



*There was a savage  
staccato of shots.*

# Rendezvous With Death

By JACK D'ARCY

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*Everybody loses—that's part of racketeerdome, and you can't beat the game—even if you're a super-smart moll like Irene.*

**P**OLA ran an oily rag over the blue steel of his automatic and grinned across the table at "Big Red."

"In half an hour," he said.

Big Red shook his head slowly.

"I sorta hate to do it," he said.

Pola's narrow black eyes stabbed into his.

"Why?" he asked.

"No one can get protection like the 'Wop,'" said Red.

"Don't you want more money?" said Pola.

Big Red nodded his massive head.

"Sure," he said. "That's why I'm going through with it. But I sorta hate to do it."

"What the hell," said Pola. "It's business."

The door opened behind them and a portly fat figure pulled a third chair up to the table.

"Hello, Wop," said Pola.

Big Red nodded a greeting.

"Hello, boys," said the Wop.  
"Everything set?"

"For nine-thirty," said Pola.  
"We're to pick him up on Rush Street."

The Wop grinned evilly.

"This ought to put some dough in our pockets, boys."

"Yeah," said Pola. He winked across the table at Red.

"Yes, sir," said the Wop, groping for a cigarette.

Big Red drummed a nervous forefinger on the edge of the table. The Wop looked suspiciously at him.

"What's the matter?" he asked.  
"Shaky?"

Red met his gaze with eyes that contained the faintest gleam of compassion.

"No," he said slowly. "Are you?"

The Wop laughed.

"Me? I've taken too many guys for a ride in my time."

"Yeah?" said Pola.

The Wop consulted his watch.

"Let's get started," he said.

Lombardi shot an ironic glance at Big Red, who avoided his gaze.

"The car's downstairs," said Pola.

"Come on," said the Wop.

They strode from the room, Big Red bringing up the rear.

A pallid-faced youth with his cap pulled down over his eyes sat at the wheel of the gray Lincoln parked at the curb. He touched his cap as the Wop entered the car. The three gangsters climbed into the rear seat.

"You know where," said Pola to the driver.

The engine purred evenly, and the car shot smoothly ahead. The late spring twilight was rapidly evolving into night. Overhead a placid moon shone down on the tall buildings. A faint breeze blew city smells into the open windows of the limousine. The Wop spoke and a

note of triumph dominated his voice.

"We'll do double the amount of business next week."

"Yeah," said Pola.

Big Red whistled softly and beat time with a huge black shoe.

THEY sat in utter silence until the balloon tires suddenly grazed the curb, and the car came to a stop. Pola flung open the door, and as he did so, a tall lithe figure approached from a near-by doorway.

"Hello, Hymie," said he.

The newcomer gestured a salutation.

"You boys want to see me?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Pola, as he thrust his hand suggestively into his coat pocket. "Get in or else——"

Hymie smiled urbanely.

"Okay with me," he said, as he casually climbed into the machine.

"Go ahead," said the Wop to the driver. The car jerked ahead.

"Well, Hymie," said the Wop affably, "I hope we can pull this without hard feelings or trouble."

"I hope so, Wop," said Hymie. "But just what's the racket?"

"You got too much in this booze racket," said the Wop. "You been cutting in on my territory. With you out of it, I can make twice as much jack."

"With you out of it," said Hymie evenly, "I could make three times as much."

The Wop laughed.

"Maybe," he admitted. "But I ain't getting out. You are."

Lou shot a swift glance at Pola, who grinned widely.

"Yes," continued the Wop. "I hope you ain't going to show a streak of yellow, Hymie. I like to get these things over without any fuss."

"I'm not yellow," said Hymie.

"Well," said the Wop, "I never thought so, but you never can tell till you see how a guy acts when he's taken for a ride."

The big Lincoln hummed powerfully through the city's streets; gradually the brick tenements of the town evolved themselves into the roomier two-family houses of the suburbs. The air became fresher and clearer. The houses were suddenly replaced by trees.

Pola leaned over and touched the driver on the shoulder.

"This'll do," he said.

The car jerked to stop. Pola threw open the door. He looked at the Wop.

"Get out," he said.

The Wop raised his bushy eyebrows.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Can't we do this job from the car?"

"You can't," said Hymie. "You're the guy who's going to get it."

Pola stuck his automatic in the Wop's ribs.

"Get out," he repeated.

Big Red sat silent and motionless, but his hand was thrust deep into his coat pocket.

The look of utter astonishment in the Wop's eyes was replaced by dawning fear.

