

"You waitress pincher," Hadley bellowed; and smacked his fist into the middle of Henri's profile



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Heir Transparent

Scallions and old Liederkrantz for our not too highly regarded friend J. Edwin Bell, vulture-puss of the Hollywood flesh marts

"GET out of my office, you light-fingered tramp!" J. Edwin Bell uttered harshly, while the eye behind his monocle grew glacially cold. "I ain't wasting my time on has-been ex-clowns which I couldn't get a job on a bet!"

Lippy Schmaltz cringed.

"Wait before you turn me out, Bell," he pleaded. "Wait, and listen how it's gonna rain dollars from heaven on both of us—on account of this idea I got!"

Mr. Bell sniffed.

Besides the monocle, he wore expensive garments of imported tailoring and had a gardenia in his lapel; so that from his stooped shoulders on down he presented the appearance of a London fashion plate. His appearance from the shoulders up wasn't so good, since this upper view naturally included J. Edwin's face.

Perched atop his skinny and outthrust neck, his sharply beaked features closely resembled those of a bird of prey—such as a large, bald vulture. In fact, what Mr. Bell really looked like was a fugitive from a taxidermist's shop.

"I'm listening," he stated glumly, "and all I hear is a dull clinking noise. Meaning them dollars must be counterfeit if you got anything to do with it!"

Lippy Schmaltz grinned wisely.

"You think so?" he jeered. "Maybe you ain't hearing so good on account of them dollars being in Gus Lennox's pants pocket right now!"

"Lennox!" J. Edwin Bell perked bolt upright behind his office desk. Incredulous sounds blurted from his thin lips. "Did I hear you say Gus Lennox?"

"I dunno what you hearn," grunted Lippy, "but that's the name I said. In other words, Bell, I'm giving you a chance to scrape a little rich gravy off'n the Mogul Films Corporation's dinner plate!"

"Great shivering snakes!" breathed Mr. Bell. He was a Hollywood flesh peddler—a cinema agent—a one-man employment agency supplying assorted talent to the movie studios on a ten percent commission basis. That is, he worked for ten percent when he couldn't put the bite on somebody for more.

Gus Lennox, being the boss producer at Mogul, was a natural target for the bite. And the flesh peddler had tried—only so far, the net results amounted to severe pains shooting through the region of J. Edwin's dentistry.

But Mr. Bell was very, very willing to try again. Maybe this time he would really shake the large lettuce out of his ancient enemy's bankroll.

"Go on, Lippy!" he urged. "What's the proposition?"

"Simple," stated Lippy. "I'd do it myself, only I couldn't hardly get in Lennox's office to see him."

The flesh peddler nodded understandingly, for he knew all about Lippy's career—which was that of a professional ribber, or gag man. For Nature had lavished peculiar treasures on Mr. Schmaltz, including a rare ability to get anybody else's goat.

It explained the guy's career as a party entertainer in Hollywood, where nowadays the thoughtful host hardly ever fails to provide a hearty horse-laugh for his guests.

Lippy got the laughs. He got them by posing as a waiter, spilling cocktails

on people, criticising the ladies' gowns, and getting into almost-fights with the men. For, as everyone in Hollywood knows, the highest form of humor is that of just insulting the daylights out of everybody in sight.

ONLY Lippy was no longer in demand as the hired life of the party. He wasn't, because he had a weakness for the cash in the guest's pockets, men's gold watches, and ladies' bracelets. In addition, he also stole the host's silverware.

It was only partly true that Mr. Schmaltz couldn't get into Gus Lennox's office. In full truth, he couldn't even get within pistol shot of the cop at the Mogul gate.

J. Edwin Bell knew all about this, since he had handled the gagman's professional career. "Meaning," he suggested, "you want to cut me in for fifty percent if I go see Lennox for you?"

"Ten percent," corrected Lippy. "Because all you gotta do is strictly legal."

"Legal?" puzzled the flesh peddler. "You mean you can get money away from Gus Lennox legally?"

"Why not?" asked Lippy. "Ain't you seen in the papers where old Ebenezer Hadley kicked the bucket? And also how his only son got trun by a polo goat and busted his neck?"

