

# A GREAT GUY

BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS

WE HAD just come back from burying Charley Hipp—fourteen of us, not counting Joe Carey, who had been Charley's bartender for four years and who was so overcome when the cortège moved off for the cemetery that he slipped on the step of one of the undertaker's limousines. He gave his head such a crack that, added to his original condition, it just barred him from the obsequies.

We gathered round the stove in the caution room. It was Charley who christened it that, and it was his favorite sitting place, although only supposed to be used when things were hot, and folks had to be, as the name of the room implied, sort of cautious. It was just the same as his ordinary joint, only turned around. For instance, when everything was running nice the bar was in the regular room right in front, looking on to the street, and you walked straight into it. Back of this was the sitting-room and the cubicles, made sound-proof and with no windows, but awful cozy just the same. Here was where you got your chops and steaks and fish and set your cheating dates.

But when the fear of a rap—phoney or otherwise—was on, Charley'd just shut this first joint right off, open a communicating door, and there you were in the caution room, which had the sitting-out place in the front—sound proof and all, and with the windows boarded up, while the bar was in the back. That way folks peeking in could see nothing, while when everything was safe and wide open the bar and the accoutrements could be seen in all their enticement right from the street and trade would be stimulated.

Well, here we were, all mourners, back from burying the best pal a man or a woman ever had. There was something so fine about Charley that Jim Doheny, one of his friends, set it out briefly in a criticism of the funeral itself. I didn't agree with him, but he's sort of intellectual and his heart's in the right place.

"You should either have had a detachment of State troops and the Governor there," he said, "or else you should have buried him like a bum. He should have been treated as a king among men or else as a beloved vagabond. But this damned mediocrity, this Rotarianism—bah!"

Well, despite what Jim thought about it I put it down as a pretty nice send-off and so did the rest of us. We'd got back to Charley's place about three o'clock and by that time Carey had slept off his troubles and got used to the crack on the head. He was set to serve us. The best of everything, as Charley would have wanted it to be.

There was myself and two other newspaper men, including this Doheny who had such funny ideas about the right sort of a burying. There was the hula dancer from Texas Guinan's night club. There were two of the daftest blondes I ever looked at or listened to. They came from the Marx Brothers' show, "Animal Crackers," and if the rest of the opera is as foolish as these two janes then the boys have got a great thing. There were three coppers from the district, already wondering where their good liquor was coming from in the future. And there were two Prohibition agents who'd helped take care of the dead man while he was operating.

Paddy, the Irish waiter, was there, and so was Herman, who was German. And Fritz, Herman's bus boy. Fifteen of us altogether—all sad and low over the passing of a great guy.

## II

Joe Carey set them up. He had Bourbon, Scotch and good Canadian ale back there, just enough for a great party. But when that was gone Charley's spot was due to pass out. None of us that counted for protection knew a man we would have cared to see in his place. Carey was too fond of his liquor. Paddy was too pugnacious. Herman was too lazy. Fritz, the bus boy, wasn't naturalized as yet. He would have made the best bet to follow Charley, being young, bright, quick, pleasant and smart-looking. But we were all pretty sound Americans and kind of set against putting folks into any sort of prominence or responsibility until they had assumed the proper obligations of citizenship.

We all had a round of doubles, including the three girls, and then the hula dancer started to cry. It was her first drink that day, so her emotion must have been genuine. She said she couldn't help thinking of the time poor Charley had saved her from the taxidriver's ball and from the complications that would have been bound to ensue from her appearance there.

You see when this girl works for Guinan she wears just a strap and a brassière and a couple of handfuls of straw. These cabmen had heard the suckers cheering her artistry and had decided to have a try at getting her to their annual ball, which is the toughest gathering in the Middle West. They told her the pay would be fifty bucks and that only nice people would be present. In fact, they let her think the affair was being got up by the executives of the company. They intimated that the audience would be just as pure-minded as the front row tables in the night club.

The little girl needed the dough and said yes. But about an hour before she was to

be picked up by one of the drivers and whirled out to this madhouse a kid who'd been working for the cab company and hadn't got properly toughened as yet called her and tipped her she would have to do her cooch in the altogether if she expected to get out of there as she went in. He told her she'd better leave her skirt and brassière and strap behind unless she wanted to get them torn up during the evening's proceedings.

Now, even although this girl was a hula dancer, she was very refined and wouldn't dream of an idea like that. She was scared stiff. Add to that, after the boy driver had finished talking to her the clerk rung her room and told her two of the toughest looking chauffeurs he'd ever seen were waiting for her and had told him to tell her to step on it.