"Boys," he said hoarsely, "you don't mean——"

"Yes," said Pola. "We mean just that. You've gypped us once too often, Wop. Hymie has promised to split up even. You're through. Get out."

The Wop's nether lip trembled slightly as he fought for control. Hymie watched him closely, a gleam of sadistic pleasure lighting his eyes.

"Go on, rat," he said. "Welch."

The Wop welched. His voice became an abject whine.

"Boys," he pleaded, "one more chance. I'll split even so help me

God. I'll even split the dough that I've got already. Jeez, you boys couldn't cross a pal like this."

HE turned beseeching eyes at Big Red, who met his eyes squarely and said nothing.

"Hymie," he went on, "I'll lay off. Honest I will. I'll never try to croak you again."

"You're damned right you won't," said Hymie.

Desperately he turned to Pola.

"Tony, I made you the big shot you are today. You really ain't going to bump me off, are you?"

His voice broke off about two points this side of hysteria.

"Yes," said Pola. "Get out."

Hymie grabbed him unceremoniously by the collar and dragged his bulky form through the open door. The Wop stumbled and fell to his knees at the roadside. Hymie slammed the door shut and sat back in the seat. Three automatics glinted dully in the moonlight.

The Wop rose and faced them. His face was contorted with fear. His eyes were glazed balls of terror. His mouth was dry. Incoherent sentences jerked from his lips.

"Before God I swear—one more chance. Honest to God——"

Something flashed into the darkness and a medley of staccato reports belched upon the still air. The Wop staggered slightly, but kept his feet. A thin trickle of blood ran crazily down from his mouth.

"I swear to God——"

A single savage shot sounded again. Something thudded murderously into the Wop's chest. His hands groped violently at his throat. His knees sagged. He crumpled and fell, an inert bloody figure at the side of the road.

"Go ahead," said Big Red.

The car moved forward. Hymie thrust his gun back into his coat.

"Well," he said, "we'll give the rat a swell funeral."

"Yeah," said Pola.

Pola sat at his table in the Red Mill watching boredly the couples gyrating about the dance floor. He waved a casual salutation as Hymie fox-trotted past him, a painted blonde held tightly in his embrace.

Pola beckoned the waiter, and ordered another quart of champagne. He watched the fizzing liquid in the glass pensively, and inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

He brushed his hand tentatively over his coat lapel. The heavy expensive cloth felt soft and luxurious to his touch. He sighed with deep satisfaction. Good food and drink were before him, his pockets were lined with bills. No millionaire lived better than Pola since the sudden demise of the Wop.

Pola was at peace with the world. He would even have offered a cop a drink.

His bored eyes suddenly came to life, as he noticed a slim brunette picking her way through the dancers toward his table.

He raised quizzical eyebrows at the slender curved feminine body that sat down in the chair opposite him. For a moment they stared at each other in silence. The girl spoke first.

"So, you got the Wop, Pola."

Pola shrugged.

"Somebody got him," he answered.

A faint bitter smile flitted over her lips.

"It was you, Pola," she said quietly. "You and Hymie and Big Red."

"Maybe," said Pola. He leaned swiftly across the table. "Do you care?"

She made a charming gesture of futility.

"I haven't got a man now."

"You have if you want him," said Pola.

"You?"

"Me," said Pola.

"How do you know I wouldn't cross you; to even things up for the Wop?"

"You never loved that fat rat," said Pola evenly. "You only played him for his dough. Well, I've got the pennies now. You can take me for them." He cast a swift appraising glance at her curved young body. "I guess it's well worth it."

She laughed.

"You're easy to make, Pola."

"Easy for you," he countered.

She looked at him shrewdly.

"You've got money you want to spend?"

"Lousy with it," said Pola.

"Well," she said slowly. "If we can get together with the understanding that I'm not nuts about you, and I'm not bound to stick when the money's gone, it's all right with me."

Pola stood up and walked around to her chair. His voice flamed with unconcealed lust. His hands crawled over her body.

"That's good enough for me," he said. "I don't care how I get you as long as I get you."

Heedless of a score of inquisitive eyes, he bent down and kissed her full upon the mouth. Suddenly he released her and fixed her with a flaming glance.

"Do we begin tonight?" he asked.

She smiled, and if her eyes were a trifle hard, Pola failed to notice it.

"Yes, Pola," she said evenly. "We begin tonight."

