

# Death on the Hook

By John K. Butler



*"Go ahead,"  
Sandy chal-  
lenged. "I'm  
ready."*

## *A Short Story of Undercover Courage*

AGAIN in the silence of the waterfront, the scream sounded. It seemed to originate from the outer end of Fisherman's Wharf, but you couldn't tell for sure, because it came shrilly through the low-hung fog in countless little echoes, echoes that had sprung hollowly metallic from the corrugated iron roofs of warehouses, hauntingly forlorn from the damp walls of the Van Cise Cannery. Those echoes cried out like the voices of many forgotten ghosts; sudden and mysterious, they raced their eerie cries through dark sleeping alleys and empty truck lanes.

A cobblestone narrow street approaches Fisherman's Wharf. On one side are the crowded wooden buildings where the Japanese and Mexican laborers live. The men go out in the fishing tugs; their wives work in the canneries; in the daytime their numerous children, when not at school, howl and yell through the filthy streets and alleys.

*Violence was no stranger to the waterfront—where hates and loves were often measured by bullets. But even the waterfront was rocked by the news that Sandy Taylor was taking death on a hook.*

On the other side of the street approaching the wharf is a district where American men and families live. It's just like the right-hand district, except the people residing in it are smugly certain it is better.

At night the fishermen with their wives, and more often *without* their wives, gather in mutual territory—the cobblestone street. There are bright lights there, a ten-cent movie, beer parlors, a dance hall, and upstairs over those places, if they know you and you have a little money, you can get action on roulette, chuck-a-luck, blackjack, craps. You can get women of all ages, nationality, and degrees of appeal, and they will be your companion for the evening to hit the high spots. They're very friendly, but you get only what you pay for, and if you take aboard too much hooch and pass out, they frisk your pockets, and you wake up in an alley with indistinct memories, a thick tongue, and no money.

One of the high spots is Whaler Joe's.

Whaler Joe's is a beer parlor. Really, it's a saloon. But the word "saloon" is outlawed in California, so Whaler Joe calls it a beer parlor.

Upstairs over Whaler Joe's is a place you can go if you're a "friend" and have some jack. It's not called anything, because whatever you tried to call it, it's *still* outlawed in the State of California.

Whaler Joe's is situated at the very beginning of Fisherman's Wharf, so the scream and its many ghostly echoes sounded through the open doors and raced along the bar.

"Did you hear that?" Whaler Joe asked.

"What?"

"Like somebody yelling."

"I didn't hear anything," Sandy Taylor said.

Whaler Joe was a huge, deep-chested man, built like a heavyweight professional wrestler. His stomach had taken aboard a bit too much food in recent years, and bulged a little, but Joe was still able to hold a Japanese in one hand, a Mexican in the other, and knock their heads together and pitch them violently through the front door.

Joe got his prefix name, "Whaler," from his early experiences off the coast of Alaska. His beer parlor had real whaling harpoons crossed like swords along an entire wall, and there were actual photographs of Whaler Joe "whale fishing" in the days before commercialization developed the idea of shooting harpoons at whales out of cannons.

"There it is again," Whaler Joe said.

"What?"

"That yelling. Like a woman, sort of a scream."

SANDY TAYLOR put his stein of beer on the bar, cocked his head and listened. He didn't hear

anything but the drone of half-drunken voices along the bar and the tin-can music from an automatic player piano that drummed out any of six tunes for a nickel each, the most modern being "Sweet Sue."

"Shut that damn' thing off!" Whaler Joe barked.

He strode around the bar to the piano and punched a lever. The music suddenly ceased.

"What's the idea!" an American tuna fisherman demanded. "That's *my* nickel! What—"

"Pipe down!" Whaler Joe's voice boomed. "Everybody pipe down!"

They piped down. They all became rigid, formed a stiff scene as is made by a movie film stopped dead in the projector.

"Listen a minute," Whaler Joe said. He tipped his big round head to one side, listening.

