

# COUNTERCLOCKWISE

## 7 - YANKEE DOODLE

Tom stopped to admire a long, sleek Mercedes at the curb, its highly polished finish gleaming a misty red in the moonlight. The hood ornament, a three-pointed star inside a circle, sparkled like fine crystal. Spare tires with deep virgin tread were mounted externally, just behind the front fenders.

"Look at this fine old Mercedes-Benz," he said. "This was one of the great touring cars of the Thirties."

"There's something stuck under the wiper," Cass said. "Looks like a parking ticket."

"Or maybe an advertising flyer." Trying to see the interior, Tom leaned in close to the passenger-side window, absently resting a hand on the door handle. "Can't tell about the upholstery. Too dark."

A voice resonated behind them. "That's quite a car you have there."

Startled, Tom grunted, "Huh?", turned and saw a small man strutting toward them out of the gloom. He looked like James Cagney.

"I've been keeping an eye on you two," he said. It *was* James Cagney.

"What do you want, Mr. Cagney?"

"To know who are you and what you're up to, you and your fancy-dancy German car."

Tom's pulsed quickened. "Sorry, but this isn't our car."

"The hell. You were just about to get in."

"Oh no. I was just taking a look. You don't see one of these every day."

"In Berlin you do."

"Berlin? What are you talking about? You're making a mistake here, sir."

"Not me. You two have made the mistake." Cagney took a step closer.

"Knock it off, please," Tom said. "We're not in the mood to be confronted by some confused actor on a sidewalk after dark."

"Confused actor, no. Patriotic American, yes."

Stay calm, Tom told himself. Cass touched his arm, the gesture sending the same message.

"Who are you and what are you doing here in Los Angeles, the West Coast's major arsenal?" The words demanding, clipped, sounding like Walter Winchell.

Though seriously irritated, Tom figured he'd better play along.

Then Cass spoke up. "We're from Sacramento. He's a police officer—"

"I heard that cock and bull story before."

"—and I work for the governor."

"Governor? You mean *gauleiter*, don't you? Governor of what? Lower Saxony?"

Tom and Cass exchanged a wide-eyed look in the moonlight that said, "This guy's nuts. What do we do now?"

"What the devil are you talking about?" Tom demanded.

"I've been watching you two ever since you came out of that dump over there, the Adams."

How the hell does this guy know where we're staying? One of several ugly questions that instantly formed in Tom's mind. Another: Was he alone or did he have a cop somewhere in the shadows? A cop would search them and find all kinds of 1988 stuff he couldn't possibly understand, like plastic Visa cards and driver's licenses with expiration dates almost fifty years in the future. They'd be turned over to the FBI and locked up God knows where.

Could he take this guy if he had to? Tom figured the odds. Cagney was much smaller but looked quick and seemed to be in shape. Yeah, Tom could take him, but that would be a crazy, last-ditch thing to try. He hoped it wouldn't come to that.

"Tell me what you're up to. Did they land you by sub?"

Tom laughed. "Right, a German U-boat took us through the Panama Canal, then unloaded us and our big Mercedes at the Long Beach Pier."

Cagney thought about it. "No, you're probably Americans, but your folks were born in the Fatherland. Maybe you were, too, but you came here when you were little, learned the lingo."

"Learned the lingo? What bad movie is that from?" He'd probably call a pistol a gat, Tom thought.

"Always stayed loyal. When the Fuehrer took over, you Krauts were only too ready to help out the Third Reich."

This idiot wouldn't let up. "Jesus," Tom said, "I used to respect the hell out of you. You were great in 'Yankee Doodle Dandy'—"

"Better believe it."

"—and 'Johnny Come Lately.'"

"Ha, now I've got you. We don't start filming 'Johnny Come Lately' for a couple of months. The average Joe knows nothing about it. But a spy might."

Damn, another mistake. Tom decided to take the offensive. He pulled out his badge holder and flipped it open. "Like the lady said, I'm a cop."

"Cop? Ha. The Gestapo supply you with that piece of tin?"

"It's a Sacramento PD badge, pal. We're visiting here and we're getting damn tired of this game."

"This is no game. Tell me your names. What's your mission here?"

"Oh for Christ sake," Tom barked. "Our mission here is to get some sleep. Come on, Cass." He turned and started toward the motor court.

Cagney caught up fast, then made his big mistake. He roughly grabbed Tom's arm—"Not so fast, Fritz"—and tried to spin him around.

That was it. This little clown had gone too far. Crazy, last-ditch time had arrived.

Tom's right hand became a fist. He put all his hundred and eighty pounds behind the wallop he threw at Cagney's jaw. The actor went down like a load of coal, his snap-brim hat flying.

"Tom!" Cass gasped.

Tom's hand throbbed. He leaned over the man, grabbed a handful of his shirt front, and pulled him to his feet. Cass picked up his hat and put it on Cagney's head at a cockeyed angle.

The actor wobbled. Tom steadied him and said, "We're going for a little walk."

Cagney's body shivered all over for a second as if he were cold. Then he got himself balanced and rubbed his jaw. "Y-you Nazis are r-ruthless."

"Shut up," Tom snarled. "Don't say another word."