The only person she could think of to call on for help was Charley. She gave him a ring and between tears begged him to run over. He was right busy at the bar when the call came but he was a Bayard if ever there was one. He grabbed two of his guns out of the curtain where he kept them, jumped into his car and was in the hotel lobby just as the biggest of the taxidriver's was telling the clerk to advise the girl that if she didn't shake a leg he was coming up after her.

"You and who else?" asks Charley. "I'm this jane's manager and she goes on naked no place."

"She's hired to dance at our ball and we're waitin' for her," said one of the toughs. "Who said anything about her working naked?"

But they both knew Charley and had started backing to the door.

"Who dances any other way at your rackets?" answered Charley. "You want to get her up there and rip her apart. This girl's decent. All you've done is let her dance fool you."

And with that he chased them out into their cabs. Then he went upstairs to comfort the girl. He had to take her out to his speakeasy to get her properly calmed

down. It took so long to do it she missed her numbers at the night club. But Charley fixed that up too.

Thinking about it over there beside the stove—what with Charley just put away—she got so we couldn't stop her crying. Then Carey had to bring 'round some more of the stuff, and that set the two daft blondes to weeping as well. Altogether, it wasn't such a pleasant sort of a party.

After a bit the cops figured they'd had as much as they could stand and get by on roll-call. The two Prohibition men said they'd have to go to work and show some results for the time used up at the funeral. Soon there was just the girls and us newspaper men and the help left in the place—all huddled round that stove and down in the mouth.

Poor Charley!

Certainly, after listening to the hula dancer and to the two blondes I knew he had not been unwept.

The funeral was nice—despite that high-brow crack of Doheny's. So he had not been unhonored.

And I'll be damned if he's going to go unsung.

### III

That backroom of Charley's was a right cozy sort of a place. Red cushions in all the cubicles and the round-bellied stove always going in the cold weather. One side of the room belonged to Paddy the Irishman, and the other was administered by Herman the German.

Always fighting, these two were, and the way Charley handled them isn't the least thing to his credit on this earth. He had hired the pair when he opened the joint four years ago. They were on a straight ten bucks a week then. But tips were running forty to fifty, so the jobs were not to be sneezed at. Charley's big trade was politicians, newspaper men and chorus girls. That sounds like a funny combination but it was a fact. The janes

all liked him and the address used to be passed around the companies like traveling salesmen do with telephone numbers. There never was a show in Chicago but what a sprinkling of the girls lit out to the joint. Very few actors. Charley didn't encourage them. Poor pay. But you'd be surprised how straight chorus girls are on squaring up liquor bills when they're running Dutch. Doesn't sound possible but it's true.

Business got so heavy in the bar Charley didn't have the time to handle the food end of the game. Carey wasn't reliable, though a first-class bartender. There were too many bottles around, and Charley spent just about as much time back of the mahogany as did his helper. So he made Paddy and Herman an offer to the effect that they could pool on buying the food supplies, pay the chef and take over that end of the business.

It worked great for the two waiters but I for one quit eating there after Paddy had got things going good. However, the liquor remained all right, which was the main thing. Politicians and chorus girls and some newspaper men have tough stomachs seemingly, for the food trade kept standing up and the first thing I knew Paddy was buying real estate.

A pugnacious pushing little fellow he was, and very anxious to take over the place after Charley had departed. But Jim Doheny, who did the fronting, turned him down cold. He figured rightly that personality is the big thing in the liquor business in these days of trial and tribulation. It was pure friendship between Jim and Charley, the only thing he got out of the protection being his liquor when he dropped in.

"I take care of him politically," Jim explained one night, "and he takes care of me alcoholically."

Which was fair enough and honest and decent enough.

Finally, this Paddy got so greedy about price-cutting that Herman the German, who had worked in the best of places be-

fore he came into the speakeasy trade, got just plumb disgusted. It wasn't that he objected to taking his end of the profits, which were getting bigger and bigger each week that came around, but he just couldn't lay that sort of food in front of customers.

He'd get a few drinks and then his conscience would start to bother him. A guy or a lady would come in and say:

"Well, Herman, how's the perch to-night?"

It would be more for the sake of saying something than anything else. Like as not they wouldn't even expect an answer. But if Herman would be a bit ginned up, which he was most of the time, he'd come right back at them.

"Lousy," he'd say—and he'd say it of everything else on that menu. Tears would come in his eyes and he'd start to tell the customers of the sort of food he'd been used to serving at the Chicago Club.

Well, of course Paddy would listen in and then there'd be a hell of a row. It came close to murder one night. Herman had been stacking up at the bar and had been getting sadder and sadder and sadder. All of a sudden he offs and marches into the kitchen. There was a pot of yearling clam chowder on the stove and he yanked it off and heaved it down the sink. The cook had been drinking all that afternoon too and he was nervous enough even before Herman picked up the chowder. When that happened he started to squeal like a rat and then all of a sudden he went into the rams. Charley and Paddy and some of the boys tied him up after taking the cleaver away from him and soon the ambulance came around and he was taken away. All Herman did while the riot was on was to go sniffing around the other pots and to heave the rest of the food into the garbage pails.