Mr. Bell had read both items. Old Ebenezer Hadley had been the big-shot banker behind the Mogul Films Corporation—owning, if J. Edwin remembered accurately, three-quarters of the voting stock. Compared to which, even the mighty Gus Lennox was only just a glorified office boy!

"Okey-dokey!" continued Mr. Schmaltz. "So all that dough goes to a second cousin, name of Mark Hadley. Only they can't find him to tell the news about how he hit the jackpot! And it leaves Gus Lennox trying to run a million-dollar business without a guy to sign the checks. So he puts up a ten grand reward for anybody which can find Mark Hadley.

And that's just where we come in at!"

J. Edwin Bell leaned back in his chair, unmerry laughter rattling in his scrawny throat.

"Why, you cheap crook!" said Mr. Bell unpleasantly. "Sure, I heard all that. And more. I heard they got this guy Hadley's fingerprints from off a postal savings account he had in New York! Meaning your racket won't lead you nowhere except straight to jail!"

Lippy stared. "What racket?"

"Your phony." J. Edwin shrugged. "The ringer you was going to slip over on Gus Lennox. Ain't that the idea?"

The party gagman drew a deep breath.

"Nah!" he exploded. "I don't need no phony. Because I found the real Mark Hadley—right here in Hollywood."

These words yanked J. Edwin half out of his chair. "What?" he yelped in astonishment. "You—say, what makes you so sure it's the real Hadley?"

Lippy grinned. "I knowed him ever since collitch days," he announced blandly.

"College?" choked the flesh peddler. "Why, you never even set foot inside of a college."

"Nah-h. But I been in Sing Sing," the gagman explained. "I was even on the football team there—and we took them collitch guys on for a practice game. So me and Mr. Mark Hadley was pushing each other around all afternoon!"

J EDWIN BELL focused his monocle on the professional insulter. "But that was several years ago, at least," he muttered doubtfully. "Chances are you just seen some guy that looks kinda like Hadley."

"I didn't only get a gander at him; I lifted his leather besides. Here!" Lippy tossed a limp billfold toward the desk.

Mr. Bell's thin fingers intercepted the wallet's flight. Automatically, his stare consulted the money compartments first. These being empty, J. Edwin turned his attention to the identification card and thumb-printed and signed driver's license from an eastern state.

Signed by Mark Hadley! There was something else: J. Edwin's alert glance detected a thin edge of blue cardboard tucked behind the license.

"Caesar's galloping ghost!" gulped the cinema agent, using the tip of his fingernail to pry up the license and discover a parking lot ticket underneath. "You mean the guy don't know he just hit a million-dollar jackpot? Walking around without a dime in his pants?"

Lippy sniffed. "He had fifty bucks on him—but you don't get no percentage on that!"

J. Edwin Bell wasn't interested in ten percent of a measly fifty dollars—at least, not very interested. "Where," he asked innocently, "is the guy living?"

The curl of Mr. Schmaltz's rubbery lips revealed yellowed teeth in a defensive grimace.

"Nah-h!" he objected warily. "I ain't spilling that! I know you, Bell! You'd keep that ten grand to yourself if you had half a chance!"

J. Edwin shrugged. He really hadn't expected the ex-extra to be quite that dumb, of course. He just asked to make sure Lippy didn't suspect the existence of the parking ticket.

"Suit yourself," he said; "only how am I supposed to collect the reward if I can't tell Lennox where the guy is?"

"You ain't gonna collect it!" asserted Lippy Schmaltz grimly. "You're gonna show Gus Lennox the leather, and make a date for me to settle the rest with him!"

"Okay, you win," Mr. Bell answered in a voice of false vinegar. "I'll go and see Gus right away immediately!"

Clutching the wallet in one fist, he clapped a derby hat atop his narrow skull with the other hand, and went rapidly into the street.

"Cabbie!" he bawled.

A taxi drew in to the curb. "Where to, mister?"

"Wait a minute!" cried J. Edwin, his fingers trembling in avid haste as he extracted the blue pasteboard from Mark Hadley's wallet. "Yeah! Let me off at

the Emscott Hotel parking lot. And step on it, Jehu!"

THE flesh peddler's thin lips wore a predatory grin as the hack whirled him across Hollywood. That parking ticket was going to lead him straight to Mark Hadley, wasn't it? The knowledge of it sent Mr. Bell's pulse pleasantly hammering—and sent his crafty brain into a series of mental acrobatics.

