

Blackie saw Joe's gun, heard the blasting report: Then everyone in the room was shooting



Second Generation

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "Mortal Formula," "Sinew," etc.

To those who worry about the problem of youth in this melting pot of ours, we commend Blackie. He knew more of what it was all about than his old man ever guessed

BLACKIE never knew where his nickname came from. Almost all the boys he knew had nicknames, so he took it for granted that he should have one too.

His mother had died when he was hardly more than a baby; Blackie couldn't even remember her at all. But there was one large colored picture of her always hanging in the living room, and Blackie looked at it and was proud that the beautiful woman had been his mother.

He was proud of other things, too, like belonging to the boys' club and being a scout, and prouder still that he

was an American. His father wasn't an American. This worried Blackie a lot. His father had been brought to this country when he was a very young boy, but he had never become a citizen.

Blackie first remembered his father when the two of them had lived alone in a little two-room tenement away over on the East Side. He had been four, and each morning his father would get up and fix breakfast for the two of them and then carry Blackie down to the floor below, where a woman with a houseful of children of her own looked after him all day.

Then in the evening Blackie's father

would come home, clean and nice-smelling from the bakery where he worked, and take Blackie in his arms and smile at him with his even white teeth and his flashing black eyes. He didn't call him Blackie; nobody did. It was after that that someone gave him the nickname and it stuck.

"Hi, my little Niccolo!" His father would scamper up the stairs with him on his back.

Then there would be bread hot from the bakery ovens, and cold meat that his father had brought on his way home; and for Blackie there was milk to drink, while his father washed his own food down with gulps of wine that he made himself every year.

Blackie used to look often at the big picture of his mother and wish that she were there and he didn't have to stay all day with the woman on the floor below. Sometimes he thought that her big eyes were actually looking at him, and once or twice he thought that her lips curled just as if she was smiling. But he knew as he grew older that this wasn't true; yet even after that he still liked to make believe that she was actually there with him.

WHEN he was seven Blackie no longer had to stay all day with the neighbors. He went to school part of the day and the rest of the time he was free to come and go as he pleased.

He had already been nicknamed by then, and even his father called him Blackie. "When we get a lot of money, Blackie," his father used to say, "we'll go back to the old country."

Blackie didn't say anything to this, but he wasn't at all sure that he wanted to go back to the old country. Then without warning at all, Blackie's father lost his job at the bakery. It seemed funny having his father home all the

time with him, just like on Sunday.

"Just for a layoff," Blackie's father explained to his friends. "Two, three weeks, a month maybe, things start right up again."

But they didn't start up in a month or even three months, and by then there were a lot of people out of work and Blackie could see that his father was really getting worried.

"What the matter with these people?" he would complain loudly whenever he had an audience. "They take a man's job, they put him on the street."

Every week he had to spend a little of the hoarded money, and as each dollar disappeared the shadows deepened in his eyes and the lines about his mouth changed his smile to a sneer.

He would sit for hours with a bottle of home-made sweet wine at his elbow; dreaming, Blackie used to think, of Italy. And always Blackie was in dread that he would decide suddenly to return.

It had been almost a year since the bakery had laid him off, and Blackie knew that the money his father had saved was almost all gone. Sometimes even he went to bed at night with a big hollow in his stomach because there was no longer bread and cold meat or a big bowl of noodles with pieces of meat stuck all through it.

His father began going out at nights and other men started coming into their room and talking with his father. The children in the neighborhood that he played with began to speak of his father with a new respect.

But it was weeks before he learned that his father had a new job. He was what the other children called a runner, but Blackie didn't know what a runner was, and one night he asked his father when he saw him getting ready to go out.

"Joe"—he had called him Joe for a long time—"what's a runner?"

"You keep your mouth shut," Joe said savagely. Then in more friendly tone, "A guy's got to eat, a guy's got to have shoes to wear."

Blackie didn't ask his father again, but he kept his eyes and ears open and pretty soon he knew that his father drove a beer truck. He carried a gun, too, and he left for work after dark and was usually back by daylight. There was money now and food, plenty of it. Blackie even had dimes and quarters to spend when he wanted to ask Joe for them.

But Joe slept during the day with the gun under his pillow and the door was locked in the afternoons when Blackie came home from school. Once a policeman in uniform stopped him in the hallway of the tenement building and said, "You're Joe Martelli's boy, aren't you?"

Blackie admitted that he was, and heard the door to their room open very softly. He could picture Joe standing there in his underwear listening, maybe with the gun in his hand.

