

**THIRTY PIECES
OF LEAD**



BY FRANK KANE

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Title: Thirty Pieces of Lead

Date of first publication: 1945

Author: Frank Kane (1912-1968)

Date first posted: Mar. 15, 2022

Date last updated: Mar. 15, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220327

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

THIRTY PIECES OF LEAD

By Frank Kane

(Author of "Morgue Star Final," etc.)

Musico was willing to aid the enemy—for a price!

THE fat man behind the desk peered near sightedly through the monocle at his papers. He wore the insignia of a colonel on his Gestapo uniform.

"You were in the concentration camp at Palmo, Musico?" he addressed the unshaven man who stood, flanked by two guards, before him.

Musico shrugged. His gaze was fixed on the corner of the desk, and he did not raise his eyes to meet the glare of his interrogator. He resented the presence of a Nazi behind the desk in the Italian Palazzo de Justicia. Mussolini and his boys might call it Axis collaboration, but back in the Chicago of Musico's memory they had another name for it—muscling in.

The colonel referred again to the sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Your mother and your wife, they are in the camp at Napolo, no?" He tossed the paper on the desk and leaned back. "Your mother, she is getting old. You would like to see her once more?"

The prisoner's lips twisted as though he was about to speak. He had to fight back the words that would tell the fat man that he knew about his wife and mother. "Death by natural causes," the Underground grape vine had reported to him. Even the Underground accepted it as natural that you die when you are beaten and starved. The struggle was successful. No word passed his lips.

The man behind the desk tried a smile. It consisted mostly of a twitching of his upper lip that bared his teeth, but didn't travel far enough to cloud the cruelty in his eyes.

"It might be arranged, Musico," he said. He removed the monocle from his eye, polished it. "You would like that? You would like to see them again?"

Musico nodded. "Yes," he croaked. His voice sounded rusty, as though from lack of use. "I would like to see them."

The colonel returned the monocle to his eye, leaned forward. "You shall do what we ask of you, and then, I promise, you shall see them."

"What do I do?"

"Tonight a group of highly trained technicians will leave for America. They must be landed without the knowledge of the authorities. You will arrange that."

Musico smiled humorlessly. "Saboteurs, eh? Why pick on me for help? It's ten years since I left America to come back to my home."

The Gestapo colonel waved the argument aside impatiently. "You know how these things are done." He indicated the sheaf of papers. "You were what they called a rum runner, no? You landed large shipments of whisky along the American coastline. You can do this."

The prisoner shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not."

"There is no maybe. You will carry out the landing of Dr Stratz and his technicians or you will never see your wife and mother again."

The slouching figure of the prisoner straightened. He blinked. "Dr Stratz?" he asked hoarsely.

"You may as well know," the figure behind the desk sneered. "You will have no chance to tell anyone. Dr Stratz will be in charge of American operations. You will see to it that he is landed."

Musico nodded. "I'll have to go along."

"Why?" Suspicion flared from the man behind the desk's narrowed eyes. "You can point out the spots on a map."

"No good," Musico grunted. "The Coast Guard's too active. Unless you know that shore like the back of your hand, you'll never find your way in. Me, I know it like the back of my hand." He scratched vigorously under his shoulder. "Best way's to send a couple of wires."

The suspicion returned to the hard eyes. "There will be no wires. This is a mission requiring the utmost secrecy."

MMUSICO shrugged. "Suit yourself. Only that ain't the way to do it. These guys'll be landed miles from noplance. They'll have to hoof it to get anywhere near civilization. That's a good way to get picked up. But, suit yourself."

“Who are these people you would wire?”

“Some of my old mob. And if you’re worrying about them yelling copper, don’t. They don’t stand in too good with the cops, and they don’t owe America nothing. Besides,” he added softly. “You got my mother and wife in case anything was to go wrong, ain’t you?”

The man behind the desk studied his prisoner’s face carefully for a moment, then, failing to find any hidden meaning, acquiesced. “You will give me the names of these people. I will take care of notifying them.” He picked up a pencil, looked up at the prisoner questioningly.