For, to tell the truth, the flesh peddler did not always conduct his affairs on the up-and-up. Indeed, the main difference between J. Edwin Bell and Captain Kidd was that Mr. Bell neglected to fly the skull and crossbones. His flag was a field of yellow emblazoned with a staring black double-cross.

"I found this billfold," mused the cuticle vendor. "And if Lippy wants to deny it, he's laying himself wide open to a pickpocket rap! Or in other words, I don't have to split with the guy. Lippy's a dirty crook, anyway! Look at all the stuff he heisted at them parties after I got him them jobs.

"And—" here Mr. Bell's eye stabbed a savage gleam through its monocle, "he never cut me in for my ten percent of the take, like any honest man would have done!"

Whereupon, he dismissed Lippy Schmaltz with a shrug of his excellently tailored, stooped shoulders. He had more important things to think about, anyway. Such as this Mark Hadley guy!

Because Mark Hadley owned Mogul Films whether he knew it or not. And all Mr. Bell had to do was figure out ways and means of cashing in on this human gold mine.

"Ten thousand! I should be a sap and turn him over to Gus Lennox for a mere ten grand," muttered the flesh broker. "Why it's like being handed a blank check on the whole Mogul bankroll. I can fill it out for a million if I work this right."

Old Ebenezer Hadley had been president of the Mogul organization, he reflected. And they didn't pay off movie

presidents with cigar coupons. Maybe they wouldn't make Mark Hadley president right away—not for a year or so—but they'd have to make him a vice-president at least. At about a hundred grand per annum!

"Hot dog!" Mr. Bell addressed himself earnestly. "So all I gotta do is sign him up on a exclusive long-term ironclad contract, entitling me to ten percent agency commission on his salary. Only first it means I gotta get the guy to trusting me. Which handing him back his empty poke ain't going to help any!"

So thinking, Mr. Bell reached for his own wallet. Fifty dollars, Lippy had said—and J. Edwin's beaky features contorted in physical anguish as he subtracted five ten-spots from his billfold. With the expression on his face of a guy being forcibly separated from his own five fingernails.

For Mr. Bell wasn't exactly generous when it came to handing out cash. He let loose of a dime when one turned around and bit him; but hardly ever otherwise. . . .

"WHY yes, that's my wallet. I must have dropped it somewhere," said the young man in the lobby of the Emscott Hotel. "No—hold on! This isn't my money. I had a twenty-dollar bill, and some fives. . . ."

He lifted a blackly curly head, stared at J. Edwin Bell with puzzled gray eyes.

"How come?" he demanded.

The flesh broker's agile wits cleared this hurdle with a flying leap. He chortled, "That proves it's yours. Because I took out your money and put in the same amount of my own."

"You—why?"

"So's you'd notice the difference if you really owned that poke," the tall cinema agent answered blandly. "That's how I could tell if I gave the wallet back to the right guy, see? On account there's dishonest fellas in Hollywood—even some lowdown crooks which would claim they lost your purse with my money in it!"

Mark Hadley blinked surprisedly.

"Well, anyway, you're honest. You must be, or you wouldn't go to all that trouble to return a perfect stranger's billfold to him. And I'd like to reward you for it. Only—" he hesitated, gazing doubtfully at the costly cut of Mr. Bell's Bond Street attire—"I guess you wouldn't take a reward, would you?"

J. Edwin Bell forced a laugh. "Of course not! Certainly not! I couldn't accept a penny from you! But—"

He paused, beaming on the youth with the fond glance of a hawk admiring a day-old chick.

"Well?" young Hadley asked eagerly.

"I'll let you take me to lunch," consented Mr. Bell. "Only not today I couldn't, being on my way out to the Mogul Films lot. That is, unless you want to join me for a bite in the studio restaurant out there?"

As if anyone wouldn't jump at the chance of eating in a studio restaurant, along with real flesh-and-blood movie stars and directors!

Young Hadley's eyes bulged. "You mean, you can actually get inside the Mogul gate?"