POLA was sitting in the small room that served him as headquarters, the following day, when Hymie entered. The mob leader seated himself casually, and flung one gray-spatted shoe upon the desk.

"Tony," he said, "Don't be a sucker."

Pola looked at him from the corner of his eye.

"Meaning what?" he asked.

"Meaning Irene," said Hymie.

"What's that to you?" said Pola, and his voice was jagged ice.

Hymie shrugged.

"Maybe nothing," he said. "Maybe plenty."

Pola's face remained expressionless.

"Go ahead," he said. "You've got more to say than that."

Hymie sighed wearily.

"Now listen," he said as though he were talking to a child. "Since we bumped the Wop you got more dough than you ever had in your life. Ain't you?"

"Yes," said Pola. "Go on."

"There's fourteen thousand women in this town," went on Hymie, "that wouldn't even look at a guy with as much jack as you; but you got to go and pick out a moll that used to belong to the Wop."

"What of it?" said Pola.

Hymie brought his foot back to the floor with a bang. He leaned over the desk and caught Pola by the wrist.

"How do you know she's not crossing you?" he shot at him.

"She never gave a damn about that Wop," said Pola.

"Oh," said Hymie with heavy sarcasm. "And I suppose she loves you, and wouldn't play a dirty trick, eh?"

"Maybe," said Pola defiantly.

Hymie swore violently.

"Listen, sucker. Maybe she is on the level, though it's ten to one she ain't. But why gamble? Lay off. I'm telling you."

Pola glared at him.

"And if I don't?"

Hymie rose to his feet.

"I'm telling you, Tony," he said,

an ominous threat in his voice. "Lay off or else——"

He snatched his derby from the desk and left the room. For some moments Pola stared in silence at the floor. His eyes contained a dangerous light, and his lips were a thin, red line.

"Nobody," he announced to the cuspidor, "nobody, not even him, can tell me what to do."

He strode from the office downstairs to the bar, where half the mob was idling. As he had expected, Hymie lounged up against the counter, a glass of brandy in his hand. The mob looked up as he entered.

He glanced across at Hymie and their eyes met squarely. For a fractional second they fought a silent mental battle. Pola spoke.

"I'm going out for a while, Hymie. See you later."

"Yeah," said Hymie. "Where you going?"

Pola's hand dropped to within an inch of his coat pocket before he answered.

"To Irene's," he said deliberately.

Every muscle in his body was tensed for a rapid draw, but Hymie made no move for his gun. He replaced his glass upon the bar, and smiled sardonically in Pola's face.

"Yeah," he drawled. "Be sure you get back safe."

"I'll get back," said Pola. But he backed through the door to the street.

HE ran to the corner of the block and sprang to the running board of a moving taxi. He noted with satisfaction, through the rear window, that he was apparently not followed.

Twenty minutes later he entered Irene's flat.

"Me and Hymie's through," he told her breathlessly.

"Why?" she asked.

He told her.

"You're a sucker," she said. "How can you keep me if you split up with him?"

"How can I keep you if I don't?" he said.

Her eyes were hard as brittle diamonds.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Get him before he gets me," said Pola. "I'm going to breeze now. If I can get half a dozen good rods together before tonight, I'll put Hymie on the spot. Stick to me, baby, and I'll be the biggest racketeer in town in forty-eight hours."

"I'll stick to you, if you pull it," she said.

"I'll pull it," said Pola. "I'm leaving the back way."

The door slammed and he was gone.

Irene lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. A triumphant song surged in her heart. A game of life and death was about to be played and Irene was holding a high hand.

She crossed to the telephone, but even before she lifted the receiver off the hook the door bell jangled. She pressed the button that released the downstairs door and waited for the knock.

A moment later Hymie entered the room.

"Hello, baby," he said easily.

"You want Pola," she said.

"You don't waste words," he replied. "Where is he?"

"I'll tell you on my own terms."

"What are they?"

"I'm no chump," she said. "That guy's going for plenty on me. If you bump him off, I want to know that I'll be taken care of financially."

"You'll get all his dough," promised Hymie. "I know where he's got it sunk."

"C. O. D.?" she said.

"C. O. D.," said Hymie. "I'll pay you ten grand down tonight."

"Send it to me this afternoon," she said, "and I'll send you a message about what time he's leaving here. You can get him as he goes out. I don't want a brawl in my dump."

"You'll have the dough in an hour," said Hymie. "But don't cross me. I want that guy out of the way. He's costing me too much."

She looked at him wantonly.

"Is that the only reason?"