"Tell Joe he's riding for a fall," the officer said, and went on out to the street.

Blackie raced up the stairs, and sure enough Joe was there with the door open, waiting for him. Joe hit him once on the head with the flat of his hand. It was the first time Joe had ever hit him and Blackie was stunned not so much by the blow as by the unexpectedness.

"What you tell John Law, huh?" Joe stared down at him, no sign of laughter in his eyes now.

"I didn't tell him nothing, Joe. He asked me was I your kid and I said yeah." Joe put the gun down and Blackie continued because he felt that

it was his duty. "He said you're riding for a fall."

IT WASN'T long after that when they moved. It was a new neighborhood, strange kids. There was better furniture, and the only way you could get up or down was in the elevator. A woman came in now each morning and cleaned their rooms and sometimes she stayed and cooked dinner.

It was summer and Blackie wasn't going to school. He was nine years old, and the only time that he wasn't happy was when he looked up at the picture of his mother which Joe had brought with them when they moved. She never smiled at him now, and of course he knew by then that she never had really.

Joe wasn't the same either. He still talked of going back to the old country; but where before he had spoken of hundreds of dollars, he now spoke of thousands.

He bought an automobile, and Blackie would see him sometimes at the wheel. He was never alone; there was always one man or more with him. Hard, tight-lipped men, the same as Joe.

Blackie found the boys' club that winter. Saturday afternoons and evenings he could go there. He had told them his name, and the man in charge had looked hurriedly around when he had said, "Joe Martelli's my father."

But they let him come, and once when they wanted to collect money for a billiard table for the basement he had asked Joe for the money. "How much you want, kid?" Joe asked casually.

"Ten dollars," Blackie said, not being at all sure how much would be needed.

"Hell, you can't get a table for that; here's fifty."

Blackie took the money to the man he had first talked to. "I asked Joe for some money for the billiard table. He gave me this." Blackie was proud of the big bills when he handed them to the superintendent.

The man took the money and dropped it on the desk as though it burned his fingers. "You'd better take it back," he said; and then, "This is to be paid for by the boys themselves."

"So my money ain't good enough for the damn punk." Joe glared at Blackie as if it was his fault the money had been refused. "Well, you ain't goin' there no more, see. Joe's kid ain't goin' where Joe's money can't go."

Blackie tried to explain that it wasn't just Joe's money; but his heart wasn't in it, because he couldn't forget the way the man had dropped the bills when he had told him their source.

Blackie stayed away for a week, and the superintendent met him on the street one day and inquired the reason for his absence. Blackie struggled between his desire to tell the truth and loyalty to Joe.

"Joe," he said under the man's cross-questioning, "told me not to go no more."

"I don't want you to disobey your father," the superintendent said, "but you'll be welcome any time you want to come."

And after a few more days Blackie did go back. It was Christmas time, and Joe appeared far too busy to check up on whether he went or not.

ONE morning in January Joe didn't come in before school time, and that afternoon when Blackie came home from school the room was still empty. He was frightened for the first time in his life, and sat huddled in the room until after dark because he was

too frightened to leave. He just waited.

He slept finally, still sitting in the chair with all his clothes on, and later during the night he was awakened by the sound of a key in the lock. He waited, holding his breath, until he recognized his father's figure against the lighted corridor. He was not alone; a man walked on either side and supported Joe's slumped body.

They eased Joe onto the bed and then one of them crossed the room and snapped the bolt on the door. "Hi y'u, Blackie?" Joe said weakly from between bloodless lips.

"Joe!" Blackie's voice sounded away off somewhere.

"Shut up," one of the men who had brought Joe in said. "He's all right. God knows why."

The next morning a man and woman came to see Joe. The man had a black bag and Blackie knew that he was a doctor, but it wasn't the doctor Joe had brought when he had the measles. The woman stayed for a week, looking after Joe, cooking their meals. Then Joe was up and around again, and in just a little while he was going out as if nothing had happened.

Blackie saw that it made a difference to the other kids, even to the superintendent at the boys' club, his being Joe Martelli's boy.

They moved again, that next summer, and this time they had a house all to themselves. That is, it was Joe's house, though there were always extra people in it. There were two cars in the garage that could be reached without going outdoors. And the men who were there called Joe "Boss", when they called him anything to his face.