"Sure," shrugged Mr. Bell. "I got a permanent pass, on account of I'm the highest top-notch talent agent in Hollywood."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the youth. "And I've spent a week trying to figure out a way of crashing into that place."

Choked sound struggled upward in the cuticle vendor's scrawny throat. "Crashing in?" he echoed. "You mean, you don't know anybody—any friends or relatives—that could get you a visitor's pass?"

"Not a soul," sighed the grey-eyed young man.

J. Edwin's heart bounced as high as the gardenia in his buttonhole. Why, this movie-struck kid didn't even know he was Ebenezer Hadley's kin!

"So all I gotta do is get him out there," thought the flesh peddler, "and feed him a dose of movie glamour. After which he signs on the dotted line while he's still in a daze!"

SHORTLY thereafter, the tall young man and the monocled flesh peddler steered their way across the crowded studio restaurant. Or rather, J. Edwin Bell steered the way—aiming straight toward the table Director Leon Hugo was just leaving.

"But," protested Mark Hadley, "this table isn't cleared yet."

"Never mind; it's gonna be," Mr. Bell stated, easing his lank length into the chair vacated by the director. "Look! Over in that corner is Henri Brei, the singing star Gus Lennox imported all the way from Paris."

Mark Hadley turned his head to look, and Mr. Bell's skinny fingers surrounded the dollar tip which Leon Hugo had left for the waitress.

Even when gunning for big game, Mr. Bell was not the guy to pass up any easy pot-shots along the way; and in the course of a year, J. Edwin picked up considerable velvet by knocking over tips on uncleared restaurant tables.

"Hey!" blurted young Hadley, jerking around wrathfully. "That's a dirty trick to play on a working girl, ain't it?"

J. Edwin Bell's fist froze in the act of transferring the coin to his pocket. "Huh?" he gulped, his sallow cheeks taking on the guilty tint of a Technicolored sunrise. "Why, you was looking the other way!"

"I was looking straight at Henri Brei!" snapped Hadley. "He pinched that blond waitress as she went by."

He stopped as the blond girl began clearing off their table. "Look, sister, what's your name?"

"Valerie. Jean Valerie." Her young face was almost as pink as Mr. Bell's. "What of it?"

"Nothing," said Hadley. "Except you just say the word, Miss Valerie, and I'll go knock that musical frog for a double loop into the nearest garbage can!"

"Oh, no. Please!" Miss Jean Valerie's blue eyes were imploring. "I'd lose my job! Why, Henri Brei is the most temperamental star on the lot."

"Oh, yeah?" Mark Hadley scowled. "That don't give him any right to pinch you, does it?"

J. Edwin Bell grunted. "Never mind! It don't mean a thing when a Frenchman pinches a girl there. They do it for flattery, like an American lifts his hat to a dame. . . . Just bring us two ham on ryes and a couple slugs of Java, girlie."

Miss Jean Valerie went away with an armload of dishes, and Mark Hadley stared thoughtfully at Mr. Bell.

"So that's what's going on around here," the young man muttered. "Big shots making passes at working girls, and the girls being insulted for fear of losing their jobs! I read plenty about Hollywood, and I'm beginning to guess a guy could find out plenty by just laying low and keeping his mouth shut."

A cold thrill teased its way along J. Edwin Bell's spine. Sudden suspicions played tag through the labyrinthine paths of his wily brain.

"Laying low?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean there's probably plenty of stuff being pulled right here on the Mogul lot," asserted Hadley. "Yes-men collecting big salaries for doing nothing, and casting directors giving jobs to their friends, and money being wasted left and right. I mean all that stuff you hear is probably strictly true."

He tackled the sandwich Miss Valerie put before him; said, "I bet she could tell plenty if she wasn't afraid of getting fired! Only of course Gus Lennox wouldn't ever ask her. A big shot like him can't get away from the brass band long enough to do a little private investigating." Hadley paused long enough to snort. "It's like fixing a car. A guy has to get down on the ground and look up under the motor. He can't find out anything by riding around in the back seat while a chauffeur does the driving."

NEVER slow on the uptake, J. Edwin Bell had got the idea already a minute ago. Mark Hadley wasn't so dumb,

after all. He knew whose second cousin he was! Sure, he did! And he knew who owned three-fourths of the Mogul voting stock, too.