His eyes stripped her naked. Desire was stamped unmistakably on his face.

"No," he said shortly, as he walked toward the door. "There's another damned good reason."

He paused in the doorway.

"Anyway," he said, "I always knew you liked the Wop more than Pola."

The door closed behind him.

"You're damned right," she said to the empty room. "The Wop was worth the whole cursed mob of you."

Her usually hard eyes were suddenly soft with dewy tears.

AT four-thirty that afternoon, one of Hymie's henchmen delivered to her ten crisp yellow gold certificates. She dismissed him curtly, and placed the money under a pile of silken garments in the center drawer of her bureau.

At four-fifty Pola telephoned. Immediately after she had replaced the receiver on its hook, she donned an absurd trifle that passed for a hat, and made her way to a drug store three blocks away. Her nickel clinked into the slot of the booth telephone and in a moment she was connected with Police Headquarters.

"Never mind who this is," she said into the transmitter. "But

something interesting will happen tonight on Race Street, the block between Fourth and Fifth Avenues."

She hung up on the desk sergeant's barrage of questions. She returned to her apartment, bathed, redressed and read a current magazine until the hands of the jeweled clock over her bed indicated seven-thirty. Then she telephoned for a messenger boy and wrote a note to Hymie. It was terse and to the point.

*"He'll leave here between ten and eleven. See me later."*

She omitted the formality of a signature. The messenger boy touched his hat, and departed on the run. At the bottom of the stairs he ran full tilt into Pola. The letter dropped out of his hand for a moment. As he stooped to retrieve it, Pola's darting eye deciphered the name on the envelope. His mind worked faster than light travels.

"Want to make a hundred?" he asked the boy casually.

"Dollars?" said the boy incredulously.

"Dollars," said Pola.

The boy nodded.

"Give me that letter," said Pola.

The boy looked dubious.

"A hundred bucks," repeated Pola.

The boy surrendered.

Swiftly Pola ripped open the envelope and scanned the damning contents. His face contorted into a frightful grimace of rage. An oath rose to his lips, but he fought it down. Cleverness, not anger, he counseled himself. He spoke to the boy again.

"Another hundred," he said, "if you'll keep your mouth shut and deliver another in its place."

The boy nodded dumbly.

Pola hastily scrawled something on a piece of paper in fair imita-

tion of Irene's script. He handed it to the boy along with the two crumpled bills.

"Pronto," he said. "And keep your mouth shut, if you know what's good for you."

He watched the messenger disappear up the street, then walked casually over to the stationery store that stood opposite.

"Police Headquarters?" he inquired suavely into the mouthpiece. "I'd suggest that you were on the spot in the six hundred block on Race Street between ten and eleven tonight."

He hung up without waiting for an answer, and strode purposefully back to Irene's flat. As he walked up the stairs he was conscious of a horrible empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, a sensation of mingled rage and hurt. The insensate fury at her attempted double-cross was dulled somewhat by the fact that he cared for her more than he would have admitted.

However, above all, Tony Pola was a practical man. He believed that after the machinery he had set in motion began working tonight, he would never see her again. Hence, he must make the most of her. He would love her tonight without restraint or affection. He would shower her with kisses before he sent her to her death.

Hymie eagerly ripped open the envelope that the messenger boy had left upon his desk. He read it slowly and chuckled as he digested its brief message.

*"He'll leave my place about eleven. He's disguising himself in my clothes to throw you off the track. Get him as he goes out. See me later."*

Hymie lighted a cigarette and permitted himself a smile of satis-

faction. Not only must Pola be killed as a matter of discipline, but in as much as Pola was collecting a pretty big cut, it was a good business move.

He strolled down to the bar and amused himself buying his henchmen drinks.

"It's one hell of a long day," he remarked to the bartender, "till eleven o'clock."

The bartender raised inquisitive eyebrows.

"Something doing tonight?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Hymie very seriously. "I'm afraid I'm going to lose an old friend."

Pola entered the girl's flat with his own key, and gave a fair imitation of his normal self.

He greeted her familiarly, and watched her closely for any sign that would betray the nervousness which he was sure she must feel. When she spoke her voice was as casual as her kiss.

"Did you bump Hymie yet?" she asked.

"Not yet," said Pola.

"When are——" she began, but he cut her short.

"Tomorrow," he said, "is the answer to all questions. Tonight I want love. That's all."

She laughed musically, and surrendered to his embrace. It seemed to Pola that her lips were offered more eagerly this time. His passionate eyes bored deep into hers, and his hands dug hard into her soft flesh with all the force of the straining emotion within him.

