancel him out on the hike with the Cub Scouts, and the next ...

ELLEN: Pidge, go to your room.

(PIDGE immediately puts down his comic and goes out the hallway SL to his room.)

PETE: *(Calling after him.)* I'll have this old set perkin' in a minute, son, then you and me'll watch the ball game.

ELLEN: Dad, this is the last time.

PETE: Ellen, you're a grown-up girl. You got a problem you haven't worked out. That's no reason why Pidge should have your problem.

ELLEN: I've only done what I thought was right. *(She goes into the kitchen.)*

PETE: *(Following.)* I read about an experiment once. Kept germs away from a kid. Raised him pure and scientific. First time he got out in the rough, he caught cold and died of pneumonia.

ELLEN: Pidge does not have pneumonia.

PETE: The kid hasn't been exposed; he has no immunity. There's cruelty and hatred and tyranny in the world. You can't make believe they aren't there – and Pidge's got to learn what they're about, so's he can defend against it.

ELLEN: Defend against it? Become a soldier and be murdered like his father?

PETE: My son was killed in the performance of his duty, Ellen.

ELLEN: My husband was blown to bits on some god-forsaken battlefield, thousand of miles from where he belonged. You call that duty?

PETE: Yes, Ellen. I do.

ELLEN: Is that what you'd like for Pidge? Would that make you happy?

PETE: If Pete could hear you now, he'd be ashamed of you.

ELLEN: How can you say that?

PETE: Remember 'Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'? The old boys who wrote those words didn't just write 'em 'cause they sounded nice. They made 'em stick, or else they wouldn't have been worth a plugged nickel. And, every so often somebody got to be willing to make 'em stick.

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ELLEN: It's not going to be my son.

PIDGE: *(Running in.)* Grandpa! Grandpa! Look out the window! Golly!

(Multiple old-style police sirens are heard in the distance.)

PETE: *(Coming from the kitchen and joining PIDGE at the window.)* What is it?

PIDGE: Coming down from Wetherby, a whole raft of state troopers! See 'em?

PETE: Goin' somewhere in a hurry.

ELLEN: What do you think it is?

PETE: Too many cars for a traffic accident.

ELLEN: *(Joining them.)* I wonder if it has to do with Tod's "top secret" phone call.

PETE: His what?

PIDGE: Top secret! Really?

ELLEN: Not really. He was joking, but he made some phone calls from the kitchen before he left. That's why he asked me to keep you outside, Pidge. We weren't supposed to overhear them.

PIDGE: I wonder if it's commies or somethin'!

PETE: In Suddenly? They'd have slim pickin's here.

ELLEN: More likely they're practising for some kind of exercise.

PIDGE: They're pulling up at the railway station. *(The sirens die away.)* Tod's meeting them! And there's a bunch of men getting off the train, too.

PETE: What do ya know? Something's up.

ELLEN: I suppose we'll read all about it in the paper this week.

(She goes into the kitchen with the intention of beginning to make supper. PETE goes to the back of the television and begins work. PIDGE, after a moment to check that his mother can't see, retrieves his gun and goes back to the window, strapping the holster belt on as he goes.)

PIDGE: *(Keeping his voice low so his mother doesn't hear and pointing his cap gun through the window.)* Dirty Commies! Bang, bang! Got 'em all!

PETE: Buffalo Bill, you'd better put that gun away before your Mom sees it – she'll tan your hide. Give me a hand over here.

ELLEN: *(From the kitchen.)* Pidge! Put that back where you got it! *(PIDGE reluctantly puts the cap gun back in the bedroom.)* Dad! I do wish you'd call Jud Kelly and let him come up and fix that.

PETE: Ellen, I knew Ohm's Law before Ohm even passed it. Don't want Pidge to miss the ball game, too, after missing the movie and all. *(PIDGE returns.)* All right, son, get ready to plug the set in while I hold this terminal down and see what happens. Okay?

ELLEN: *(At the kitchen doorway.)* Dad, are you sure you know what you're doing?

PETE: Ellen, please.

ELLEN: I looked on the back. It says “Danger, five thousand volts ...”

PETE: Ellen, please! Stop being a woman. Ready, boy? Okay, plug in!

(PETE holds a screwdriver onto a connection at the back of the television and PIDGE plugs it in. The television set poofs with spitzen-sparken and PETE is knocked back on his fanny.)

PIDGE: Grandpa!

ELLEN: *(Running in from the kitchen.)* Dad! Dad! Are you all right?

PETE: *(Shaking his right hand.)* I guess I’m all right. Scared the pants off me, that’s all.

PIDGE: *(Looking behind the television, he holds up a melted screwdriver.)* Golly, look at this.

PETE: *(To ELLEN.)* I guess maybe you’d better call Jud, huh?

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ELLEN: Honestly.

(She goes into the kitchen, dials the phone and speaks quietly into it, hangs up.)

PETE: *(Still getting the tingles out of his arm.)* That was a close call, boy.

PIDGE: *(Reading the back of the television.)* How much is 5000 volts?

PETE: Enough.

PIDGE: Would it kill you?

PETE: It would probably pick you up and toss you across the room. Unless you were standing in a puddle of water, then you’d be grounded. And if you were grounded, it’d kill you deader than a doornail. Like that! *(He tries to snap the fingers on his right hand, but it doesn’t work. Snaps his left.)*

PIDGE: Would it hurt?

PETE: Like blazes. *(He shakes his hand again.)* You stay away from that set now – don’t monkey with electricity unless you know what you’re doing.

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PIDGE: How come you messed with it, Grandpa?

PETE: *(Shaking his head and chuckling ruefully.)* You got me there, boy.

ELLEN: *(The doorbell rings.)* I'll get it. Jud says he'll be up in a little while.

PETE: I'm sorry.

ELLEN: Honestly ... *(She opens the door. Two men and a woman are outside it.)*
Yes?

BARON: *(Consulting a note-pad.)* Mrs. Benson?

ELLEN: That's right.

BARON: Is your husband at home?

ELLEN: My hus ... No. I'm a widow.

BARON: I'm sorry. What I should have asked was, are you the owner of this house?

ELLEN: No, I'm not. It belongs to my father-in-law. What is it you want?

BARON: I'm John Baron, special agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation. *(He holds out his ID.)* These people are also with the FBI. Do you suppose I could have a few words with your father-in-law?

ELLEN: Just a moment. *(She turns to the living room.)* Dad!

PETE: What? *(Coming to the door.)* Oh! Who are you folks?

BARON: John Baron, Special Agent. *(He holds out his ID.)*

PETE: FBI? For heavens' sake!

BARON: May we come in?

PETE: Why, sure! Come right in! Make yourselves at home.

BARON: Thanks.

PETE: Not at all. I get quite a kick out of this. Used to be with the Treasury Department myself.

BARON: Really?

PETE: Back in the old days.

BARON: Collector of Eternal Revenue, eh?

PETE: Tax collector? Not on your life. Secret Service.

BARON: *(A small pause.)* You don't say?

PIDGE: Grandpa was President Coolidge's bodyguard.

BARON: You don't say?

PETE: Yep, back in '28. Retired out of the service, account of my heart. Not heart trouble, you understand; an accident on one of old Calvin's fishing trips. A stray bullet from a hunter. Got the slug right here. *(He taps his chest directly over his heart.)*

BARON: Nasty.

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BIRDIE: How come you're still alive?

PETE: I don't know. Lodged in my heart. They took it out. Had to take it easy after that, so they retired me.

BART: You're lucky.

PETE: Luckier still if it hadn't hit me.

BARON: I guess that's so.

PIDGE: I'm gonna be in the Secret Service, someday.

PETE: Thought you was gonna be a sheriff, like Tod.

BARON: Squirts like you are supposed to grow up to be President.

PIDGE: Name's Pidge, mister.

BARON: Glad to meet you, Pidge.

PIDGE: And, I ain't a squirt!

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BARON: No, you're not. Sorry.

ELLEN: Mr. Baron, what did you want to see us about? Is something wrong?

BARON: Nothing wrong, Mrs. Benson, but there might be. We're...checking.

ELLEN: On us?

BARON: On the house. Do you mind if we take a look around?

PETE: First, I wanna know ...

BARON: We're going to look around, with or without your permission, Mr. Benson. It's an emergency. *(To the other two.)* Check it.

(The other two, BIRDIE and BART, exit to the kitchen and the hallway, respectively.)

ELLEN: There must be something the matter.

BARON: *(Going to the bedroom SL and looking in.)* Anyone else live here besides you three?

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PETE: No.

BARON: Anyone been by here today?