“Just reach Tommy Carrone in Chi—”

The Gestapo man scowled. “Chi? Where is this Chi?”

“Chicago, The Alamo Hotel. Just tell Tommy that Melody Musico is landing a valuable shipment at the usual place off Oyster Bay. Just mention the time and the date we’ll be arriving.”

The colonel grunted. “He will know it’s authentic?”

“That’s right,” the prisoner nodded. “You better put in just a line. Remember Tony. Put that in. It’s the old password.”

The man behind the desk nodded, then gestured to the two guards. “Take him out and give him a bath and a shave. Have him ready to leave in three hours.”

He watched as the prisoner shuffled painfully between the two guards, and as the door closed behind them, he punched a button on his desk telephone. “Dr Stratz,” he growled into the mouthpiece.

A moment later the connection was made.

“How did it go, Colonel?” the metallic voice on the other end demanded.

“Good, Dr Stratz. Arrangements have been made. You will, of course, dispose of this man as soon as he has served his purpose.”

“Of course, Colonel,” the voice on the other end purred. “I have had some small experience as commandant of the Napolo Camp.”

The colonel rocked with laughter. “Of course. I promised him that he would see his wife and mother. They were taken care of at Napolo. It is only fitting that you give him the passport to see them.”

wo heavy black sedans, lights out, motors humming softly were lost in the deep shadows off the beach.

Tommy Carrone squinted into the opaqueness of the night, consulted the luminous dial on his watch and grunted. “That wire said he’d be here at 12.10. It’s 12.15. You think something went wrong?”

The beefy man at his right grunted. “Maybe it was a gag, that wire.”

Tommy Carrone shook his head. “No. It said ‘remember Tony.’ Nobody but Melody Musico would have said that. I’ll bet—” He paused, held his hand up. “You hear a put-put boat out there?”

Both men stiffened into attention. The beefy man nodded.

“That must be them,” Tommy Carrone grunted. “Tell the other boys to get ready. We don’t want to waste no time.”

A few minutes later the trim nose of a motor launch knifed through the heavy mist that hung low over the water. It nosed into the sand, jarred to a stop.

Two men leaped across its bow onto the sand. Five more followed, then the motor was silent and a sixth joined them. The little group gathered on the beach. Its leader peered into the impenetrable blackness that surrounded them.

“Your friends, Musico,” his voice was harsh, metallic. “Where are they?”

The familiar voice of Melody Musico cut through the blackness. “They’ll be here Dr Stratz. You must be patient—like we learned to be at Palmo—and Napolo. You were there, weren’t you?”

Stratz’ figure stiffened. “What do you mean?”

“How were my mother and my wife when you saw them last, Doctor?” Musico’s voice was harsh.

“Your friends?” Stratz’ voice was urgent.

Musico laughed. “You’ll be hearing from them any second now—”

Suddenly, from three sides the rhythmic chatter of sub-machine guns shattered the silence. The little group melted away. Stratz tried to run, then unbuckled at the knees and sprawled forward on his face as a heavy blast tore through his back. Musico fell to his knees, tried to pull himself to his feet and was slammed back against the sand by a fusillade.

As suddenly as it began the tommyguns' cacophony of death ceased. In a matter of seconds the landing party lay sprawled about the beach.

The beefy man who stood with Tommy Carrone made for the motor launch and impatiently tore open several of the paper packages.

"Hey, Tommy," his disappointed voice cut through the darkness, "that ginzo musta blew his top. Know what he's trying to hustle in? A load of dynamite and nitro. As if we ain't got more'n enough of that now."

Tommy Carrone walked over to the riddled body of Melody Musico and turned it over with the tip of his toe.

"Of course he was nuts. He shoulda knew I'd get him for putting my kid brother on the spot—even if it did take me ten years to catch up with him. And then he has the nerve to rub it in by sending me a wire telling me to 'remember Tony.' As if I could forget."

(THE END)

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Thirty Pieces of Lead* by Frank Kane]