The silence was strange. A fat rat scampered over the sawdust and vanished in a hole by the kitchen. They could all hear, faintly, the dance orchestra playing from Fisherman's Heaven, the deep-throated whistle of a trans-Pacific steamship crawling through dense fog around the breakwater.

"*Listen*," Whaler Joe repeated tensely.

They all listened.

Sandy Taylor, hunched at the bar, cocked an ear.

Not one man in the place knew who Sandy Taylor really was. They thought he was a "tuna man" between jobs; they guessed he might have been employed at one time as a foreman at the Van Cise Cannery. Whaler Joe figured him to be a con-man, or a gambler.

None of them had the slightest suspicion that he was the ace undercover operator for the Harbor Police. Sandy Taylor couldn't let them suspect. That was part of the job. His value to the Harbor Police grew largely from his ability to meet the fishermen, hangers-on, and the people along that cobblestone street on even terms. His value was in being a policeman and not looking like a policeman. He wasn't a fictional detective who disguised himself with beard and dark glasses; he disguised himself by his easy mingling with the working men of the harbor, by mixing with everybody except police officers, by living in the district, by pretending to get drunk in the district, by gambling there, by "asking for touches" there, by, occasionally, asking for jobs.

"There it goes again," Whaler Joe said.

They all heard it this time.

Down the bar a man remarked loudly: "Sounds like a dame, and she don't like something." He guffawed as though he'd gotten over a top-form joke.

SANDY TAYLOR dropped his cigarette into a cuspidor. His eyes narrowed perceptibly. His work tonight wasn't, he thought, with a woman's scream. But as a law officer he had to respond.

In a way, it annoyed him.

He was supposed to be working on another case. A case of a stolen necklace.

It happened last week.

The steam yacht, *Mary II*, had been pulling up anchor in the waters of the Southern California Yacht Club for a cruise to Santa Catalina Island. Lots of distinguished guests aboard. Mrs. Edgar Farnsworth-Smith was aboard. There was a party. Somebody who didn't belong to the party managed to reach the yacht via rowboat, get aboard, and lift a twenty-thousand dollar pearl necklace from Mrs. Edgar Farnsworth-Smith's cabin. It was a dark night, foggy, like tonight. The yacht's captain took a shot at the thief. His shot went wild. The thief rowed away in the fog. The captain heard the dip-swish of the oars.

Sandy Taylor was commissioned to recover the stolen necklace. Somebody in the harbor had taken it. That person would have to "unload" it, "fence" it. Sandy Taylor told the Captain of the Harbor Police: "I'll drift around; pretty soon I'm bound to find out who lifted the string of pearls."

So tonight Sandy dropped in for some drinks at Whaler Joe's. He figured that any man who had fenced twenty-thousand dollars' worth of necklace, if he were a harbor man, would be spending the profits at Whaler Joe's.

Whaler Joe hadn't been back of the bar when Sandy Taylor first entered. That was at ten P.M. At eleven P.M. Whaler came down the stairs.

Sandy Taylor had a deep hunch that the man who swiped the string of pearls might be upstairs, gambling his profits. But Sandy didn't know Whaler Joe well enough to inquire about the "customers" upstairs.

At eleven-twenty, the first scream and its many eerie echoes drifted into the beer parlor. At eleven-twenty-five, Whaler Joe said to Sandy: "What'd I tell you! You hear it?"

"I heard it," Sandy clipped.

He made a run for the front door. Whaler Joe clumped over the sawdust after him.

Somebody shouted: "It was a dame, all right—yelling bloody murder!" and every customer of Whaler Joe's set down his drink and joined in the surge through the front door into the street.

Sandy Taylor was long, lean, and hard-muscled; he had the stride of a marathon runner as he headed out through the wet fog toward the outer end of Fisherman's Wharf. The customers of the parlor had been drinking heavily and they panted along far

behind; only the powerfully built Whaler Joe could keep up with Sandy.