So that was why he had kept his presence in Hollywood a secret—because he wanted to find out for himself what went on behind the scenes.

Mr. Bell's piratical mind instantly set his sails with the prevailing wind.

"You're absolutely right!" he said. "A smartie could get plenty of low-down, supposing for example he had a job as an extra. Which I'm in the business of handling such jobs for a mere ten percent. Here."

He whipped a document from his pocket, uncapped his pen. "Lemme sign you up," wheedled J. Edwin. "I won't promise you no fat salary, but I'll get you some kind of a movie connection where you can get enough experience to write a book about."

"Mr. Bell," cried Mark Hadley warmly, "it's the break I've been looking for."

He flourished his name across the dotted line.

"Hot dog! You're hook—I mean, you're almost hired already," explained the flesh broker in triumph as he returned the contract to his pocket. No matter what happened from now on, he was in—into Hadley's future earnings for a strictly legal ten percent.

So rejoiced J. Edwin Bell—with one half of his mind. The other half was busy figuring how he didn't have to stop just because he'd won a battle. There was a war to settle—his old war with Gus Lennox.

"Come on," he said. "I already thought of a swell job where you can meet the most important big shots in the industry."

They left hastily, almost colliding with director Leon Hugo in the doorway. Mr. Hugo's round face was an unhappy shade of gray as he propelled himself between the tables.

"Hey, Joan! Miss Valerie," he wailed. "I made a mistake. That was my lucky dollar I tipped you—and I want it back."

"Dollar?" cried the blond. "You tipped

me a dollar? Why, that old vulture-puss—Why, he's gone!"

Mr. Bell was gone, all right—secluded in the first telephone booth he had sighted, and putting in a call to a newspaper guy of his acquaintance.

"Listen, Winkle," J. Edwin said swiftly. "How about trading me two ducats for the reception Gus Lennox is throwing in honor of Henri Brei's new flicker after the prevue tonight?"

"Trade you," came Winkle's reply, "for what?"

"A scoop," Mr. Bell promised. "I found the guy that owns Mogul Films, and you can have the first interview with him in return for them ducats."

"Sure. What can I lose, because with my dyspepsia the reception's gonna be a total loss anyway," agreed the newspaperman.

The flesh broker knifed his thin form out of the booth and grabbed Mark Hadley's arm enthusiastically. "That was Gus Lennox I talked to about you," he reported, "and it's all set provided you got a dress suit."

"You mean monkey clothes? Gosh, I'm out of luck."

"Never mind," consoled Mr. Bell, planning rapidly as he spoke. The flesh peddler's ideas were always strictly Class A larceny, but this one was even better. In fact, it was super-colossal and epic, besides being a stroke of genius.

Elation flowed hotly in J. Edwin's veins as he contemplated it, and his vulture-like visage set in an anticipatory grin. "Never mind I'll rent you the glad rags."

IN A rented dress suit, therefore, Mark Hadley stood beside J. Edwin Bell that evening at the reception in honor of Henri Brei's latest picture.

"All set?" queried the flesh broker. "You ain't forgot what you're gonna say?"

Hadley's gray gaze rested glumly on the glamorous throng of motion picture celebrities in the ballroom. "Yeah, I know. But if you ask me, it's pretty damned silly!"

Mr. Bell shrugged his dinner-coated

shoulders. "You wanted to get the low-down on Hollywood, didn't you? Well, there ain't hardly any Hollywood parties nowadays where they don't amuse the guest with some gags like this. It's got so pouring soup down people's necks is a way of making a living in this town."

"It's downright childish!" muttered young Hadley. "I'm surprised a fifty-thousand-dollar executive like Mr. Lennox would waste his money on such stunts."

"That's because you don't know Lennox yet," grinned the cuticle vendor, "or anyways not the way you're going to pretty soon!"

He seized the young man's arm, for at that moment Mr. Bell's monocled stare glimpsed Gus Lennox moving toward the champagne-sipping figure of Henri Brei. On account of being a little, bald, brown, shriveled guy, Gus Lennox inevitably reminded the onlooker of a peanut—but a peanut all dolled out in soup-and-fish, starched shirtfront, and diamond studs.

"Go ahead. Lennox is giving us the high-sign to spring the gag right now," said J. Edwin.

