

I twisted as I slid on the polished boards and I saw him reach for the fallen gun. Reach for it, and get his fingers curled around the butt. I tried to heave myself up and stop the slug that was coming to crash my life out, but I was too slow. Much too slow. I knew that even while I was trying.

But the hand with the gun didn't point in my way. Instead, it went away from me as Carl scooped the .38 up and ran for the door. I scrambled to my knees wondering what the hell.

Win snapped me out of it. She was yelling frantically, and making wild passes with her foot at the floor, like she was trying out a new dance step and not quite making it. I stood up and flicked her a look.

She was still tethered to Ginny by that lashed wrist, and Ginny had collapsed, a dead weight, in the corner, passed right out. Win was making these sweeps with her foot, reaching out as far as Ginny's weight would let her, trying to reach the other gun and kick it over to me.

"Bart!" she was wailing. "Oh, Bart! The gun!"

I picked it up on the run and headed for the door of the room, still running bent double, straightening up as I went. It came to me that I didn't see Jodi anywhere in the room. I didn't connect that with what Carl had been shouting. Not for the moment. Things were happening too fast all of a sudden.

Not till I got out in the hallway. Then I joined up the words and made them a sentence with meaning. Jodi had taken her chance while Carl and I were doing our exercises on the floor. She'd sidled along the wall to the door and then taken a very swift powder for the great outdoors, and Carl had seen her go.

He'd also seen his chances of making a getaway go with her.

That was why he'd left me and run out after her. Maybe he figured on stopping her and then turning and tossing a slug into my works. Or maybe he was just so crazy with rage and terror