IT was thickly dark at the end of the wharf. The riding lights of boats were like timid candles blinking in the mist. A night light burned over the locked doors of the Van Cise Cannery; another light burned brightly in the fog from the top of a derrick-like apparatus used to hoist tons of tuna from the holds of the fishing tugs.

Sandy Taylor heard the scream again. His shoes slithered on the planks that were always slippery from fish and the melting ice used to preserve the catches.

Sandy Taylor stopped at the edge of the wharf and looked down.

A broad-beamed tug lay against the pier pilings, moored. It was dark and deserted except for the electric hand lantern set on the deck by the pilot house, and the two dim figures showing in the glow.

One of the figures was sprawled face down, motionless. The other figure was Dorothy March.

Sandy Taylor swung around on the wooden pier ladder, greasy from fog and the boots of fishermen. He descended rapidly to the deck of the launch.

Dorothy March threw her arms about him, hid her face against him, sobbing tensely, sobbing in tight, throaty little gasps.

"It's Daddy—I think—I think he's dead!"

For a moment he just stood there, holding her. He was fond of Dorothy March. She had been born and raised in the harbor district, but she had grown up aloof to the harbor men. She had dark hair and dark eyes and a figure that the men stood and watched when she walked along the street.

She'd been taking care of Dad March for years. Old Dad needed plenty of taking care of. He had once been skipper on a tanker and since retiring on a small income he had little interest in anything but talk of ships and rye whiskey. The rye and the talk went together. Rye led to talk and talk led to rye.

Sandy Taylor said gently: "Let me look at him."

He knelt down beside the sprawled figure, moved the lantern closer. Up above on the pier many white faces stared down. Whaler Joe and two others dropped easily down the ladder. Dad March's head had a queer twist from the neck. There was blood in the matted gray hair. His neck was broken. One of his arms was far stretched toward a shattered gin bottle.

A voice behind Sandy Taylor remarked: "The old boy fell off the pier."

Taylor looked around. It was Jeff Reynolds. Jeff was one of the harbor's loafers. He had a thin, bony frame from which his clothes hung loosely, a sharp

discolored nose, and never a job. He lived by chiseling and selling lottery tickets. He liked to tell about the time he sailed a canoe to South America on a bet and the long period he put in as Second Mate on the S.S. Flower of the East.

"How do you know he fell off the pier?" Taylor asked directly.

Jeff Reynolds shuffled his feet awkwardly. "Huh?" But he didn't ask Taylor why he was so curious. His decisive way seemed to give him the right to be leader in this situation.

"I said how do you know? Did you see it?"

"No. Hell, I didn't see it. But it's easy to see how it happened. He fell off the pier and banged his noggin on the deck. He was awful drunk."

Taylor looked over at Dorothy. "Were you with him?"

She shook her head slowly. Her lips moved and it was a second before she got the words out. "No. He said he'd be home by ten, and when he didn't come I got worried. I went out looking for him. You know how he gets when he's had too much to drink. I was afraid he might be lying in some alley. I came along with the lantern. I saw his hat back there, so I held the lantern over the edge of the pier. This—" She couldn't say any more.

TAYLOR spoke over his shoulder to Jeff Reynolds, "What makes *you* think he was drunk?"

"I seen him."

"When?"

"Tonight. He barged into Whaler's early. Didn't he, Whaler?"

"Yeah," said Whaler Joe. "He come in about seven."

"He got very drunk?"

"Yeah," Whaler Joe nodded. "He wanted to cut me high cards for ten bucks a cut. I kind-a hated to play when he was drunk, but he got nasty about it. So I took him in the backroom and played him. Jeff was there. Old Dad had a run of bad luck. He kept calling for double or nothing on the cuts, and that made him lose worse. I hate to see a guy lose so much jack, but after all, cards is cards. It might be *me* losing next time. We all gotta take our turns."

"How much did he lose?"

"Well—" Whaler Joe stroked hard jaw. "It must've been five thousand. Say five thousand five hundred."

Sandy Taylor brought up with a jerk, his muscles tensing. "What?"