PETE: Just the usual. Willy Harris left the milk. Tod Shaw ...

ELLEN: What's this all about, Mr. Baron?

BARON: Just being careful. I'll explain later.

BART: *(Returning from the hall.)* Two bedrooms, one bathroom, clear.

BARON: One bedroom here.

BIRDIE: *(Returning.)* Kitchen, pantry, back door, stairs go down to the garage under the kitchen, clear. Car in the garage.

BARON: *(Pulling the window curtains aside.)* Look at this for a setup. Sorry, folks, but I'm afraid we're gonna have to hang around for a while.

PETE: Why?

ELLEN: What's the matter?

BARON: Don't be alarmed. Nothing's wrong.

PETE: Of course, there is! The FBI doesn't go visiting for nothing.

ELLEN: I won't stay. I'll take Pidge and go.

BARON: No, Ma'am. I'm sorry, but nobody leaves until we say so.

ELLEN: Why not? What's happened?

BARON: Look, just go about your business, like it was any Saturday afternoon. Read your papers, watch TV, anything, but nobody leaves the house.

PETE: Something fishy about all this.

BARON: I'm sorry, sir, but it's official business.

PETE: What sort of official business?

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BARON: Mr. Benson, an ex-Secret Service man like you should understand.

PETE: Either I'm getting old and stupid, or else I'm ...

BARON: At 5 p.m., a special train will arrive in Suddenly. It'll stop at the station down there and a certain passenger will disembark.

PETE: So?

BARON: Mr. Benson, we're working with the Secret Service on this.

PETE: The Secret Serv- ... you mean, the President's on that train?

BARON: He'll disembark here for a planned excursion to a local ranch.

ELLEN: What?

PIDGE: Golly!

PETE: The President! Well, that's different!

PIDGE: You mean the President's gonna get off the train right down there?

BARON: That's right.

PIDGE: Gramps, we gotta go down and see it!

PETE: That's the greatest thing ever to happen to this town.

PIDGE: Can we go down and see it, Gramps? Can we?

BARON: Sorry, kid, no! Nobody leaves the house. Bart, see that the back door's locked tight. Birdie, bring in the gear and put the car out back.

(BIRDIE goes out through the front door; BART out through the kitchen.)

PETE: What kind of name is Birdie for an agent?

BARON: A nickname – for Bernadette.

PETE: Humph. I still don't understand.

BARON: Mr. Benson, use your Secret Service eye. If anyone wanted to kill the President, what's the best vantage point in town to do it?

PETE: Well, someplace high. The church-tower ... on top of one of the businesses along the railroad track, maybe.

BARON: Those are cleared out and locked down, by now.

PETE: Well, top of the hill here, then, if they had the right rifle. High-power, accurate – easy shot with a sniper-scope. Somewhere they could see when the President climbed down from the train ... *(He has illustrated by pointing through the picture window. He stops.)* Holy smokes.

(The sound of a distant train horn is heard.)

BARON: That's right. He could do a beautiful job, right from this window of yours.

PETE: That's true but, for the love of Mike, you don't think that Ellie and me ...

BARON: Of course not, but someone might, so we'll have to remain here for the President's safety – and for yours.

PETE: Yeah. I can see that, now. Oh, brother.

PIDGE: Can't we see the President, grandpa? Can we, Mom?

ELLEN: No, Pidge. We have to stay here.

PETE: Watch with your telescope, boy. Bring him right up to the eye.

PIDGE: Aah! That's no better'n seeing him on TV.

ELLEN: Sorry, Pidge, no dice.

(BART and BIRDIE come in from the kitchen, with a couple of long cases.)

BIRDIE: Back door locked. Phone in the kitchen. Want me to yank it?

BARON: No, we don't change the pattern. Bart, give Birdie a hand.

PETE: Mr. Baron, I don't understand. Back when I was in the service ...

BARON: Protecting Calvin Coolidge.

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PETE: ... though we made precautionary checks, we never went to extremes.

BARON: Unless you were tipped about an attempt on the President's life.

PETE: You don't mean it?

BARON: I mean it.

PETE: But, you're FBI! Secret Service is responsible for the President.

BARON: They're using everybody this trip, Mr Benson. It's that serious. *(Indicating out the picture window.)* Have a look down there. Treasury agents, state troopers, local law enforcement and us.

PETE: Do you know if old Dan Carney is down there? We worked together in the old days. He's chief of the presidential detail now.

BARON: Uh ... that's confidential information.

PETE: This is a terrible thing.

BARON: Not your worry, Mr Benson.

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PETE: I'm an American, ain't I? 'Course it's my worry.

BART: *(At window.)* Car. Somebody's driving up to the house.

BARON: Who is it?

PIDGE: *(Looking out.)* It's Tod.

BART: Why's he in uniform?

PETE: He's the Sheriff here. Didn't you meet him?

BARON: Must have missed that.

(A knock at the front door. PETE opens it. TOD stands outside.)

TOD: Hi, Pop.

PETE: Hi, Tod. What brings you up the hill? Say, did you run into old Dan Carney down at the station?

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TOD: Dan Carney?

PETE: Chief of the Presidential detail – I was his section chief when he was still wet behind the ears! He must be with the team down there.

TOD: What do you know about what's going on down there?

PIDGE: Gee, Gramps, you used be the boss of the guy who guards the President?

PETE: Sure was, Pidge. Back then, we both guarded the President.

PIDGE: Like Mr. Baron does now.

TOD: Who?

PIDGE: Mr. Baron's from the FBI!

PETE: Oh, you didn't know? The FBI got here ahead of you.

(BARON, BART and BIRDIE step forward, guns in hand. There is a frozen moment; the clock strikes 4:00 p.m. and a train is heard roaring and blowing its horn through the

town)

TOD: Down, Pidge!

(TOD goes for his gun but before he can draw, BART shoots and TOD falls, shot in the upper arm. PETE pushes ELLEN and PIDGE to the floor. After the noise settles, PETE stands to see TOD slumped against the door and BARON, BART and BIRDIE with guns in their hands. PIDGE shakes ELLEN who has been knocked out.)

PIDGE: Mom!

BARON: One sound from the kid, old man, and he's dead.

(He looks out the front door. He looks at BART and BIRDIE and grins.)

Nobody noticed. Train muffled it. *(He closes the front door. To TOD.)*
You get the situation, brave boy?

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PIDGE: Mom! Mom!

PETE: Pidge, you've gotta be still. No noise.

PIDGE: *(To BARON.)* You stink!

PETE: *(Covering PIDGE's mouth with his hand.)* Pidge, shut up!

BARON: Guts.

PETE: He's only eight.

BARON: Lots of guts.

PIDGE: Mom.

(BARON takes TOD's gun from its holster and steps back, as TOD rises unsteadily, cradling his right arm.)

BARON: No trouble from you. You're all busted up. You got it, now? Let's be practical. I don't want any more shooting around here. I want it nice and quiet and cosy. Now, bring her around and explain to her that one phoney move and she's got a kid with his throat cut. Doesn't make much noise

that way. The same goes for you, too. Anybody steps out of line ... the boy!
Is that simple enough?

TOD: *(ELLEN, rousing, is verging on hysterical as he tries to make her focus.)*
Ellen, listen to me. Pay attention. Listen to me! Everybody is all right. Get
hold of yourself. No matter what happens, you've got to hang on. If you
scream, or make one false move, he'll murder Pidge. You understand?
He'll murder Pidge.

BARON: Do you hear him, lady?

ELLEN: *(Mumbling.)* Yes ...

BARON: What's that?

ELLEN: Yes!

BARON: Good, then we're all in accord. All right, in there and sit. We've got a long
time to wait. *(To BART.)* Move the kitchen table in front of the big window
in here. *(To the Bensons and TOD.)* All right, relax. Watch some TV.

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~~PETE: It ain't workin'.~~

BARON: *(Indicating TOD.)* Well, work on *him*, then. Fix him up. Don't sit there
waiting to blow your cork – 'cause I'm waitin' for it, too. Keep quiet..

ELLEN: *(Noticing TOD's arm for the first time.)* Tod, you've been shot!

TOD: Bullet hit the bone – broke it, I guess.

PETE: *(Looking at the wound.)* That ain't good.

ELLEN: He needs a doctor. Look at his face.

PETE: We can't have no doctor, Ellen. We're the doctor.

ELLEN: We can't set a broken arm.

BARON: Tough.

TOD: *(To BARON.)* Can you?

BARON: Can I what?

TOD: Straighten this fracture.

BARON: You couldn't take it.

TOD: Straighten it.

(BARON grins meanly and hands his gun to BIRDIE.)

