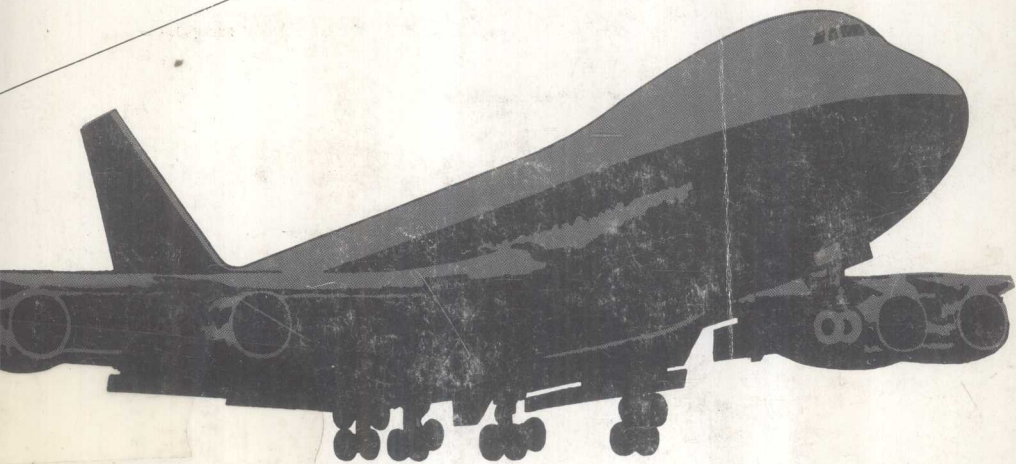



**A
TOUGH
ONE
TO LOSE**
TONY KENRICK



NOVEL OF SUSPENSE

A TOUGH ONE TO LOSE

A diagonal line, solid on the right and dashed on the left, crosses the title text from the bottom left to the top right.

by Tony Kenrick

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A TOUGH ONE TO LOSE

TONY KENRICK

Set in the romantic purlieus of San Francisco, this is an ingenious caper—a hijack and kidnap combined—of dazzling proportions. It is executed faultlessly by the most unlikely group of men imaginable. The ransom is a staggering twenty-five million dollars. And no wonder. The group hijacks nothing less than a 747—along with its 360 passengers—and *disappears from the face of the earth*. An absolutely fool-proof method of collecting the ransom enhances their plan to the point of brilliance.

In spite of the lid the FBI puts on the case, an improvident young lawyer, Bill Verecker, learns of it and is eager to take on the gang for the reward. He is so broke that he can't pay Annie, his ex-wife, her alimony, nor can he even pay his secretary (who is also Annie).

Desperation drives him to outlandish theories and wild strategies—all of which *work*, to the surprise of the gang, the FBI, and Verecker himself—and leads to a beauty of a climax and a stunning solution.



David Montgomery

Tony Kenrick, Australian born, has lived and traveled in more parts of the world than he can remember. He does recall an interlude in San Francisco and another in New York City. For the time being, he has settled for a quiet hamlet in Kent, England, where he is working on his third suspense novel.

His first, *The Only Good Body's A Dead One*, got rave reviews, among them one from Newgate Callendar of the *New York Times Book Review*, who could only gasp, "What a climax!"

Jacket designed by Bob Guisti

The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.
Indianapolis and New York

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Only Good Body's a Dead One

For Timmy, who missed out the first time

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PART ONE

Prologue

He still had a few minutes to kill.

He rinsed his hands under the tap so he'd be doing something if somebody came in and slowly dried them on a paper towel. He straightened his tie in the mirror and patted his pockets for a comb. There was a dispenser on the wall; it wanted a dollar fifty for nail clippers and seventy-five cents for a comb. Seventy-five cents? Who were they trying to kid? He could go into any drugstore in the . . . Wait a second. That was pretty funny. Here he was on the verge of two million bucks, and he was getting uptight over a lousy six bits. He was going to have to get used to the idea of spending. He fed three quarters into the machine, pulled out a drawer, picked up the comb and walked back to the mirror, tearing the wrapper away. He ran the comb through his hair a couple of times, unzipped the flight bag at his feet and dropped it in next to the rest of the

things: tweezers, a nail file, a hand towel, a toothbrush, a small tube of Gleem, a paperback, a black plastic case. Inside the case a barber's straight razor lay doubled up on a bed of red velvet. It was brand new, the thin, ice-cold edge untried. There wasn't any shaving cream. If anybody asked he could say he'd forgotten it. But nobody would ask; it was a hundred to one they'd even look at him twice. He zipped up the bag, went through the door and mounted the stairs to the concourse. From speakers somewhere over his head a man's deep, comforting voice broke like a wave of warm syrup over the terminal: Calair announcing the final call for Flight 422 non-stop to New York. He gave it another ninety seconds, then started toward the departure gates. He wanted to time it just right.



1

Monday, 2 p.m.