Dorothy March gasped. "Five thousand *dollars*? How could Daddy—"

"Where did he get that much money to lose?" Sandy Taylor asked quickly.

"How the hell do I know?" Whaler Joe snapped. "I don't ask guys where they get their jack. Anyway, Old Dad had an income."

"But it's only a hundred a month!" Dorothy exclaimed. "We use that to live on."

Whaler Joe shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe he won it somewheres in a lottery or something. How do I know?"

Sandy Taylor did some thinking. Dorothy sat on a bench by the pilot house, sobbing in that throaty way, sobbing into her hands.

Sandy said to the men above: "Go call the cops. We'll have to tell them all about this."

"Everything?" Whaler Joe asked worriedly.

"Sure. Why?"

"Well, I sort of hate to admit about the gambling. They might hold me on it."

"Don't be a stoop," Sandy said. "You tell your story. Everybody gambles around here. They won't hold you."

Jeff Reynolds scratched his head thoughtfully. "You know," he began, "it *is* sort of funny when you stop think of it. Where *would* Old Dad get so much cash all of a sudden?"

Nobody answered that, but they all thought about it. Sandy Taylor began searching the dead man's pockets. He found no money. He found only a house key and a flat leather case. He held the case to the light. Gold lettering on the outside read:

SWANSON AND COMPANY  
Jewelers

Sandy whistled softly and opened the case. It was lined with purple velvet formed in a shape to hold a necklace nestling there, but there was no necklace. The jewel case was empty.

"Holy smokes!" Jeff Reynolds grunted, peering over Sandy's shoulder. "Say, you remember reading about the necklace that was swiped from some rich old hen on the *Mary II* last week?"

Sandy studied the man carefully. "What about it?"

"Well, I seen in the paper the pearls come from Swanson and Company. Honest I did."

"So did I," Sandy Taylor agreed pointedly.

"You know what I bet?"

"What do you bet?"

"I bet," Jeff Reynolds said in a voice that carried to the men looking down from the pier, "I bet Old Dad was the guy that swiped that string of oyster-drops. There's the case right there. He goes and fences the pearls and that's where he got all the money he lost to Whaler Joe tonight. So Dad gets tight and comes barging out here and falls off the pier—"

Dorothy March was clinging to Sandy's arm then. He saw the shine and shimmer of her eyes in the lantern's glow. "Sandy—you don't believe that, do you? You don't believe daddy stole the necklace? Not really?"

"It sure looks like it," Jeff Reynolds said.

"Sure," there was a note of irony in Sandy Taylor's tone, "it looks like it, all right. The trouble is, it looks *too much* like it!"

THE undercover man remained in the deep dark beside the Van Cise Cannery until the last curiosity seeker had gone. It took about an hour, altogether, including the removal of the body.

The police made a mild investigation and were very convinced that Dad March had met death by accidentally falling off the pier to the deck of the tug while intoxicated. The thing that took them away still interested was the jewel case; it looked like a definite clue to the missing Farnsworth-Smith pearls. Also, the tale of Dad March's gambling loss looked like a clue.

When the last footstep, the last huskily excited voice, died away in the foggy night, Sandy Taylor stepped out of the corner in which he'd been waiting and snapped on a pocket flash.

The beam was a weird white shaft in the damp gloom; it made a circle of brightness on the worn wharf planks. Sandy Taylor walked behind the circle, slowly, hunched in thought.

He stood for a while at the place from which Dad March must have pitched over.

Heels tapped faintly somewhere behind him, and he immediately switched the light off. He dropped his hand into his pocket, closing his fingers over the butt of his service Colt.

When the heels sounded closer, he aimed the flash in that direction and suddenly snapped the switch.

Dorothy March shuddered and stood in petrified fright as the beam of light played on her.

"Hello," Sandy said.

"Oh—is it you? I've been hunting for you. I couldn't find you back on the street."

He lowered the flash from her eyes, turned it straight down. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes." Her voice was breathlessly tense. "It's something—well, I didn't know whether to tell the police or not. Maybe it's silly, and anyway I'm his daughter and they'd think I was just talking."