BARON: Hold on, brave boy.

(He takes TOD's arm and pulls viciously to set the fracture. TOD grimaces but makes no sound. To ELLEN.)

Tie it up. (He retrieves his gun from BIRDIE.)

ELLEN: May we take him into the bedroom?

BARON: Sure – but the boy stays here. And the door stays open.

(ELLEN and PETE take TOD into the bedroom. BART and BIRDIE have brought the kitchen table into the living room and placed it in front of the picture window.)

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PETE: All right, let's go to work.

TOD: *(Low voice.)* Pop, we gotta do something.

PETE: *(Low voice.)* I know, I know, but what? What?

ELLEN: *(Low voice.)* They've got Pidge.

TOD: Ellen, right now, none of us count. Not even Pidge.

ELLEN: How can you say that!

TOD: Ellen, they're going to kill us all, afterwards, anyway.

(She says nothing, but looks very frightened as she uses a pillow case to bandage his arm.)

PETE: Two men and a woman. Can we take them?

ELLEN: Dad! We haven't a chance.

TOD: As long as we're alive, there's a chance.

PETE: They got this all cased out. Planned down to the smallest detail.

TOD: There's a flaw in every plan, if we can find it. Pop! You got a gun?

PETE: Gun? A revolver, presentation piece when I retired. Here, in this drawer.

TOD: Ammunition?

PETE: I hid the cartridges on account of Pidge. Seven, eight years ago.

PIDGE: *(In the living room with the trio of hoods.)* You're a dirty lousy gangster!

BIRDIE: Smart-mouthed brat! *(She raises a hand to strike PIDGE.)*

BARON: Leave him alone, Birdie.

BIRDIE: Did you hear what he said?

BARON: I heard. He's been watching too much television. He ain't a bad squirt.

BIRDIE: Just tell him to shut up.

BARON: Sure. You hear, kid? Shut it. *(Tapping the table top.)* This thing's metal.

BIRDIE: Steel top, chrome legs.

BARON: I figured wood. No difference. Screw the brackets to the legs, then to the floor. That way the table won't dance.

PIDGE: You're a bunch of cowards!

BARON: You're getting too fresh. So, button it.

BIRDIE: Johnny, why go to all of this trouble? It's a lot of work.

BARON: Do it, Birdie.

BIRDIE: But Johnny, I don't see why we ...

BARON: I said, do it! You get the table anchored and the gun screwed to the table, you've got a solid base. *(He opens a case and brings out a rifle. He fondles it and holds it up as if aiming.)* This baby's got a heavy recoil and

we've got just three seconds to nail the President. It's all got to be rock solid when we get to it.

BIRDIE: A tommy gun would do just as good – and faster, too.

BARON: A tommy gun stinks. Pistol ammunition. No accuracy, no punch beyond fifty feet. Might as well use a musket. This is the weapon. In the army ...

BIRDIE: I know. When you were in the army ...

BARON: Yeah. So, shut up and screw it down.

TOD: *(As ELLEN ties the bandage on his arm.)* Tighter, tighter. Pop! Find those cartridges yet?

PETE: *(Looking in drawers.)* Not yet.

BARON: *(Looking down the sights of the rifle.)* This is quite a weapon, Birdie. Quite a weapon. I did a lot of choppin' in the war with a baby like this, a lot of choppin'. You're wrong about me, Pidge, bein' a coward. I won a Silver Star in the war, north of Cassino – pocket of resistance and I took it out. I killed 27 men, all by myself, one by one. Bang! Bang! Bang! I won a Silver Star.

PIDGE: Ah, you stole it.

(BARON grabs PIDGE by the shirt, who cries out.)

ELLEN: *(Jumping up.)* They're hurting Pidge!

TOD: | All right, take it easy! *(He misses her arm as she runs out.)*

BIRDIE: | Johnny, take it easy! Relax, for the love of Mike.

BARON: I won it! Ya hear me, squirt?

ELLEN: *(At the hallway.)* Leave him alone!

BARON: *(Lets go of PIDGE, who runs to ELLEN.)* I won it!

BIRDIE: OK, Johnny, OK! | You won it.

PETE: *(Finding cartridges.)* | I got 'em.

BART: *(Nodding toward the bedroom.)* They've been in there a long time.

BARON: Yeah. Get 'em back in here.

(BARON puts the rifle back into its case while BART, pushing ELLEN ahead, goes into the bedroom. PETE has his back to the door, putting cartridges into the revolver.)

BART: What are you all trying to pull? *(PETE slides the revolver back into the drawer and closes it, covering the action with a handkerchief he pulls out and wipes on his forehead.)* In the living room. Come on, come on.

(The three are herded into the living room by BART.)

BARON: Feeling better?

TOD: Yeah.

BARON: Bart's sorry, aren't ya, Bart? He didn't mean to wing ya. *(BARON grins meanly.)* He meant to blow your brains out.

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TOD: No kiddin'? *(He looks at BART.)* He's a lousy shot.

BARON: Yeah, but I'm not, so sit down; it'll be safer for everybody. You've got that duty look in your eye. I've seen it up on the line.

TOD: The line? When were you up on the line?

BARON: Some other time. Sit down! *(Glancing out the window.)* Bart, you fool. His car's out front. Might as well advertise. Put it in the garage, quick!

BART: *(Going out.)* Oh great, just great.

BARON: I have to think of everything. *(He looks out the window, again, then wipes his neck with his handkerchief.)* Hot in here. Is that clock right? *(To PETE.)* All right, suppose you tell me what happens in this house on a Saturday afternoon, between four and five.

TOD: Pattern.

BARON: Smart guy. Sure, and we don't break that pattern. We got a job to do here and if we break the pattern, it might blow the deal, you know?

TOD: Wouldn't that be a shame?

BARON: What happens on a Saturday afternoon, Pop?

PETE: Mario slings the paper over the fence, around 4:30.

BARON: Delivery boy – does he come in?

PETE: Nah. She got groceries earlier.

BARON: Anyone else?

PETE: Cy Hammel went up the mountain, hunting jack rabbits, a couple hours back. He'll go past on his way back.

BARON: Will he stop?

PETE: Not unless he's got something to brag about.

BARON: What's he hunt with?

PETE: Twenty-two. Single shot.

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BARON: *(Shorts. To TOD.)* Anybody know you were coming up here?

TOD: *That* is an interesting question.

BARON: What's the interesting answer?

TOD: Go to hell.

ELLEN: Tell him, Tod.

BARON: Sheriff, if you think I have any qualms about killing this kid, you couldn't be more wrong. I chopped plenty of 'em – not much older'n that. My only problem about killing him – or you, or her, or him – is that I wouldn't be gettin' paid for it – and I don't like giving anything away for free.

TOD: Neither do I, including information.

BARON: There's that duty look again, brave boy.

TOD: Brave? Not me. See me shaking? I'm scared. So are you.

BARON: I wouldn't count on it.

TOD: But, I've been scared before. The way I figure it, Baron, I'm dead anyway – so's Pop, so's Ellen, so's Pidge. Just a question of now or later and, if it gives the President a bit of an edge, I've got no problem with now.

BARON: I've heard of you! You're the guy took Omaha Beach all by yourself.

TOD: I was at Utah Beach – and so were a lot of other guys. And every one of them was ten times the man you are.

ELLEN: Tod, stop it! They won't hurt us; they won't hurt Pidge. They said so.

TOD: They can't shoot us, now, Ellen, it'd bring everybody up the hill, but do you think they'll kill the President and leave us alive to identify them?

ELLEN: *(To BARON.)* You said you wouldn't hurt Pidge!

BARON: Sure, sure! I meant it, too. He's just being brave with your kid's life. I knew guys like that in the army. Bart and Birdie and me, we're just doing a job, that's all. So what if you identify us? By six o'clock, we'll be out of the country and you'll never see us again. All you got to do is play straight.

ELLEN: Tell him, Tod. Tell him you won't do anything!

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BARON: Are you kiddin'? The hero of Utah Beach here? Don't talk to me about beaches, sheriff. I was at Anzio – thirty miserable days at Anzio – I know all about beaches. Don't worry, lady. We'll just assume that they knew he was coming up here. Somebody comes to check, I send you to tell him that the sheriff and his friend *were* here but they had to go someplace else. And I'll have a gun on your kid's head the whole time.

PIDGE: *(Standing up.)* I have to go to the bathroom. *(He starts to walk toward the hallway.)*

BARON: Go with him, Birdie.

PIDGE: I don't need any help. Especially from a woman.

BIRDIE: *(Pushing him lightly.)* Come on, come on. Little runt.