After that there was a council of war. And here was where Charley showed what a square guy he was. He could have taken over that kitchen any time and brought it back to the sort of a place where I would

have been glad to eat. But he had given these birds his word and all he did was to tell the Irishman to let the customers have a better break. The deal between them, he said, would have to stand.

You'd hardly believe me when I tell you those two hash slingers were doing more than a hundred and fifty a week apiece in clear profit. Herman finally solved the problem by hiring Fritz to work for him. This boy hadn't been over from the old country long and he was a nice, personable kid. All the trade came to like him and even Paddy got along with him. Herman paid him forty a week, which was good money for a greenhorn. That left the old Dutchman with over a hundred for himself and all he had to do to earn it was to sit there and to see that no short-changing went on over his tips. He led an ideal existence. Had his mug of beer beside him afternoon and night and was in on most of the pinochle games. Listening to him, you'd have thought he was the boss instead of Charley.

It just goes to show you what kind of a fellow our dead pal was.

#### IV

You could hardly ever go into the joint without running into Sergeant Carroll. In fact, I guess he put in a better attendance than Carey, Paddy, Herman or Fritz. Of course he never bought a drink and once I asked Charley what he figured the copper cost him in Bourbon. But he reminded me the man had his uses. Certainly he did take care of things at his end. Charley, you might say, had about the best protection in town.

There were the two Prohibition agents, who covered him on the Federal end, Jim Doheny, who watched out for him at City Hall and in the courts, and then this Carroll. A lazy guy and a heavy drinker who won't go any further than he has got now and wouldn't be that far if it wasn't for his uncle, one of the city's biggest politicians and a man who has his

finger in the police pie all the time. Carroll did pretty much as he liked around the district and if he'd wanted to work he could have gone to the top of the tree. He was content where he was, for the captain and the rest who were above him at the station-house were scared of his uncle and give him the right of way. He was just putting in what you might call a life's vacation on the force. A good guy to know, although his taste in Bourbon ran into real dough.

Well, sir, Charley had a friend, a right polished sort of a girl who operated an ale and whiskey flat in quite a nice section of town. She was a sweet lass and quite the lady. Her spot came to be known among automobile men, who are heavy spenders when they have it. The time of the last show here she did a whale of a business. So much and with such attendant noise around early in the morning that the neighbors made a heavy complaint to the police captain. He wandered over and gave her a talking to, which frightened her into calling Charley. Sergeant Carroll happened to be in the joint at the time and he heard the story over the 'phone.

"Listen," he said, "tell her to keep on a-going. My uncle got that guy his captain's bars. He'd better lay off her while I'm on the force."

Well, of course Charley heartened her up by telling her that, and, being a girl, she does just what a fool girl would do and gets brazen. The automobile salesmen were carrying on worse than ever and the first thing we knew one night the beat copper—she always took the right care of him—tips her the captain and a squad are heading her way because of new complaints and would be around to pull the flat inside an hour.

She called Charley, shaking so she could barely talk.

"Get your booze out of there quick," he told her. She answered him she'd got so much of it and being alone she couldn't begin to move it. Charley thought a minute and then his eye caught Carroll sitting

in the backroom absolutely plastered with Bourbon. He tipped off the girl quick to what he wanted her to do and then shouted at Carroll.

"Say, you," he yelled, "run up to my girl's joint and sit around. She's lonely and she always did like you."

Carroll was willing, so they got a cab and hoisted him into it and ran him out. Finally he walked into the flat, but so soused he could do nothing but grin and wait.

"Take a hot bath," said the girl. "It'll sober you up fine."

This was in line with what Charley had told her to do.

Carroll figured this was a great party and told her to hop to it. So she ran him a tubful in this pink-tiled bathroom of hers, the like of which he had never seen before in his life. She helped him off with his clothes and he tumbled into the water.

She was a sort of a particular girl, having come from a good family, and Carroll was just the opposite. She looked at him a minute laying there grinning silly-like in the hot water. And then she grabbed a bottle of bath salts.

"I'll shake these over you, sergeant," she said. "You smell like a goat."

And with that she dumps the whole bottle-full into the water.

She'd no sooner done that than a rap comes on the door. She opened up and in burst the captain and the squadmen. They banged around and after a minute or two they crashed into the bathroom and there was Carroll lying grinning in the hot water, all perfumed up like Peggy Joyce. He'd sobered considerable too.

"Hello, Cap," he sung out. "Whaddye mean busting in like this? Can't I have no privacy at all, at all?"