"What?"

"You've been a good friend, Sandy. You don't believe daddy stole that necklace from the yacht, do you?"

"I'm pretty sure he didn't," the undercover man told her. "Is that what you wanted to ask?"

"Not all. It's something else. It's about that bottle, the one that was broken by his hand on the deck."

Sandy's hard smile wasn't noticeable in the drifting mist. Distantly, in the outer harbor, a vessel hooted mournfully. The fog siren screeched eerily from the breakwater.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "I thought of it, too. It was a gin bottle. Your dad never drank anything but rye. He'd rather be sober than drink gin."

"Yes—poor old dad. He couldn't help drinking. It was because he missed being a skipper so much. Don't you think there's something queer about the gin bottle?"

HE put an arm across her shoulders, gently, and said slowly: "Look, Dorothy; he's gone. The thing that happened to him, happened quick. I don't think he felt much pain. It didn't make any difference to *him* which way he died, because it was all over in a second. But sooner or later you may have to realize *this*, Dorothy. I *don't think* Old Dad had any accident."

Her breath sucked in tightly. "You mean—"

"I mean his neck was broken, all right. But not from falling off the pier."

"You think somebody— Do you, think—"

"Yes," he said firmly.

"But who would do that? Dad never had any enemies. Who would do a cruel thing like that to him?"

"That's just it. He never had an enemy. That's why this person who did it is extra devilish. I'm going to catch him, Dorothy. That's the only thing we can do for dad now."

She clutched his arm. "You know *who*?"

"I've got a guess. I'm going to check it."

"I'm going with you!"

"No. You go home. This is apt to be tough."

"I don't care. I'm going. Do you think I wouldn't be there when the devil that did that to daddy was trapped?" She laughed in a tight little way. "I'll be there. I'll help. If it's too dangerous We'll get the police. But we won't let him get away, will we, Sandy?"

"You better run home," he pursued.

"I'm not afraid. I'm not the kind of a weak sister that faints and things. I can take care of myself. Once a man grabbed me when I was coming home through the alleys from a show. I knocked him down. Really I did. I socked him right on the button."

Sandy Taylor couldn't help smiling. She was a grand kid. He could just picture her socking that masher on the button.

He patted her shoulder and said firmly: "Okay, Dot. Take a hitch in your belt, roll up your sleeves, and let's get going."

He led the way down the darkest side of the pier along the railroad branch that went out to the Cannery. Back at the approach to the pier, the going got very slushy from melted ice, fish scales, sawdust, and mud. He held his flash all the way, moving slowly, studying the ground.

When he got into the deep slush he went even more cautiously over the surface, studying every inch.

Finally, he said: "Here. This is the place. This is where Old Dad died."

"Here?"

He nodded, bending over the muddy surface where truck marks and ruts and holes showed. "I noticed slush on dad's clothes. The police thought it got there because he was so drunk he fell down before he got to the end of the pier. I had a different hunch, and here's the proof."

"Proof?"

"Yeah. Those are two sets of footprints, fresh, made tonight after the trucking had stopped. Right here is a dragging rut where a man fell. After that there's only one set of prints leading back the way we've come."

"Oh!" the girl managed. "Oh!"

"Want to go home? Had enough?"

She drew herself up. "Certainly not. I won't have enough till we get to the end."

He patted her slim shoulder again and wondered why he'd never asked her to marry him. He was an awful dodo, he decided. Later on, when things got calm again, he'd have to see about changing his past neglect.

"This way, Dot," he said.

THE player piano was blasting out "Alexander's Ragtime Band" when they walked through the doors into Whaler Joe's. A big crowd of men and some women lined the bar—Americans, Japanese, Mexicans. It was going on to two A.M., closing time. Everybody was talking about the death of Dad March.

Whaler Joe nodded to Sandy Taylor and locked the front doors. "I got to close," he said. "If I bust the ordinance, they'll take my license away." At the top of his lungs, he bellowed: "Polish off, folks. Bar's closed. No more sales."