PIDGE: Don't call me that!

(They exit into the hallway.)

BARON: Bart, take over Birdie's watch with the rifle.

BART: *(Going to the table to finish setting up the rifle.)* Okay. *(He looks at the table.)* Table's screwed down.

BARON: All right, get the tripod up on it and centre it in front of the window. Drill a hole for each foot, bolt it to the table. *(Pulling his pistol as TOD rises.)* I thought I told you to sit down.

TOD: Just stretching my legs. You're a careful man.

BARON: Real careful.

PETE: Planned everything, huh?

BARON: Sheriff, the first man they shoot to the moon on a rocket will plan everything, too, 'cause it's never been done before. Neither has this.

PETE: There's plenty has taken shots at presidents.

BARON: Not without getting caught. Or killed.

TOD: Doesn't that worry you?

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BARON: Haven't got time to worry. I just make my plans and carry 'em out.

TOD: John Wilkes Booth had it planned, too.

BARON: Booth! Ha! Stupid ham. "Down with tyrants!", jumping off a balcony and busting his leg. If he wasn't such a ham, he'd have gone out the back door, clean and quiet.

TOD: The guy who killed Garfield made plans, but they hung him just the same.

BARON: Point blank range and it took him two shots. Like the guy who got McKinley.

PETE: And Zangara got the chair for his try at ol' Teddy Roosevelt.

BARON: From the middle of a crowd! I hate crowds. No place to line up a shot.

TOD: And, they all died or fried. So, nobody ever got away with it.

BARON: But, you see, the difference is I got no personal stake in this. I don't hate nobody, here. I'm just a guy makin' a livin' and I'm going to do it cool and calm – and I think you've stretched long enough. As you were. *(TOD*

sits as PIDGE and BIRDIE come back from the washroom.) Birdie?

BIRDIE: Yeah?

BARON: Hike downtown, baby, and see what's goin' on, especially at the station.

BIRDIE: Why me?

BARON: Because they won't be looking for a woman.

BIRDIE: Why are they looking for anybody?

BARON: They're not. Leave the car. Just stroll down the hill and see what's what.

BIRDIE: Why can't I take the car?

BARON: Because if they nail you, baby, we need the car to get to the plane.

BIRDIE: Johnny, the place is crawlin' with cops.

BARON: That's what you're getting' paid for, ain't it?

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BIRDIE: Are you kiddin' me?

BARON: I said: *that's what you're getting paid for, ain't it?*

BIRDIE: Yeah.

BARON: What more do you want?

BIRDIE: *(A slight pause.)* Nothin'. Nothin' else. I'll be back. Don't do anything crazy while I'm gone.

(She exits through the front door.)

BART: Johnny! Look. *(He demonstrates that the rifle is securely mounted on the tripod.)* Nice and steady just like you wanted it.

BARON: Open the curtain. *(BART does and BARON looks out at the town.)* Trap. Big beautiful booby-trap.

ELLEN: You can't do this. You can't do it!

BARON: You're wrong, lady. I'm gonna do it. Take a look. *(He grabs her arm and*

pulls her to the table.) Go on, take a look. I can do it and I'm going to.

PETE: You're an American citizen, for the love of Mike.

BARON: And at one minute after five, I'm going to be a rich American citizen.

ELLEN: You'll never live to enjoy it.

BARON: Shut up. *(He sees BART holding his gut.)* What's the matter with you?

BART: Stomach's actin' up, again.

BARON: Take a pill.

BART: Maybe the old man's right, Johnny. It's a terrible thing.

BARON: Turn it off, will ya. It's just a man – just another man!

BART: No – it's the President!

BARON: Yeah. *(He grins.)* Yeah! I never killed a president before.

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(A vehicle pulls up outside the house. BARON pulls ELLEN to her feet and makes her look out the window.)

Who's that?

ELLEN: It's Jud Kelly. The TV repair man.

PETE: Television set went on the blink; Ellen sent for him to come and fix it, so the boy could watch the ball game.

BARON: Why didn't you tell me?

ELLEN: We forgot, that's all.

PETE: You were waving guns in our faces.

BARON: Bart! Soon as he steps in the door, chop him.

ELLEN: No!

PETE: He's a harmless kid!

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BARON: I don't need nobody else in here.

ELLEN: I'll send him away – say we don't need him anymore.

PETE: He just got married, for crying out loud!

ELLEN: Don't hurt him!

BARON: Well, sure, lady, if you're the one askin' – but if you cross me ...

ELLEN: We won't! We won't!

BARON: So, he joins our happy little group. Pop! You've got the ball. Answer the door. Tell him to come in – but one wrong word and the squirt here ...

PETE: Yeah. Yeah, I know.

(BARON hustles PETE to the front door then steps out of sight into the kitchen.)

TOD: Ellen, we've got to keep this guy talking.

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ELLEN: *(Softly.)* Why?

TOD: *(Softly.)* Because that's his weakness. He likes to hear himself. I've gotta find a way to get to Pop's gun.

ELLEN: Is another gun going to fix this?

(PETE opens the door to let JUD in.)

JUD: Hi, Pete! What's new?

PETE: Hello, Jud.

JUD: From what Mrs. Benson said on the phone, I figured I'd better get up here and fix your rig before you zapped yourself good! *(He laughs.)*

PETE: Yeah. Come on in.

(JUD, with his tool-kit, goes to the living room, followed by PETE. BARON follows from the kitchen.)

JUD: Hi, everybody. *(Sees TOD's bandaged arm.)* Tod, what happened to you?

TOD: *(Nodding toward BARON.)* Ask him.

BARON: *(Threatening with his pistol.)* Same thing that'll happen to you, unless you do exactly as you're told.

JUD: *(Smiling at the gun.)* You're kiddin'. *(Looking at the BARON's pistol.)* Is that real?

BARON: Yeah, it's real. *(The smile on JUD's face fades slowly.)* What's your name?

JUD: Jud Kelly.

BARON: What are you doing here?

JUD: I came to fix the television set.

BARON: *(Banging JUD's tool-kit with his pistol.)* Drop it. *(JUD does so.)* All right, Bart, case him.

JUD: *(As BART frisks him.)* What is this, a stick-up?

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BART: Yeah, that's right. It's a stick-up. Just like the movies, ain't it?

JUD: I don't have any dough, if that's what you want.

BART: Ain't that too bad? Go over there and sit down, buster. *(JUD starts to do so but BART yanks him back.)* Take your luggage with you. *(JUD takes his tool-kit and sits. To TOD.)* You, too. Sit down.

(They sit.)

TOD: Sorry, Jud. We didn't have a choice. They'll hurt Pidge if we don't cooperate.

JUD: I don't get it. What's with the guns? Hey! Did they rob the bank?

BARON: Where's your store?

JUD: Main Street. Everybody knows that.

BARON: Who runs it?

JUD: Just me.

BARON: All alone?

JUD: Mister, do you have to point that gun at me?

BARON: Alone?

BART: *(Cuffing JUD on the back of the head.)* Answer him.

JUD: Yeah.

BARON: You locked up when you left?

JUD: *(Looking nervously at the gun; nods.)* Yeah.

BARON: Who knows you were comin' here?

JUD: Nobody. Just a service call. That gun makes me nervous, mister. I'm no hero. Honest! You can put the gun away.

BARON: Sure, but get this straight: one wrong move and the kid gets it. That's right, *he* gets it. So you see, *his* life depends on *you*. Get it?

JUD: Yeah. I get it.

(BARON puts his gun away. There is a pause while BARON paces, BART watches and the others sit. Finally:)

BART: Say, Johnny, maybe, we ought to load the gun now, to be sure, huh?

BARON: No, that's just what the Wyatt Earp there would like.

TOD: Forget about me. I've had it.

BARON: Don't con me, sheriff. The minute that weapon's loaded, one of you brave boys will decide it's worth taking a bullet just to fire it and alert the feds down there – and then the game'd be over, wouldn't it? *(To ELLEN.)* You got any food in the house?

ELLEN: 'Course I have.

BARON: I'm gonna grab a bite, Bart. Watch 'em.

BART: You think they got any milk, Johnny?

BARON: They got a eight-year-old, don't they?

BART: Bring me a glass of milk, will you, Johnny? My ulcer's murdering me.

BARON: Watch 'em, Bart. Watch 'em. *(Pushing ELLEN to the kitchen.)* Come on.

JUD: I don't dig it. Will somebody tell me what's going on?

BART: Sit down! Be quiet!