The captain recognized Carroll, not for what he was himself but for being the nephew of the man he owed his job to. So he stopped for a snifter and explanations and then off he went.

Those were the sort of things that Charley did for his friends.

## V

It was getting dark on the street. In the backroom Carey had fallen asleep across his arms on the bar and those of us who were still drinking had been helping ourselves.

We'd all been sitting quiet, thinking of our friend who was dead and gone. That is, all but one of the chorus girls, who'd been jabbering to herself about what a poor jane like her was going to do when this television had been perfected and there'd be no more theatres and no more work day in and day out for either her or the Marx Brothers.

Jim Doheny shoved his chair back. He and Doc Mitchell had to get to the office and write the stories they'd picked up on the 'phone after the funeral. The hula dancer said something about a supper show and the blondes were due at the theatre. We'd all had a lot to drink but it hadn't taken us out of our sadness.

Jim smacked Carey across the cheek and woke him up.

"You'll pour out a last one," he said.

Carey did just that and we drank in silence. We all stood there a minute as if we didn't know what to do. Paddy broke the tension by saying he'd have to beat it down to his restaurant. He'd bought himself a little place before Charley was cold in his bed!

"That guy I've hired will be diving into the till if I don't," he said.

There was a crack that Charley would never have made. It just showed you the difference between men. And to think Paddy had tried to get Jim to spot him into the joint!

Herman figured he'd go home. His long holiday was over now and he'd have to go back to work. A little older and a little stiffer but full of memories—sweet if sad. Fritz and he shuffled off. Paddy had gone on ahead.

We left poor Joe Carey sniffing over the bar. We didn't know then that he'd stay there all night drinking the Bourbon and that finally he would grab one of Charley's gats out of the curtain and send himself off to join his friend.

We'd sent for a cab and when we got outside it was there waiting. The six of us clambered in somehow or other. It was a funny thing that happened then. Nobody reached out to close the door and the car was tipped to the curb so it couldn't have swung shut by itself. But yet it seemed as though somebody was holding it open for us as we got in and then that someone closed it.

The girls didn't notice it—which was a good thing. I remembered that Charley would always speed us home like that. No matter how busy he might be he'd come out to the sidewalk, pack us in if anybody needed packing, close the door and wave us good-bye.

I guess he was there all right—not wanting to miss the very last time.

# DEPARTMENT STORES

BY BORIS EMMET

**T**O THOSE who have, of late, been observing the trend of the retail business in the United States, it is clear that its effectiveness, unlike that of manufacturing, has not increased. As a matter of fact, it has actually retrogressed.

By effectiveness is meant, by and large, the cost of the store service to the consumer and the incidental return to the owner. Aside from that, one is unaware of any complaint which either of the parties would be justified in making. The consumer, almost invariably, gets what he wants under a system of service which necessitates free delivery in most instances twice daily, in bundles or packages wrapped in the most stylish and expensive, to the store, fashion. This service also presupposes, in the majority of instances, free credit of from sixty to ninety days to almost anyone, and an unlimited exchange and return privilege, even after the purchased merchandise may have been used.

The motto, "The customer is always right," is usually construed to mean that the store is always wrong, as a matter of good business policy. The wide-awake customer knows that he can make almost any store acquiesce in anything, irrespective of its reasonableness, as long as he is willing to go higher up. What the department manager may not grant will be granted by the Adjustment Bureau, and if the Adjustment Bureau says No the superintendent will say Yes, under sufficient pressure. By the time the complaint reaches the general manager the matter is usually settled to the full satisfaction of the customer.

There is only one fly in this apparently

ideal ointment. Ultimately, perhaps without realizing it, the consumer pays for all this service in full.

The cost of doing business, known in department store parlance as the mark up, has been steadily mounting, until in 1928 the majority of stores needed a minimum mark-up of between 38% and 40% of the retail price to keep the sheriff from their doors. Some could not perform this miracle even on 40% and required a point or two more. This mark-up, in addition to all the other costs incidental to carrying on the business, includes the cost of mark-downs or reductions, and also the net return or profit, which varies in most instances from 4% to nothing.

The meaning of the 40% mark-up becomes more apparent to the layman when it is stated that an article purchased wholesale for sixty cents has to be retailed by the store for a dollar. This charge seems to be rather steep for the service of moving merchandise from the producer to the consumer and justifies the current public dissatisfaction with department store management. That there is such dissatisfaction is made evident by two facts: (1) the full-priced or regular business of a majority of the American department stores is steadily declining; and (2) there has been a tremendous increase in the volume of business of the chain stores, which are known to operate on a much smaller gross margin.

The steady decline in the day-to-day regular business has raised havoc with the traditional department store, necessitating as it has the development of store-wide sales and departmental "events"—a policy which, if honorably pursued, makes the