He flipped half the light switches. The bartenders began to count their receipts. The sailors and fishermen went right on drinking, taking their time.

Sandy Taylor walked directly to the far end of the place. It was dimly lighted down there. Jeff

Reynolds was sipping cognac. He looked at Dorothy from bloodshot eyes. "Say, that was too bad about your old man, wasn't it?"

Sandy strolled to the wall and examined the crossed harpoons. He saw a board that held a set of six belaying pins as curios from sailing vessels. Nobody paid attention to those curios. They were covered with dust. Except one. One had no dust. It looked slightly damp.

Sandy smiled in a hard way and went back and stood by the table where Jeff Reynolds was sitting.

"Jeff," he began mildly, "did you hear the latest?"

Jeff Reynolds hunched his thin shoulders. His hooked nose twitched slightly, like a rabbit's. "Huh?"

"The latest is that Dad March didn't die by accident. He was murdered."

Jeff Reynolds stared at him blearily for a long time. "You mean somebody killed him?"

Sandy leaned over the table, saying pointedly: "Yeah—that's exactly what I mean."

Whaler Joe strode up heavily. "I got to close up. It's the law. I got to—" he broke off, noticing the tense way Sandy Taylor stared at Jeff Reynolds and the shifty-eyed Jeff looked at the floor. "What's the matter?"

Reynolds shuffled his feet, slowly got up. "You hear the latest. They say Dad March was knocked off."

"Knocked off?" Whaler Joe looked from Dorothy to Sandy to Jeff. "Who'd knock Old Dad off?"

Jeff cleared his throat. "Know what I think? I think Dad stole that necklace, see? He cashed it with a fence. He got a lot of dough, see? Some of it, he lost gambling with Whaler Joe. Then some tramp tailed him when he left here and knocked him off for the rest and made it look like an accident."

Nobody at the table spoke. Down at the other end of the room the fishermen gabbed and drank, and the player piano hammered ceaselessly.

Finally, Sandy Taylor dropped a hand into his pocket, stood back and said to Jeff Reynolds: "Know what *I* think, Jeff? I think you're *too* full of ideas on this case. I'll tell you the real lowdown."

"*Lowdown*?" Jeff Reynolds coughed into his palm, shuffled his feet, batted his eyes.

"Yeah," Sandy Taylor said to him. "Somebody hoisted the Farnsworth-Smith string of pearls, but it wasn't Dad March. The police made a big search, because Mrs. Farnsworth-Smith has a lot of influence and the insurance company doesn't want to hold the sack. This guy that swiped the necklace from the *Mary II* at the Yacht Club got scared. He

wanted to cool the heat down. So he decided to frame the theft on somebody else. Dad March was an easygoing fellow. So he picked on Dad to take the rap."

Jeff Reynolds coughed and glanced nervously around the room.

Sandy went on: "Whaler Joe had some curios on that wall—you can see some belaying pins over there. All but one have dust on them. The police will check that *one* and find it has mud and blood and hair and fingerprints. They'll be able to see that under a microscope. Dad March was a little tight, all right. The guy who stole the pearls tailed him out carrying a belaying pin and a bottle of gin.

"He broke Dad's neck in the slush back of the cannery with the belaying pin. Then he dragged Dad's body to the end of the pier and tossed him over to the deck of the launch so it would look like Dad fell over. He dropped the bottle of gin down on the deck. One of his mistakes was right there. Dad March hated gin. He drank rye. The killer threw the gin there because he figured it showed how drunk Dad had been. The killer also planted the jewel case on Dad."

Reynolds gasped. "Planted?"

"Obviously," Sandy Taylor clipped. "If a man steals pearls and fences them, what the devil would he keep the case for? It's nutty. That's the cheesy part of the frame-up. If I stole a string of pearls and hocked them, would I go carrying the empty case around with me so people would have a nice clue as to the thief? Nuts! The guy that figured that part of the frame was a moron."