(BARON has pushed ELLEN into the kitchen. She goes to the fridge and gets out cold meat and bread, then crosses to the counter and gets a carving knife out of a drawer. With her back to BARON, she stares at the knife. BARON walks up behind her gently, reaches over and gently twists the knife out of her hand, elbows her aside, gently, and begins to make a sandwich.)

ELLEN: Haven't you any feelings at all?

BARON: *(With a slow grin.)* No. They were beaten out of me by experts. Feelings are a trap, lady. Feelings make you think about things besides yourself. Show me a guy with feelings and I'll show you a sucker.

ELLEN: Don't you even think of your mother? Your father?

BARON: *(He sits straddle of a chair and begins to eat his sandwich.)* Oh, I used to think of them all the time. My mother was a street-walker. My old man was drunk by eight a.m. and walloped the tar out of her whenever she didn't bring in enough dough. I swore, one day, I'd kill them both – but they drank themselves to death before I could. But first I got taken away from that happy family and dumped in a home. A home! Now, you got a home here, lady, a real nice one. What I had wasn't a home – it was just barely livin'. Feelings? Hah! Experts took care of that.

ELLEN: *(Turning away from him.)* No use ... no use ...

PIDGE: *(Suddenly shouting.)* You stink! *(He jumps up and runs to the bedroom where he finds his cap gun and picks it up.)*

PETE: Pidge! Come back here.

BART: Johnny! *(As BARON comes out of the kitchen.)* The kid.

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BARON: *(Barring ELLEN from crossing into the living room.)* Hold it.

ELLEN: Pidge! Pidge!

BARON: *(Lifting his pistol to cover the group. To BART.)* Get him.

BART: I'll take mommy along with me.

(He grabs ELLEN and pushes her toward the bedroom just as PIDGE comes out of it. As BART turns to grab him, PIDGE lifts his cap gun and points it at BART.)

PIDGE: Don't you touch her! Stick 'em up, or I'll blast you.

(BART backs away quickly, badly frightened. Still pointing the cap gun at BART.)

Don't you touch her! Don't you ...

(BART grabs the cap gun from PIDGE.)

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TOD: Nice going, Bart.

PETE: It's only a cap gun!

TOD: I gave it to him myself.

BART: I oughta beat his brains out. The little ... *(BARON is laughing.)* What's so funny?

BARON: You should've seen your face! A cap gun!

BART: Go ahead! Laugh yourself sick!

BARON: *(Grabbing the cap gun and looking at it.)* That's a pretty good one, though, isn't it? They make 'em look real today, don't they? *(He hands the cap gun back to PIDGE.)* Here you are, kid. Blow his brains out.

(PIDGE fires the cap gun at BART a couple of times.)

PIDGE: BANG! BANG! BANG!

(BARON pushes PIDGE toward the others.)

ELLEN: Couple of big, bold, bad men, getting scared to death by a seventy-five cent cap gun.

BART: I oughta beat that kid.

BARON: Are you sure he couldn't take ya?

BART: I need some milk, Johnny; the pain's pretty bad.

BARON: Go soak your ulcer ... and bring me a piece of the cake.

BART: *(Going into kitchen.)* Where's Birdie? Why don't we hear from Birdie?

BARON: *(To the group.)* Sit.

JUD: If this isn't a stick-up, what is it?

BARON: What do you care? Didn't you come up here to fix a television set, junior?

JUD: Yeah.

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BARON: Well, then, fix the television set.

JUD: *(A low voice.)* Sheriff, what's going on?

TOD: *(NOT lowering his voice.)* They're planning to kill the President, Jud.

JUD: Which president?

TOD: The President of the United States. He arrives here this afternoon.

JUD: You're kidding! *(He looks at the rifle on its tripod on the table.)* No, you're not kidding. Kill the President? The President? They can't! They couldn't do a thing like that.

PIDGE: They're Benedict Arnolds. They're stinking traitors.

JUD: Are you guys crazy? *(Rising.)* You can't do a thing like that!

BARON: *(Pushing him down.)* Sit down, reckless.

JUD: Don't you realise what that means? That's ... that's assassination! He's your President, too!

BARON: Make a deal with ya, boy. *(He presses his pistol up against JUD's temple.)* Why don't we kill you instead? Okay with you? That even-steven? Thought not. *(He waves the pistol around to the others.)* Anybody else wanna take the heat off the President? How about you, sheriff?

TOD: It's a bad joke, Baron.

BARON: I think it's hilarious. Anybody else wanna volunteer?

PIDGE: They're enemy agents; they're commies!

(BART, who has just returned with some cake for JOHNNY and a glass of milk for himself, laughs.)

BART: I ain't no commie. I was born right here in America.

PETE: Sometimes the worst enemies come from within. "...defend it from all enemies, foreign and domestic." Good turn of phrase, ain't it?

BART: I ain't no foreigner, I tell ya!

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TOD: All right, who is paying you, Baron?

BARON: *(Laughing quietly.)* I haven't the slightest idea.

TOD: What's in it for you?

BARON: You're pretty curious, aren't you, sheriff?

TOD: While I last.

BARON: Believe it or not, I like you, sheriff. You've got guts. You must have been a good soldier.

TOD: I got by.

BARON: I won a Silver Star.

TOD: That's pretty good.

BARON: Killed 27 Jerries, all by myself.

TOD: You're a killer, all right.

BARON: Yeah.

TOD: Yeah. Some guys liked it. I knew a couple.

BARON: Funny thing: in the war, you do a lot of chopping, they give you a medal. Here, they fry you.

TOD: Hard to match up, isn't it, Baron? Just when you get real good at something, boom!, the rules change. Suddenly, you're a murderer.

BARON: Yeah, over there you can knock over a whole platoon and get a medal, Over here ...

TOD: Over here, you put a half-dozen slugs into a double-crossing punk that isn't even worth burying and you find yourself breathing cyanide.

BARON: *(Looking at TOD with surprise.)* A double-crossing ... ? Hey! You mean good old Smiley Bitters?

TOD: Yeah, that was the name. Smiley Bitters. Ain't that a moniker? Agent Carney told me all about him, Pop.

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BARON: You mean, old Smiley's not dead? Or maybe he talked before he died.

TOD: Yeah, Baron, he talked. How he talked! Why do you think those state troopers are down there? Why do you think the Secret Service is here?

JUD: *(Slowly.)* The President? Holy cow. *(To BARON.)* You ... you murdering ...

(BART cuffs the back of JUD's head again.)

BART: Knock it off! So, they know about us?

TOD: They've got the whole thing pieced out – and they've got this town covered so tight ...

BARON: ... so tight we could walk right in the back door. Sure! If Smiley talked, they know about us. Say, that's good, Bart!

BART: That ain't good, Johnny.

BARON: Of course, it's good! We not only get the money, we get the glory, too. The only ones to knock off the President and get away with it.

ELLEN: You hate the President enough to kill him?

BARON: There's plenty that do – you know why. He ain't one of us. But, me? I got no feelings one way or the other. I'm just earning a living.

PETE: Treason ain't a living.

BARON: Ace shoots craps. Don't give me politics; I got no politics. Doesn't matter to me who's running the country – or how. I don't even know who's paying me and I don't want to know. What's the difference?

TOD: Ever wonder why they want you to do it?

BARON: I know why. He's one of them kind, ain't he? – and that makes the guys behind it real sore – but they're suckers, not me. I'm gettin' it made! Listen, sheriff, before the war, I drifted and drifted and ran and ran and everywhere I was just a face in the middle of a great big crowd. I used to dream about that crowd – all those faces scratchin' and shovin' and bitin' and, somehow, all those faces were me. All me – and all nothin'.

TOD: But the war changed that, eh, Baron?

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BARON: Sure, it did! Suddenly, *they* were all looking at *me* – at *me*! At Johnny Baron – Sergeant Johnny Baron! And, it was *me* they were seeing! I'm no traitor, sheriff. I won a Silver Star.

ELLEN: Killing.

BARON: Yeah, that's right. Killin'! And, boy, was I good at it! I had talent and, after the show, I found out you can make good dough with talent. I hooked up with an outfit. They said where and how much and Johnny Baron did the job. Me! Nobody else! Nobody else could do it! You think Birdie or Bart could handle this without me? You think anybody else in the world could handle this?

BART: You're talkin' too much, Johnny.

BARON: Nobody else could do this job, because they've got feelings and feelings is no good. I'm the only one who can do this job – and pretty soon everybody'll know it and everybody's going to remember Johnny Baron.

TOD: For a while.

BARON: That's better'n most. Naw, I got nothing against the president, lady. To

me, he's just a half a million bucks – tax-free. *(He laughs a little.)* Makin' my own laws about taxes, too, Pop.

JUD: This guy's nuts!