There were women, too, different ones. An old wrinkled-faced woman cooked their meals and had charge of

the house. Sometimes there were parties, and then for a day or two Joe would sit around drinking with some girl. Hardly ever the same girl twice.

Blackie wore long pants now, though he was only ten. He had found the local library and another boys' club. He could have money any time he wanted it and as much of it as he wanted.

"I'll get you a car, kid, when you're sixteen."

One thing pleased Blackie: Joe didn't talk so much about going back to the old country. Once, when he was half drunk, he took Blackie into his bedroom and after several failures opened a big safe he had had built into the wall. It look to Blackie as if the inside were half full of money, stacks and stacks of greenbacks. "When we get her full, kid, we're pulling up stakes."

THE next morning, though, he was sober, and when he was sober he didn't talk about going away. He took Blackie in the car with him out into the country. There was the driver—Joe no longer drove his own car—and another man who sat on the back seat beside them.

Joe showed him a small pistol. It had gold inlaid grips. "For you," Joe said, and Blackie's fingers trembled with excitement when at last it was in his own hands. He had never fired a gun in his life, but he was anxious now to try this.

When they had driven a few more miles Joe told the driver to stop; and they went, all four of them, and made a target of a piece of paper and stood off taking turns shooting at it.

Blackie took his turn with the others, though he was never able to hit the scrap of paper as Joe and the other men did. One of the men had a bottle that

they passed around. "Give the kid a drink," Joe said.

It made him gag and tears came into his eyes, but he drank it and looked at Joe for approval. "You're Joe Martelli's kid; you remember that, see. We're going places, you and me." Blackie knew that this time Joe wasn't talking about going home to the old country.

A bird came from somewhere and sat on a limb above their heads and began to sing. "Get so you can do this," Joe said, and raised his own gun and shot once. The bird seemed to jump a little way into the air; then it fell and twisted for a moment on the ground.

Blackie said, "Joe!" in a choked-down voice, and the three men laughed.

"It wasn't hurting you," Blackie said. "It hadn't done nothing."

"Take a drink," Joe said. "Be a man, forget it."

But Blackie couldn't forget it. He thought of it that night when he was in his own bed. He had a room to himself, though Joe no longer went out every night.

... Blackie was twelve before he asked Joe's permission to join the Scouts. "A bunch of sissies," Joe said. "What you want to hang around with them for?"

"I like 'em," Blackie said, "and they like me. I know a lot of fellows who've joined."

"Forget it, kid," Joe said. "That ain't no racket for Joe Martelli's kid to be hooked up with."

Blackie knew from the papers now what the name Joe Martelli stood for. His mother's picture still hung in the living room of the new house, but he wondered sometimes whether she would even remember him. Hardly a week passed that he couldn't find Joe's name mentioned in the papers at least once.

Sometimes Joe was gone from home for days and weeks, but it didn't seem to make any difference. There were always the same tight-lipped, beady-eyed men coming and going in the big house.

He got to know many of them by name, but he was always afraid of them and he couldn't get away from the feeling that they were afraid of him because he was Joe Martelli's kid.

JOE was there the night that the cop stopped him as he was entering the gate. "Just a minute, son." The officer stepped in front of him, and almost in no time at all Joe was out of the house and other men followed him.

"What's going on here?" Joe elbowed his way past Blackie to confront the officer.

"Hello, Joe." Blackie could feel the difference in the man's voice. "Don't mind if I ask the boy a question or two, do you?"

"Like hell I don't," Joe said. "That's my kid. Joe Martelli's kid, see. No one asks him questions unless I say the word." He jerked his head. "Go on in the house, Blackie."

They moved aside for him to pass and Blackie heard the officer say, "Some day, Joe, we're going to pin something on you that'll stick."

"Better bring the marines when you try it," Joe said. "If you ain't out of here in thirty seconds you're goin' to be lookin' for a job in the mornin'."

Joe followed Blackie up to his room. "I ever catch you talking to one of those mugs, I'll slap your teeth down your throat."

"What'd he want?" Blackie said. "What'd he want to know?"

"A lot o' things, maybe. Kid, I got this town eatin' out of my hand. Joe Martelli is king-pin, see. When I think of what a fool I was, grindin' ten hours

a day in that bakery, and then near starvin' when I lost the lousy job, when I think of the sap I was then, I could damn near shoot myself."

"Remember," Blackie said, "we used to sleep with the door open so's to get the breeze blowing?"

"Well, ain't we got fans enough? We don't have to keep doors open. You ain't satisfied, huh? You want to be back in some stinkin' walk-up."

