

# Number Eight

part 2

1 I turned off the road and pulled to a stop next to the three pumps. An elderly man came around to the driver's side of the car.

"Fill in the tank," I said. "And check the oil."

The kid studied the gas station. It was a small building, the only structure in the ocean of wheat

5 fields. The windows were grimy with dust.

I could just make out a wall phone inside.

The kid jiggled one foot. "That old man takes a long time. I don't like waiting". He watched him lift the hood to check the oil. "Why does anybody that old want to live? He'd be better off dead."

I lit a cigarette. "He wouldn't agree with you".

10 The kid's eyes went back to the filling station. He grinned. "There's a phone in there. You want to call anybody?"

I exhaled a puff of cigarette smoke. "No."

When the old man came back with my change, the kid leaned toward the window. "You got a radio, mister?"

15 The old man shook his head. "No. I like things quiet."

The kid grinned. "You got the right idea, mister. When things are quiet, you live longer."

Out on the road, I brought the speed back up to eighty.

The kid was quiet for a while, and then he said, "It took guts to kill seven people. Did you ever hold a gun in your hand?"

20 "I guess almost everybody has."

His teeth showed through twitching lips. "Did you ever point it at anybody?"

I glanced at him.

His eyes were bright. "It's good to have people afraid of you," he said. "You're not short any more when you got a gun."

25 "No," I said. "You're not a runt any more."

He flushed slightly.

"You're the tallest man in the world," I said. "As long as nobody else has a gun, too."

"It takes a lot of guts to kill," the kid said again. "Most people don't know that."