PETE: Shut up, Jud.

BARON: *(Grabbing JUD's shirt front and pushing his pistol against JUD's cheek.)* Listen to him, buster. Don't ever say that again. Ever!

TOD: Take it easy, Jud.

(BARON lets go of JUD and holsters his gun.)

(To BARON.) A half million dollars, huh?

BARON: Yeah. That's a lot of scratch. A man could a long way on that amount – Cuba or Paraguay. A long way for a long time.

TOD: How do you know it'll ever be paid?

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BARON: You think I'm stupid? Half of it's *been* paid.

TOD: And the rest?

BARON: *(He pats his gun.)* Oh, I'll get it.

TOD: This isn't just a man, Baron. It's the President.

BARON: Don't you get it? The laugh's on the guys payin' the freight. Half a million bucks – and what do they get out of it? *Nothin'!* Half a million for absolutely nothin', because tonight at five o'clock, I kill the President – bang! bang! bang! – and, one second after five, there's a new President. What changes? Nothin'. What are they paying for? *Nothin'!* It all goes on like nothin' happened. Otherwise, I wouldn't have taken the job.

TOD: You'd have taken it.

BARON: You think so?

TOD: Yeah.

BARON: Why?

TOD: 'Cause it makes you feel like a man.

(The phone begins to ring.)

BARON: All right, take it easy. Come on, lady. *(He pulls ELLEN back to the kitchen.)* Do as you're told and everything will be fine. Answer straight, clean and plain. Answer it.

ELLEN: *(Picking up the receiver.)* Hello ... Who do you mean "Johnny"? ... Oh ...

(ELLEN looks at BARON and holds the phone out to him.)

BARON: *(Taking the receiver.)* Birdie? ... Yeah. *(To ELLEN, with a grin.)* Train's on time ... Is there a car – a limo – waiting in front of the station? ... Yeah, I figured. Facing which way? ... Facing me. Fine. You did a good job, baby. Get back as soon as you can – and, Birdie! Don't be followed.

(BARON hangs up the phone and goes back into the living room, bringing ELLEN with him.)

BART: *(Looking out the window.)* There's the big boy's car, now.

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BARON: *(Also looking out.)* Sittin' duck.

BART: From here, what, four hundred yards?

BARON: Four twenty-five. Wind, ten mile an hour, right to left.

(BARON reaches into one of the cases they brought in and extracts a telescopic sight, sliding it onto the rifle and clamping it in place. There is, suddenly, a distant flurry of pistol shots, two different calibres.)

BART: Gunfire!

BARON: Birdie's in trouble. *(TOD starts to stand up. BARON points his pistol at him.)* Don't you move!

(More gunfire, from several different weapons, this time. Police sirens sound as well, along with squealing tires.)

TOD: Ellen! Down!

ELLEN: Pidge!

(She pulls PIDGE down beside her.)

BARON: Where is she?

BART: They got her trapped behind that gas station.

BARON: *(Almost to himself.)* Come on, baby. Run.

BART: Come on, Birdie.

(A couple of single gunshots are heard, then a burst of automatic fire, then silence.)

BARON: So long, baby.

BART: Do you think they got her?

BARON: What do you think? I just hope she's dead.

BART: Why would you say that? She was a swell kid.

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BARON: If she's dead, she can't tell them where we are.

BART: Yeah, I didn't think of that.

BARON: It's a good thing I'm here, then.

ELLEN: He who lives by the sword ...

BARON: That wasn't a sword, lady. That was a tommy gun.

ELLEN: A murder gun – made to kill.

BARON: Name me a gun that isn't.

TOD: Guns don't kill, Ellen. *(He looks at BARON.)* It's born killers on the end of them that kill.

ELLEN: Nobody's a born killer. You learn it – you learn to like it.

TOD: You know, they're going to be looking for me, by now. The sheriff can't disappear without somebody noticing.

BARON: Shut up.

TOD: Now, with your girlfriend there getting it, even if she *is* dead, they'll start searching every building in town. Just a matter of routine, right, Pop?

PETE: Sure, routine. They'll search. They'll find you.

BARON: Shut up.

BART: *(At the window.)* Johnny.

BARON: What now?

BART: They're lookin' up here.

BARON: Now, we got trouble. Everybody except Mrs. Benson, into the kitchen.

PETE: What are you gonna do?

BARON: Nothing, I hope. Move. *(They start toward the kitchen. To BART.)*
Anybody gets brave, kill 'em all.

BART: All of 'em?

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BARON: Why not? They can only fry you once. Pidge, you stay with me.

(BART herds the men into the far corner of the kitchen, leaving ELLEN, BARON and PIDGE in the living room.)

BARON: *(To ELLEN.)* Now look. Get a grip on yourself. I want you to look relaxed. If you don't pull this off, everybody is dead. Do you understand? *(ELLEN says nothing.)* Do you understand?

ELLEN: All of us dead.

BARON: *All* of us dead. But, the kid first. All you have to do is be yourself.

ELLEN: I don't know what you mean.

BARON: They'll come up here to check whether the sheriff is here. I don't want 'em in the house. I want you to go talk to them out front.

ELLEN: I can't. I don't know how. I don't know what to say.

BARON: Just go out and water the flowers. Do anything you like, but keep busy ... You look like a ghost. Lipstick and rouge, quick. *(ELLEN opens her purse*

and applies lipstick and rouge, with a compact mirror. In the distance, a police siren is heard, growing louder.) Now, listen to me carefully. They'll ask whether the sheriff was here. "Certainly, he was here. Came up to check the house, but he left about three o'clock. Went out on the White Springs ranch road. They took Pop and the kid with 'em and that's the last you saw of them." You got it? *(He grabs her by the shoulders and spins her around to him.)* You got it?

ELLEN: Yes, yes.

BARON: *(Pushes her toward the door.)* Step on it. *(He opens the front door and pushes her through. We can see her, standing just outside the door, watching as the sirens peak and begin to wind down. The police cars pull up outside. From behind the door, holding on to PIDGE:)* Pull it off, lady, or everybody is dead – everybody.

TOD: *(Low voice.)* He's getting rattled, Pop.

PETE: *(Low voice.)* How do you mean?

TOD: He didn't expect his little Birdie to get killed. That's rattled him.

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PETE: Got anything in mind?

TOD: Not yet.

BART: Shut up, you guys.

ELLEN: *(Speaking off.)* Oh, hello. *(Pause.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* Oh! You must be working with the sheriff. *(She hesitates, then:)* He came up here about three o'clock, to check the house, he said. I – I don't know why. Haven't seen him since he left. *(Pause.)* Why, Sheriff Shaw, of course. He said he had to check – the White Springs Ranch road. *(Pause.)* Well, no. No, he isn't. You see, he used to be with the Secret Service. *(Pause.)* So, Sheriff Shaw took him along. My little boy, too. *(Pause.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* No. No, I haven't. Something's wrong. I know something's wrong. All that gunfire a few minutes ago ... *(Long pause.)* Well, all right, then. Goodbye. I'll tell him to contact you if he comes back.

(We hear car doors close, then a car start up and drive away. ELLEN still stands on the doorstep.)

BARON: All right, lady, inside! Come on, come on. *(ELLEN comes back inside, very defeated.)* Very nice. Very nice job. Congratulations. *(He pushes*

PIDGE toward her and looks at her, amused.) You don't like me, do you?

ELLEN: You're an animal. Animals kill each other: that's what you're doing.

BARON: You like your roast beef rare, medium, or well done?

ELLEN: I wish you were dead.

BARON: You haven't got the guts.

ELLEN: Just give me a chance.

(He looks at her silently, then hands his pistol to her.)

BARON: Here's your chance. Go ahead, take it – *(She stares at him, then grabs the gun and points it at him.)* – but remember the squirt's right here.

(She lowers the gun. BARON takes it back.)

You see? Feelings, lady. You think of others first. Now, you missed your chance. 'Course, I didn't give you a whole chance – *(He holds up the clip he has removed from the gun and pushes it back into the grip of the pistol.)* – but you didn't even take a half a chance. All right, Bart. Run 'em in. All clear.

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BART: Everything okay, Johnny?

BARON: Sure, everything's fine. She played her part real good. She should be on television. *(Sees JUD sitting)* You! Didn't I tell you to fix the television set?

JUD: You told me to sit.

BARON: *(Indicates the tool-kit and the television.)* Get your stuff and fix it. It'll keep you from getting patriotic.

JUD: *(Picking up the tool-kit.)* Why not? If I don't do something, I'll blow my top.