She made no protest, for down in her heart a thousand small voices chanted a bitter song of triumphant hate. This was Pola's last kiss. His death kiss, as it were. For tonight would see the Wop avenged. Hymie would get Pola and the bulls would get Hymie.

Pola sat and watched her closely. Little devils of agony clutched at his soul. Her eyes burned softly into his. God! How he wanted to keep her with all his body and heart! But the message of his keen brain kept ringing in his own mind. She cannot live. She must die. He glanced quickly at the clock. Ten-forty-five.

He groaned. She looked at him keenly.

"Tony," she said, "you're crying."

He blinked away the single tear that had risen to his eye. He forced that terrible hardness upon himself.

"Crying, hell!" he said. "Smoke in my eye."

She seemed satisfied with this explanation.

Pola tightened his arms around her. The little jeweled clock indicated ten minutes to eleven. He kissed her madly. Ten more minutes.

**S**UDDENLY he sat up. A look of awful resolution was in his eyes. He spoke quickly, as though afraid to trust his voice.

"I'm going, baby," he said. "Beat it downstairs ahead of me and see if any of Hymie's mob's around. I'll follow in a minute."

Silently she arose and donned her hat. She walked to the door. He stood stock still looking at her. His nails dug into the palms of his hands. His teeth were tightly clinched. A single bead of perspiration ran down his forehead. There was yet time to say the word that would save her. The warning sentences rushed to his lips, but he fought them down. In a misty haze he saw her open the door and disappear, the latch clicked softly behind her.

The moment she was gone he reverted to his efficient self. Undoubtedly she had money in the



room. He must seize it before the cops that he had planted downstairs began to investigate. Knowing her habits he went immediately to the center bureau drawer. He rummaged among a heap of silken underwear, then gave vent to a startled whistle. Swiftly he picked up the bundle of banknotes and thrust them into his pocket.

Even as he did so, a savage staccato volley of shots came to his ears.

He felt his stomach turn over. He sank into the nearest chair and lit a cigarette with trembling fingers. He fought desperately with his nerves, and brought them under some semblance of control as he heard the heavy tread of feet upon the stairs. A moment later four detectives dragged Hymie into the room.

Pola rose. With a terrific effort he brought his voice to normal.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Graham, of the Homicide Squad regarded him keenly.

"That's what I want to know," he said. "Did you tip Headquarters this afternoon?"

"Me?" said Pola.

"Yes, you," said Hymie. "You double-crossing rat. You wrote that note. You framed——"

Graham waved him to silence.

"Shut up," he said. "I'll handle this."

Confidence flooded back to Pola.

"Listen," he said to the detective. "You got nothing on me, see? Not a damned thing. I'm sitting up here waiting for my girl and I hear some shots. Now, what's going on? Where's Irene?"

"Dead, you louse," roared Hymie. "You made me kill her. You——"

"Shut up," said Graham wearily. "Search 'em, boys."

He started as one of the bulls pulled a sheaf of yellow notes from Pola's pocket. "What's that?"

"That's my own dough," snarled Pola. "My own dough, see. You can't touch me for that."

"Your own dough?" put in Hymie. "Yeah."

"Look it over, officer," said Hymie. "Carefully."

Graham looked up from his scrutiny of the notes.

"Well," he said, "this gives us enough on you to take you along, Pola. This is phoney stuff."

Pola unleashed a roar of rage. "I've been crossed. The lousy double-crossing dogs. I've——"

"Shut up," said Graham again. "Drag 'em both along, boys."

Handcuffs clicked about Pola's wrists. He glared with ripping eyes at Hymie.

"Damn you," he said to him.

Hymie merely shrugged.

"We both lose," he said philosophically.

The six of them headed down the stairs, Hymie dejected and possessed of an utter futile weariness, Pola wrapped in a bitter brooding soul consuming hatred.

At the bottom of the stairs Graham leading the little procession, called up to them:

"Mind the body in the hall. The boys dragged it in till the wagon gets here."

Pola stared ahead and retched violently. For down there before him lay what had once been Irene Shanley. Her alabaster skin was stained with blood. Three gaping holes were drilled deep into her soft flesh.

An agonizing sob shattered Pola's throat. Hymie glanced at him not unsympathetically.

"What the hell," he said. "She was a good kid."

"She was a louse," said Pola. "God I loved her!"

He sobbed like a child on the way to the police station.