Jeff Reynolds was sweating profusely at the forehead and on his upper lip.

Sandy continued: "You overplayed your part, Jeff. You wanted the police to think it was an accident, so you shot your mouth off as soon as we discovered the body. You had an explanation for the whole thing. It was too good an explanation. You explained it so every man there would get the bee in his bonnet and tell your ideas to the police."

Sandy backed up to the side door that led to Whaler Joe's upstairs gambling rooms and a downstairs exit. He turned the key in the lock. The front door had already been locked by Whaler Joe as he obeyed the ordinance for liquor dealers. Nobody could get out now.

The fishermen down the bar, the bartenders, none of them knew anything out of the way was taking place.

JEFF REYNOLDS sneered: "So you think I killed him, huh? You think I swiped the belaying pin, planted the gin bottle. That's what you think, huh?"

"No," Sandy Taylor said definitely.

Jeff Reynolds jaw dropped laxly. "No?"

"No. You're too weak. You couldn't plan *anything*. You didn't swipe the necklace. You haven't got enough muscle to break a man's neck, even with a belaying pin. And you haven't the guts. You were just the killer's stooge. The killer didn't want to risk exposure by giving an explanation to Dad March's death, so he had *you* do it."

Reynolds wiped the sweat away. "Anyway," he grunted "you're nuts, because if Dad didn't swipe and fence that necklace, where did he get the five grand he lost at cards to Whaler Joe?"

"There wasn't any five grand," Sandy Taylor said. "That was Whaler Joe's idea to make things look worse for Dad March. Whaler Joe didn't mind confessing to a little gambling if it further put the pearl theft on Dad. Whaler Joe has the muscle to break a man's neck with a belaying pin. And Whaler Joe knows how to use one; he used to be a whaler off Alaska. I don't think Joe fenced that necklace he stole yet."

Sandy glanced toward the corner and the safe which the bartender was opening to tuck away the night's profits. "Maybe the necklace is there. We can get the safe opened on a court order. Maybe Joe's fingerprints will be on that belaying pin. Maybe you were only the stooge, Jeff, but you can be arrested for criminal complicity. Maybe—"

Dorothy March screamed. "Look out, Sandy!"

The chair hurled in a swift arc. Sandy Taylor ducked it by inches. It crashed to pieces against the wall. Whaler Joe picked up another chair, whipping it at Sandy.

Sandy ducked again and yanked his gun out.

While he was drawing the gun, Whaler Joe snatched another chair in his strong meaty hands. Dorothy March threw herself at him, spoiling his aim. The chair went wild.

Down the bar a dozen masculine throats yelled: "Fight! Hey, boys! *Fight!*"

Whaler Joe ran around the table and grabbed the knob of the side door. He wrestled frantically with it, but he couldn't get the door open; Sandy Taylor had already taken care of that angle.

"Look out, Sandy!" Dorothy screamed again.

Jeff Reynolds had pulled a long, sharp tuna knife from under his coat. His left fist smashed against Dorothy's face, sending her hard and sprawling to the sawdust floor. Jeff rushed at Sandy with the tuna knife held underhand in expert fashion. In that skillful way, it was worse than a gun; it might be faster than a gun. It was intended to go deep into Sandy's groin and rip slashingly upwards.

SANDY sidestepped just in time. His gun *whammed* three times and Jeff Reynolds dived slidingly across the floor and lay still. The blade of the knife had taken a slice from Sandy Taylor's side.

Whaler Joe snatched a harpoon from the wall. His tremendous muscles bulged and tensed under his shirt. His face was a hard, muscular mask, his eyes narrowed, his thick lips grinned smugly at Sandy.

The harpoon hissed through the air as Sandy ducked, shooting twice. Neither bullet struck; Sandy had lost his aim in ducking.

The harpoon buried itself many inches into the mahogany bar.

With amazing speed for a man so big, Whaler Joe had snatched another harpoon from the wall display. He held it poised. Sandy Taylor crouched with his Colt in readiness.