BARON: Fix the set and shut your mouth. I don't like you much. Now fix it. We've still got time. *(He looks at the clock, then to BART, indicating that he guard the others.)* All yours.

(BARON checks the sights, flips the safety off and pulls

back the bolt, then reaches into a case and pulls out a magazine, pushing it into the rifle. He then gestures to BART.)

Open 'em.

(BART pulls the curtains open, until BARON holds up his hand to indicate “far enough”. BART then swings the window panels open.)

Four twenty-five – make it four thirty-five. *(He adjusts the knobs on the telescopic sight.)*

TOD: Isn't that a German rifle?

BARON: Yeah. You know it?

TOD: I know it. Seen more than a couple of them up close.

PETE: What is it?

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TOD: Eight millimetre. Fully auto. Thirty-round mag.

PETE: *(Whistles.)* Whew!

BARON: Best rifle for the job.

TOD: Depends on the job. Where were you during the war, Baron?

BARON: All the way from the Kasserine Pass. I won a Silver Star. Where were you?

TOD: Normandy to the Elbe by way of the Bulge. Where'd you find that weapon?

BARON: Don't worry, sheriff. I got a license for it.

ELLEN: A license? For a murder weapon? That's what that was made for – murder!

BARON: It's my God-given constitutional right, lady.

ELLEN: God-given!

TOD: Second Amendment.

BARON: Second Amen – dment. See? It's built right into the word. God bless America! You got a problem with America, lady?

(ELLEN covers her face and cries.)

TOD: She's got a husband who's dead in Korea.

BARON: Tough break, but you and me know the chances.

TOD: You get up into Germany?

BARON: No, I didn't make it that far. You, though. Bet you were one of those big-shot guys with gold bars on his shoulder.

TOD: No, no. I was just a corporal.

BARON: Corporal? I made sergeant.

TOD: Nice. I take it you don't like officers?

BARON: Officers – big-shots. Yes sir, no sir, salute sir, Big-shots.

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TOD: And, you don't like big-shots?

BARON: *(He taps the butt of the rifle.)* Not when I've got a bigger one. I killed more Jerries than any five officers put together. I did some pretty good chopping in the war. Pretty good.

TOD: Yeah, you're a born killer, that's for sure.

BARON: Not born. They taught me – and I liked it. Ha! My C. O. used to shake like a leaf while I chopped. If more guys like me had command ...

ELLEN: There'd be more killing!

BARON: Or maybe less, lady. 'Cause we'd do it right, the first time.

TOD: Tell me, Baron. How come you didn't get into Germany?

BARON: They sent me home. My tour was finished.

TOD: Your tour? In the infantry? That was for the air corps. You finish your tour in the infantry when they plant you in a box.

BARON: Turn it off.

TOD: Yeah, you probably went over the hill.

BARON: I said, turn it off. I ain't no coward!

TOD: No. No, you're no coward, Baron. No, you look like a yard-bird to me.

BARON: I'm tellin' you, sheriff. Turn it off.

TOD: Big-shot turned yard-bird, eh? Come on, now; tell me. What were you in the stockade for? Rape? Was that it? No. No, that's not your thrill. Killing's what you like. Killing ... maybe ... unarmed prisoners?

BARON: Sit down and shut up.

TOD: *(He sits beside ELLEN.)* But, no, you got away with it – oh, I got it! Section eight. A psycho discharge. Yeah, I knew guys like you. Rather kill a man than love a girl. A real kick. A thrill deep down in the guts.

ELLEN: Stop it, Tod. Stop it.

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TOD: And now, you've got the right to get that thrill back. That it? The constitutional right to gun down anybody you want. God bless the United ...

(BARON suddenly kicks the seated TOD on his wounded arm. TOD falls onto ELLEN's lap, grasping his arm.)

Aaagh!

BARON: Like I said, shut up.

(BART, watching from the corner, laughs quietly.)

ELLEN: *(Whispering.)* Tod, it's hopeless.

TOD: *(Whispering.)* It's not five o'clock, yet.

BARON: Hurts, huh?

TOD: It hurts.

BARON: Well, I can keep kickin' as long as you keep shootin' your mouth off.

TOD: I know.

BARON: Gonna keep your trap shut?

TOD: Yeah.

BARON: Well, ain't that good? *(To JUD.)* You got that TV workin', fix-it-man?

JUD: *(From behind the television.)* Nearly. You were right, Pop. You blew the power tube. I have one here. I'll have her perkin' in a second.

PETE: You know, Jud, I was thinking. We get a lot of interference lines in our reception 'cause we're a long way from the broadcasting station. If you were to ... I don't know ... clamp the main plate lead to a good ground like ... like that table there, say ... we'd get a better picture.

JUD: Clamp the main plate lead to the table?

PETE: To cut the static lines in the picture.

JUD: What?

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BART: Expert. First he wrecks the set, then he tells the kid how to fix it.

JUD: Main plate lead? To the table? *(He looks at the back of the television set and sees the high-voltage warning.)* Oh. *(Looks at PETE.)* Yeah.

PETE: Yeah. Then, all it needs is a high potential ground.

BARON: What are you guys yapping about?

PETE: Technical talk, mister. I'm an old radio man. Battleship New York, 1918.

PIDGE: Gramps beat the Germans, single-handed.

PETE: I sure did, son. When the Germans heard I was there, they surrendered the whole fleet to me at Scapa Flow. Well, me and ten American battleships ... and the whole Royal Navy.

BARON: All right, all right, stop the bulling and fix the set. Do what he told you.

JUD: *(A slight pause.)* Yes, sir. *(He begins to work behind the set.)*

PETE: *(Grabbing his chest.)* Oh!

ELLEN: Dad, Dad! What is it?

PETE: Pain, bad.

(JUD continues to attach a wire-lead between the table leg and the back of the television set.)

BARON: What hit him?

ELLEN: It's his heart. He has a bad heart.

PETE: Pidge, my pills, top drawer of the bureau.

PIDGE: What?

PETE: My pills. Top drawer of the bureau.

PIDGE: What pills?

ELLEN: Pete's pills, Tod. Top drawer of the bureau.

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TOD: I'll get 'em.

BARON: You stay put. The kid'll get 'em.

(PIDGE goes into the bedroom and opens the drawer. He pulls out a pill box, then he sees PETE's revolver. He takes his cap gun out of his toy holster, drops the real gun in its place, places his cap gun in the drawer and closes it.)

PETE: Ellie, I need some water. A glass of water – a big glass of water.

ELLEN: All right, I'll get some.

BARON: You stay put 'til the squirt gets back.

ELLEN: But, he needs ...

BARON: Stay put.

(PIDGE returns to the living room, with the pills. TOD and PETE see that it is the real gun in the holster; BARON, BART and ELLEN don't. PIDGE starts to pull the gun from

the holster.)

ELLEN: Pidge, put that thing away and get some water for your grandfather.

PIDGE: But mom, listen ...

ELLEN: You heard me, Pidge.

PIDGE: Oh, gee ...

(He puts the revolver back in the holster and gets a glass of water from the kitchen.)

BARON: You know what, Pop? I think your heart attack's a phony.

PETE: *(Shaking his head.)* Pain's bad.

BARON: I'm warning you: you try to pull something ...

TOD: Baron, I've been thinking.

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BARON: You've been thinking you'd like a crack at this rifle.

TOD: You think I want to get myself killed?

BARON: I think you wouldn't mind getting yourself killed. Like I said, you got that duty look in your eyes.

TOD: Why would I want to get myself shot?

BARON: Because it's five minutes to five and a shot might bring those state troopers stormin' all over the joint before the President arrives.

TOD: I don't want to die any more than you; any more than Bart, there.

BART: Why don't you shut up? Johnny, shut him up.

BARON: No guts.

BART: It gets on my nerves, that's all. My stomach.

TOD: You got too many nerves, pal. That's why your stomach's in a knot.

BART: *(Threatening with his pistol.)* Keep talking, mister. You'll get your wish.

BARON: Easy, Bart. We don't have to shoot him. We just have to twist his arm. All the pain; none of the noise. So don't go winning any post-mortem medals.

TOD: I'd enjoy a post-mortem medal exactly as much as you'll enjoy that post-mortem money.

BART: What did he say?

BARON: What did you say?

TOD: Post-mortem, Baron. Nobody ever took a shot at the President and lived. You won't either.

BARON: You don't think so? I got it all planned. We're over the border a half-hour after I take out the President.

TOD: Oh! So, you got a plane. You'll never reach it ahead of the police, and, if you do, there's an air force base twenty minutes from here. What have you got, a Cessna? A hundred miles an hour? You know how fast a Sabrejet is? You'll never make the border.

