

# Number Eight

part 3

1            “One of those killed was a boy of five,” I said. “You got anything to say about that?”

              He licked his lips. “It could have been an accident.”

              I shook my head. “Nobody’s going to think that.”

              His eyes seemed uncertain for a moment. “Why do you think he’d kill a kid?”

5            I shrugged. “That would be hard to say? He killed one person and then another and then another. Maybe after a while it didn’t make any difference to him what they were. Men, women or children. They were all the the same.”

              The kid nodded. “You can develop a taste for killing. It’s not too hard. After the first few, it doesn’t matter. You get to like it.”

10           He was silent for another five minutes. “They’ll never get him. He’s too smart for that.”

              I took my eyes off the road for a few moments. “How do you figure that? The whole country’s looking for him. Everybody knows what he looks like.” The kid lifted both his thin shoulders. “Maybe he doesn’t care. He did what he had to do. People will know he’s a big man now.”

              We covered a mile without a word and then he shifted in his seat. “You heard his description

15 over the radio?”

              “Sure,” I said. “For the last week.”

              He looked at me curiously. “And you weren’t afraid to pick me up?” “No.”

              His smile was still sly. “You got nerves of steel?”

              I shook my head. “No. I can be scared when I have to, all right.”

20           He kept his eyes on me. “I fit the description perfectly.”

              “That’s right.”

              The road stretched ahead of us and on both sides there were nothing but the flat plain. Not a house, not a tree. The kid giggle. “I look just like the killer. Everybody’s scared of me. I like that.”

              “I hope you had fun,” I said.

25           “I’ve been picked up by the cops three times on this road in the last two days. I get as much publicity as the killer.”

“I know,” I said. “And I think you'll get more. I thought I'd find you somewhere on this highway.”

I slowed down the car. “How about me? Don't I fit the description too?”

The kid almost sneered. “No. You got brown hair. His is red. Like mine.”

30 I smiled. “But I could have dyed it.”

The kid's eyes got wide when he knew what was going to happen.

He was going to be number eight.

*Number Eight*, Jack Ritchie