"We're different," Blackie said, "we're not like other people. I'm not the same as other kids; they don't even like to play with me."

"You're damn right, you ain't like other kids; you're Niccolo Martelli. All I got to do is snap my fingers and half the big shots in this town'll send their kids to play with you."

"You don't understand," Blackie said. "I don't want to be different, I want to be like other kids. I've joined the Scouts, Joe. A good Scout is a good citizen."

"You ain't lettin' 'em feed you that slop, kid? Good citizen! I'm a good citizen. I ain't never been in jail. I pay my debts."

"I'm one of what they call the second generation. My Scout master says the future of the country rests on our shoulders."

"Don't let the future of this country worry you, kid. We ain't goin' to be here. Another year . . ." He kissed his fingertips in a gesture of farewell.

SOMETHING happened, though, before that year passed. Blackie wasn't sure what it was. But Joe became more and more taciturn and ill-tempered. Once he was gone for a whole month, and Blackie saw by the papers that he was being held without bail for the grand jury.

All the trouble seemed to be caused

by an election that had thrown out the old leaders and prosecutors.

Then Joe was back home, but he was frightened. Even Blackie could tell by his actions that he had changed. More and more men came, making demands upon him. When Blackie looked into the safe, he saw that the huge stack of money had dwindled beyond belief.

Joe called him in one night. There was just the two of them in the room. "Kid," Joe said, "they're ridin' me. I've still got one trump left, then it's you and me for Canada."

"Listen, Joe." Blackie was as near to tears as he had been in a long time. "The papers say if they pin something on you, you'll burn."

Joe laughed. It was an ugly, mean laugh, but it was the only way he ever laughed any more. "Joe Martelli burn? Not a chance, kid. There's too many in the same boat, see. If I go up the river, all these leeches I've been payin' 'll go too."

It seemed to Blackie that everyone in the house was walking on thin egg shells after that. The days dragged, a week seemed like a month. Then he heard an extra being cried on the street. Joe sent him out to buy a copy and met him at the door, grabbing the paper from his hand.

He watched Joe's eyes race across the page and heard a sigh of satisfaction. He didn't see the paper, didn't know until the following day that a baby girl had been kidnaped and was being held for ransom.

Blackie couldn't believe that this was what Joe had meant, but for days he tried to avoid Joe because he knew that deep down in his heart he hated him. There was no clue, yet; the papers said so, and the police were keeping off the case until after the child had been released.

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One paper printed a statement from the baby's father. Blackie carried it in to Joe. No ransom was to be paid. It was, the father said against the principles of liberty and democracy.

"Well," Joe said, "what you showin' that to me for?"

For an instant Blackie thought that he might have been wrong after all. Then he saw Joe's eyes and knew that it was only a bluff.

"You know." Blackie said.

"You're smart, ain't you? You're Joe Martelli's kid. That stuff," he pointed to the paper, "that's newspaper talk, it don't mean a thing. He'll pay and pay plenty when the time comes."

"Joe . . ." Blackie hesitated. He could feel the little gold pistol in his pocket but he didn't know what he was going to do with it. "I'm fourteen, Joe; I'm big enough to say something."

"Say what?" Joe asked. "You keep your nose clean."

"All right." Blackie's hand rested on the smooth inlaid pistol butt; it gave him new strength. "I'm going to Mr. Grayson and tell him he can hold me till you send the kid back."

"You blasted idiot! Do you think that'll save me? You know the penalty for a snatch."

"Then send her back," Blackie said, "and I'll sail for home with you whenever you want to go."

JOE had risen and was coming slowly forward. Blackie went backward until his back was against the door. His hand came out with the small, shiny pistol. "You gave me this, Joe."

"That pea-shooter!" Joe said. "Kid, I'm going to have your hide for this."

"Joe, Joe, I'll shoot." Blackie tried to keep his voice low, but the words were loud in spite of him.

Joe stopped, wavered, then turned

back to the chair he had quitted. "You're Niccolo Martelli, all right. Kid, there's a man sittin' up there with a gun on you. You never knew that, did you? Oh, Joe's got a lot of tricks up his sleeve."

Blackie saw that a picture had moved on the wall and a man's eye glinted above a gun barrel. "Shoot," he said, "Go on, shoot, I'm not afraid to die."

"O. K., Chick," Joe said, and waved a dismissal. "I'll talk to the kid"

"I'm not fooling," Blackie said. "I can be there in thirty minutes."

