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THE SOFT GLOW FROM A PINK LAMPSHADE SPILLED CLARET over a white candlewick spread. It took Don a while, after opening his eyes, to realize that the winy light made the fingers of his left hand appear bloody.

He wriggled his fingers. They were caked with blood.

It came back to him slowly. The lurching skid. The sickening spin. Throwing his hand up to protect his eyes. The crash.

He felt as if he ought to be in a hospital. But this was no private ward. Venetian blinds, television set, a door with a white Regulations card tacked to it, a wheat-colored writing table. On the table was a cowhide brief case. Rettjer's brief case.

"Don't tell me," growled an unpleasant voice, "you didn't fracture y' freakin' skull! We were just getting ready to report you as an accident fatality."

Turning his neck brought a sharp pain, but Don twisted around enough to see a bony fist with a sapphire ring as large as brass knuckles. His eyes traveled up to the stub of cigar drooping from a smirking mouth, the broken nose, the bulgy brown eyes. Army.

"Been better if you'd cracked up permanently, Cadee. Saved everybody a mess of trouble." The man on the other bed flourished a gun for emphasis. Don's .45.

"Pleasure to disappoint you," Don muttered.

"It won't be any pleasure," Army answered. "We'll just have to finish what that bang against the windshield started. No other way now."

"Sure." Don shifted painfully to raise on one elbow. "I can tell you a better way."