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BARON: You know, a fella could get an education just listening to this guy.

BART: Maybe he's right, Johnny.

TOD: Look! You've got half the money already, right? A smart guy would take that plane now, fly out of here, and live to spend it in South America.

BART: He's right, Johnny. We can lam now. Why take the risk? It's too big, Johnny. There's something wrong with it.

BARON: Chicken.

BART: Chicken! Yeah, all right, call it chicken. Birdie wasn't chicken – look what happened to her. They'll get us, Johnny. Who wants to be rich and dead? The guy's right. We've got the money – or enough of it, at least. Let's get outa here. Once we're across the border ...

BARON: Hate those craps.

BART: I don't want to die in this stinkin' little town!

BARON: Turn it off, Bart! You're embarrassing me in front of the sheriff.

BART: Johnny, even if we swing it, they'll never give up. It's the President!

TOD: They'll be after you, the Secret Service, the FBI, every cop in the free world. Heck, even if you did it, you think the guys paying for this would gonna let you live? *Everybody'll* be on your tail – until the day you die.

BART: He's right, Johnny. They'll get us.

BARON: They won't get *us*, Bart. Not *us*. I got it planned, I tell you – planned!

TOD: Was your girlfriend getting killed part of the plan?

BARON: *(He points his pistol straight at TOD. After a tense moment when it looks like he might shoot, he suddenly pushes the barrel against TOD's wound. TOD grimaces.)* She knew the odds. I ain't gonna lose a sleep over her.

PETE: You're sick, mate. You're sick.

BARON: I don't like that, old man. Remember who's got the gun.

ELLEN: And that makes you God?

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BARON: That's what guns are for, lady. You got a gun, you *are* God – at least as far as the chumps without guns are concerned. This – *(Brandishing his pistol.)* – gives you the power of life and death. First time I drew a bead on a man – first time I squeezed that trigger and saw him fall – I got some self-respect. I was somebody. Like the squirt over there. If that cap pistol was real and I didn't have this, he'd be God – and I'd pay him every cent of that half a million for my life, because life is all I got. But the squirt doesn't have the gun. I have – and I can lose the lightning.

PIDGE: I told you I ain't a squirt.

BARON: Shutup, kid.

(JUD turns on the television. Sound comes out of the speaker but no picture appears.)

No picture, fix-it-man. Just noise! Knock off the noise!

(PETE starts toward the set to turn it down, placing the cup of water that he got from PIDGE on the edge of the metal table, deliberately letting it fall onto the floor and spill.)

PETE: Oh! Butterfingers!

BARON: Sit down! (*PETE sits.*) There's one other thing about this gun, lady. Without this gun, you would never have even noticed me. You wouldn't spit at me. But with it, you'll remember me – as long as you live.

(He leans down to the rifle, but doesn't touch it before a train horn is heard. He straightens and looks at the clock.)

That's the special. Where is it now?

TOD: Blowing for the sixty-six crossing, outside of town.

BARON: All right, Bart, this is it. (*He motions PETE away from the table.*) You, over there. Nobody makes a sound. I gotta concentrate.

BART: Let me see, Johnny, just once.

BARON: We're gonna do it, Bart. This is my meat. We're gonna do it.

BART: I want to see.

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(BARON steps back and BART leans over the rifle. The instant he touches the metal, he begins to convulse and his finger tightens on the trigger. There is a pop and fizz from the television. The rifle, trigger held by BART's convulsed finger, begins to fire, shot after shot. BARON turns, shocked, to see BART convulsing at the rifle.)

ELLEN: (*Grabbing PIDGE and pulling him down.*) Pidge!

(BARON sees the sparks from the television, the pool of water under BART's feet and the lead connected to the table. JUD kneels behind the television. BARON fires once at JUD, who falls, then yanks the TV plug from the wall. BART's body crumples and falls from the table. There is the sound of gunfire from outside, and things are knocked off the bureau and shelves. PETE flattens himself on the floor. TOD tries to grapple with BARON, but BARON smashes his wounded arm and chops his neck with the pistol butt as he falls. BARON threatens the others to get back, tests the table to be sure it is no longer electrified, then leans over the rifle. He starts to line up his shot.)

(PIDGE has pulled PETE's revolver from his holster. ELLEN pulls it out of his hand, then sees that it is the real

gun. She looks at BARON and, shakily, aims it at him, but cannot pull the trigger. She drops the gun. The sound of the gun dropping makes BARON turn and, seeing ELLEN moving, he lifts his pistol toward her. PETE lunges and grapples him around the knees. BARON chops down with the butt of his pistol and PETE falls to the floor. The train horn blows loudly as it passes through the town at high-speed. BARON turns back to the rifle but he is too late. Just at that moment, the clock chimes 5:00 p.m.)

BARON: It didn't stop. It didn't stop.

(PETE's revolver has fallen beside PIDGE, who grabs it and levels it at BARON.)

It didn't stop!

PIDGE: Reach for the sky, mister!

(BARON turns from the rifle and lifts his pistol toward PIDGE, who pulls the trigger. The revolver goes off.)

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POW!

(BARON is hit, falls against the table, drops his weapon and begins to slide down to the floor. PIDGE, shocked by the violence of what happened, drops the gun.)

BARON: No ... No! Please, no!

(BARON crumples to the floor.)

ELLEN: PIDGE!

(She grabs him and pulls him away from the sight. BARON is dead. TOD staggers to his feet and kicks BARON's gun away from him, checks that the rifle is unloaded, then picks up PETE's revolver and crosses to ELLEN, who is holding PIDGE tightly.)

TOD: Ellen ... Ellen ... It's over. Let him go. Let go, now.

(As soon as ELLEN does let go, PIDGE immediately throws his arms around her and holds on tightly. TOD goes

to PETE, who is lying on the floor.)

Pop! Pop! (*PETE comes around and tries to focus.*) Pete! Are you hurt?

PETE: Oh! (*He puts his hand to the back of his head and tries to focus.*) I've had worse. What about ... ? (*He sees ELLEN and PIDGE, then BARON.*)

(Police sirens are heard, approaching, then slowing and coming to a stop. TOD pulls out his handkerchief and, without exposing himself, waves it in front of the window. He drapes it over the muzzle of the rifle, then notices JUD lying still on the floor. TOD crawls to examine him.)

TOD: (*After a moment.*) Well, he stopped them.

ELLEN: Jud!

PETE: How bad is he?

(TOD gives a small shake of his head.)

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PIDGE: You mean, he's dead, too?

TOD: I'm afraid he is, son.

(PIDGE buries his face in his mother's shoulder.)

ELLEN: How come the train went right through the station?

PETE: They'd have been ordered to highball it as soon as the gunfight with Birdie broke out. The President missed out on seeing the sights of Suddenly.

TOD: I guess he did. Pidge, what you did ... you mustn't think ... he was a bad man, Pidge. What you did was a good thing.

PIDGE: Yeah. He was a bad guy.

(He crosses into the bedroom and gets his cap pistol.)

ELLEN: (*Sees blood on PETE's head.*) Dad, your head!

PETE: I don't need any nurse maid. (*Indicating PIDGE.*) What's he doing?

TOD: I haven't the faintest idea.

(PIDGE returns and holds the cap pistol out to TOD.)

PIDGE: Can you take this, please? I'm sorry, Tod. I ... I don't want it, anymore.

TOD: *(Taking the cap-gun.)* Sure, son. Sure.

(PIDGE and ELLEN put their arms around each other.)

VOICE: *(From outside, over a bullhorn.)* Inside, there! Throw out your weapons!

TOD: *(At the window, but below the sight line. He throws out the pistols.)*
Codeword: Hangover! Repeat: Hangover! We are 10-14! Repeat: 10-14!
(He goes to the others, holding his injured arm and grimacing.)

ELLEN: Tod, let me see. *(Checks TOD's bandage.)* You said it this morning, dad.

PETE: Said what?

ELLEN: About principles.

PETE: *(He thinks.)* Oh, yeah. Somebody had to make them stick. *(He looks at JUD's body and at PIDGE.)* And, as always, it's the kids that pay.

ELLEN: *(To TOD.)* You need a doctor.

TOD: The Secret Service will be coming through that door any moment. I'll have a lot of things to do before I can get this looked at.

ELLEN: *(Re-tying his bandaged arm.)* You'll do what I say, mister.

TOD: All right. This is going to be one hell of a report. All of this in Suddenly.

PETE: *(Arm around PIDGE.)* I still say it's a dumb name for a town.

TOD: Oh, I don't know. I don't know about that.

(They all look toward the front door as it slowly opens.)

END OF PLAY

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