Nobody in the room spoke. The player piano finished off suddenly. Fishermen flattened themselves against the walls, out of the way, hid behind the bar, or lay flat on the floor. All watching. The Japanese stood like a small army, their faces showing no emotion, no fear—just watching.

Whaler Joe said thickly to Sandy Taylor: "All right, cowboy! You got a bullet, and I got a harpoon. Let's go!"

Dorothy tried to scramble up off the floor. She was crying out continuously. "Somebody! Help! Stop it! They'll kill each other! Somebody *do* something!"

Nobody moved.

Then Whaler Joe's heavy right arm flashed.

Sandy Taylor had been watching for that. His eyes were as unblinking as a cat's watching a mouse. He tipped up the table before him as a shield. The harpoon pierced the wood, stabbed through for half its length, and Sandy winced in pain as the sharp steel head grazed his thigh.

His gun had fired its last shot as the harpoon flew at him. Whaler Joe's big body lurched. He grabbed at his side instinctively.

His eyes had a wildness now, the gleam that's a cross between insanity and a hysterical fight for life. In his nervous hysteria, the bullet in his side didn't hurt him.

"All right, cowboy," he laughed crazily, snatching down another harpoon. "Now I got this, and you ain't got *anything*! How you like it? How you like it?"

Sandy Taylor picked up the seat of the broken chair and held it before him. His face had a deadly whiteness, but the nervousness was controlled. His hands didn't shake as he watched the poised

harpoon. Blood seeped down from his side, from his leg.

"Go ahead," he challenged, "I'm ready."

Dorothy March ran yelling toward the front doors. "Somebody call the police! Where's the phone! Please! Quick!"

The fishermen just stood rigid, or peered over the bar, or looked up from their positions prone on the floor. They had eyes for nothing but the fighters. They were watching a gladiatorial contest. They knew only one man would live. Their eyes flashed with primitive gleam as they waited to see which man it would be. They saw the huge man who knew how to hurl harpoons and had one ready; they saw the lithe young man who had only the seat of a chair.

DOROTHY MARCH, trying to wrest the front doors open, looked around. She saw the two men waiting, grinning coldly at each other. Her body slumped suddenly in a faint and became an unnoticed fallen thing on the floor.

"Where do you want it?" Whaler Joe snarled. "In the belly or in the teeth?"

Sandy Taylor didn't flinch. He couldn't allow himself to flinch then. He was the only person who would be active in his own defense.

He said: "You're awful good at clubbing a drunken old skipper to death with a belaying pin, but maybe you're not so good now. Come on, Joe, toss it!"

The harpoon lanced out. With incredible swiftness, Sandy Taylor shot up the chair seat, tilted it suddenly, and the harpoon glanced wild from its surface, hit with a mighty crash a row of bottles behind the bar.

Sandy Taylor drove forward like a quarterback bucking the scrimmage line. He hit Whaler Joe low and the big man spilled back against the wall, shaking it with the violence of the contact, sending harpoons clattering to the floor.

Sandy had a chair now. It whipped over his head, smashed down, made a sickening thud on Whaler Joe's skull. The huge man slumped forward and didn't move. His mouth, half-open, had sawdust in it, and seeping blood.

"I'm sorry I fainted," Dorothy said. "I didn't mean to get like that, Sandy. I just couldn't help it when he had the harpoon."

"You did fine," he told her. "You did better than I thought you would, and that's *something*. I told you it might be tough, didn't I?"

Three radio cops and two men from the Harbor Police strode into the parlor. Sandy Taylor, the undercover man, was pulling a string of pearls from Whaler Joe's safe.



One of the cops walked over to the safe and stared at Sandy. He saw the blood on his leg, leaking sluggishly from his side, the sweat dripping from his chin.

"Hi, fella," he greeted. "What's been going on here? What's the reason for all this?"

Sandy held up the Farnsworth-Smith necklace. "Here's your reason," he said. "It's just a piece of string. Just a piece of string—only it has pearls on it."