Joe sat motionless so long Blackie shifted on his feet nervously. At last Joe spoke. "We'll play it your way," he said, and picked a phone from the table.

There was no answer. After a minute of waiting he replaced it and tried the second one. "Wire's dead," he said hoarsely.

Blackie felt the door move at his back and at the same moment the man's eye and gun barrel filled the hole high in the wall opposite. He felt the weight increase behind the door and was swept forward. He staggered to regain his balance.

Joe, his face livid, was on his feet, gun in hand. "Take it easy, Joe," one of the two men who had entered said. "You're not crossing us up."

"I'm still boss," Joe said. "What I say goes, Curley."

"Not no more it doesn't," Curley said. "The kid's making you soft. We're all in this up to our necks."

"Get out, Blackie," Joe said.

"Blackie stays. Keep 'em covered, Chick, I'll collect their hardware."

Blackie didn't see Joe aim the gun in his hand but he heard the blasting report in the closed room, and then everyone was shooting. Blackie fired once at the spot in the opposite wall and felt the little pistol torn from his fingers as a bullet struck it. Then Joe was lying on the floor clicking an empty gun. Blackie bent over him as feet sounded on the stairs.

"It's all right, kid," Joe said, "I guess—I . . ."

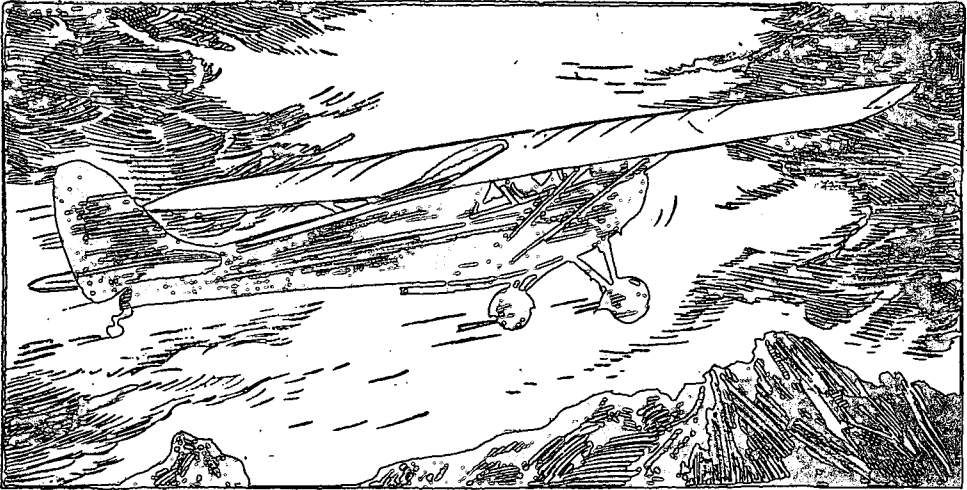
The papers carried a picture of Blackie that night. "Hero," they called him. "This, the second generation, knows already more of liberty and democracy than it was ever possible to teach the parents . . ."

"Grayson's daughter was all right," Blackie said to the Scout master who had come in to see him. "She wasn't hurt a bit, just scared. And Joe—well, Joe was all right too, at the end."

"You bet he was," the man said. "He must have been proud of you there at the last."

USE SPEEDWAY DE LUXE BLADES
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Gold in the Sky

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

Author of "Black Sky Before Sunset," "Medals for Madmen," etc.

Compadres, we three are men who laugh at misery. What need have we of food and drink, if we have dynamite and steel? So to work! Tonight we will tear the heart out of Mexico to find gold

Complete Short Novel

CHAPTER I

THE LOST VIEW

THE trouble in Jennings' mine started with a serious cave-in on the eight-hundred-foot level and subsequent loss of the main ore vein; the vein made Jennings' Mexican holding worth something like two million pesos.

The trouble between Tobiah Wayne, airplane pilot, and Frederick Werner, owner of the diamond drill rig, started over a yellow, clothbound book, worth not more than two dollars at the near-

est States bookstore. That and a pinto cayuse with a cross-grained sense of humor.

Off-hand it would seem there could be no possible connection between the two troubles. . . .

Tobiah Wayne sprawled comfortably on the big, homemade veranda couch of the mine residence, a book in his hand, his tanned, homely face screwed up in lines of studious concentration. With Toby sitting in it, the couch lost its size. Toby was big enough to dwarf any ordinary piece of furniture.