The Fleishhacker Tower is on the south side of Montgomery Street, just about in the dead center of the financial section of the city of San Francisco. It was built in the late Twenties when American architects were still dreaming of the glories of Chartres and Amiens and Notre Dame, and if you're a broker or a lawyer or an accountant it's a very good address to have. William Verecker was a lawyer, and he had an office there but only because he did some legal work for the renting agents now and then and was getting a break on the rent. If he hadn't been he could never have afforded it; he couldn't afford much these days. His law practice was only three months old, and nobody was knocking down the door to retain him, which wasn't so surprising considering what had happened. He'd been a junior partner in an old established firm—an old, conservative established firm—until he'd been involved

in an embarrassing incident with a society hostess that the press has picked up. A nude midnight swim, they'd called it, which Verecker said was nonsense. He'd had to borrow a swimsuit that was a couple of sizes too big for him. When he'd dived off the springboard it had come off. The firm hadn't accepted the explanation and neither had his wife, Annie, and they'd both fired him. She'd been his secretary at the firm before and after they were married, until the midnight swim. Verecker had gone to work for another firm for a while, then started up on his own. Shortly after the divorce had come through he'd called her and told her he needed a secretary and asked if she knew a good girl. She'd said yes and applied for the job herself. It floored Verecker, but Annie didn't see anything strange in it. She claimed that as a boss he was terrific—it was as a husband he was so lousy—so they'd gone back to their old arrangement of boss and secretary, although Verecker would have much preferred to go back to the more recent arrangement. He claimed he was telling the truth about the swimming pool thing, but Annie said she knew what the truth was: He'd just got the seven-year itch a few years too soon.

She'd been working in her job for about five weeks and had come to work one Monday expecting to spend the day in the same way she'd spent all the others so far—being sweet to the many people they owed money to and tough with the handful who owed them. But as it turned out, that particular Monday changed her life for quite some time to come.

And Verecker's, too.

She was sitting behind her desk, alone in the office, trying to make sense of the accounts. She had a sandwich in one hand and pecked at a small adding machine with the other. She totaled it, looked at the figure, groaned and lowered her chin into her palm. It was a nice-looking chin and a nice-looking palm. In fact, all of her looked pretty good. A painter would have described her as having good bones, marvelous eyes, a fine mouth, a fluid way of moving. A model agency

would have said that although her face was quite lovely, her figure was a little too full. A construction worker would have said that she was stacked.

She'd often complained to Verecker, during their marriage, that she thought she could do with an inch off here and there and that maybe she should diet, but Verecker forbade it. He'd told her she was his and every other red-blooded male's idea of a woman and warned her that lips that touched Metrecal could never touch his.

At the wedding people had said what a handsome couple they made, but they were looking at Annie when they said it. Not that Verecker was ordinary—far from it: five-ten, light-brown hair the law fraternity thought was a little too long, a good strong nose, forceful and honest, above a mouth that looked constantly primed and ready to break into a smile. When it did, the brown eyes would crinkle into a half-squint and two semicircular lines would bracket the smile like parentheses. He was extremely presentable; it was just that, in the looks department, Annie was the star of the show.

The outer door banged and she looked up as Verecker strode into the office, threw his golf cap onto his desk and slumped into his chair. He stared morosely at something he didn't like three feet in front of his nose and said, "It's a humbling game all right."

"Don't tell me," Annie answered. "After you took an eight on the second hole you decided not to keep score but just concentrate on your swing."

"I kept score, don't worry. But so did Rogers. I would have beat him if his last tee shot hadn't rolled into a hole. A hole," Verecker appealed to her. "I ask you, what kind of a club has holes a foot deep on the fairway?"

"Gophers have to live, too."

"Gophers nothing. There was a row of them—some kind of burnt-out fireworks in the bottom. Damn kids."

Annie said, "Wait a minute. *His* ball rolled down a hole and *you* lost?"

"Oh, he claimed winter rules and took a drop. Drop? Hell, he hurled the thing about a hundred yards up the fairway. It was his best shot all day."

Annie's eyebrows went up half an inch. "Winter rules? This is May."

Verecker looked disgusted. "He mumbled something about it being a long season. What am I supposed to say to that—'Listen, schmuck, it's seventy-five degrees, use a wedge'? He's a client, after all."

"Yes, and so far a non-paying one."

"Is there any other kind?"

Annie picked up a wad of bills and waved them like a fan. "We'd better find another kind or this business is going bottom up."

"Please." Verecker turned his face away and held up both hands. "Let's not discuss money so soon after a ninety-four."

"How much did you lose today?"

"Twenty-five bucks."

Annie closed her eyes.

Verecker said plaintively, "You couldn't lend me ten till payday, could you?"

"What payday? Today's supposed to be payday. I haven't had a payday for weeks. I haven't even got my alimony this month."

"Business has been bad."

"Business has been terrible. Honestly, Verecker, we need money."

Verecker got up and squared his shoulders. "There's only one thing for it: I'll become a shyster lawyer—a mouthpiece for the mob, with a hair-line moustache and a badly fitting chalk-stripe suit. Tampering with juries, bribing witnesses, bailing out hoods while the cops grind their teeth—it's steady work and the hours are good."

Annie considered it. "A shyster, huh? Well, you already wear the suits."

Verecker grunted, moved to her desk and picked up the