Because this was the flesh broker's super-colossal stroke of genius—employing Mark Hadley as Lennox's hired gagman without letting Lennox know about it.

"Okay. But I still think it's damned foolishness for grown-up men to pull this sort of horseplay!"

Hadley advanced, elbowing celebrities of both sexes aside as he bore down on Henri Brei. J. Edwin Bell tagged behind, like a buzzard hovering on the trail of an active young wolf in order to help the wolf finish his next meal.

Hollywood, reflected Mr. Bell pleasantly, was going to see something new in the way of high-powered, double-barreled, delayed-fuse gags tonight! In fact, Hollywood already was seeing it—and hearing it, for Mark Hadley had been instructed to speak his lines in a loud, clear voice.

"That prevue tonight," remarked the young man, "certainly was a stinker."

The ensuing dead silence was all that Mr. Bell had hoped for.

"Comment?" gasped Henri Brei unbelievably.

"And you," declared Mark Hadley, "were the worst smell in it."

Henri Brei strangled on an ejaculation in his native tongue, roughly translatable as, "Name of a pig!"

Hadley was not an expert ribber—not of Mr. Lippy Schmaltz's class—but what he lacked in finesse, he made up in grim determination.

"You sing through your nose," he continued, "and you got a crooked nose, besides."

IN THE moment which followed these tributes, Mr. Bell heard a sound effect which hadn't been included in the original script. Indeed, it surprised the flesh broker, even though he knew all about Monsieur Brei's temperamental pride in his voice and profile.

The sound effect was the *sloosh* of Henri's champagne flung full into young Hadley's face.

"*Sapristi!*" snarled the Frenchman. "*Espèce d' idiot!*"

Mark Hadley mopped champagne out of his eyebrows. "Why you—you waitress pincher!" he bellowed, and contributed a sound effect of his own.

Namely, the smack of his fist square into the middle of Henri Brei's profile.

"Hot dog!" breathed J. Edwin Bell, his monocled optic brightening as he beheld Gus Lennox arriving on the scene of battle.

Gus Lennox was far from being the biggest man in the room. But then, Vesuvius isn't the biggest mountain in the world. And Gus Lennox, like Vesuvius, could erupt on occasion—as now. . . .

"Bummer! Reprobater! Nose-smasher!" blazed the little producer, hurdling Henri Brei's prostrate figure to confront Mark Hadley. "Or if I don't make myself clear yet, you hoodlum! You're gonna wind up in Alcatraz for this. Somebody call a cop."

"Wait a minute," protested J. Edwin Bell, knifing his thin figure through the

ring of onlookers. "You mean you're actually going to have this boy arrested?"

Gus Lennox whirled.

"So!" he intoned dangerously. "It gives buzzards besides hoodlums! Somebody call two cops!"

"Why, you two-timing peanut!" gasped the flesh peddler. Wounded innocence rang in his voice. "Trying to have us arrested when you hired this boy to pull off the gag for a joke!"

"Hired him?" bleated the producer. "Listen, ain't I already got troubles too much without I should go and hire nose-smashers so Brei can't make a personal appearances tour?"

J. Edwin Bell laughed hoarsely. "Yes, you hired him! You're just trying to back out of it, Gus Lennox, on account of this French ham didn't take it in a spirit of nice clean fun."

"A-ha!" cried Henri Brei, sitting up on the floor and glaring at Lennox. "So you have hire heem to make insult of me? *Mon Dieu*. I tear up my contract! I go back to Paree!"

Wailing sound gathered in the little producer's throat.

"No!" he implored. "Listen to me, Brei! What's behind this is like always, meaning a snake in the grass named Bell! Commencing when he comes in, it gives buzzard feathers in the woodpile again! In other words, Bell is a wolf in sheep's clothing biting below the belt on Achilles' heel."

"So—now you call me the heel?" shrilled Henri Brei. "You make the insult, too. *Mon Dieu*, of a sureness I tear up my contract."

At which point, another voice made itself heard. "Break it up, folks. Gangway. Who called the cops?"

"Officer," choked Gus Lennox. "Take these two crooks to the hoosegow—permanently."

IN THE eleven A.M. glare of a police court the next morning, J. Edwin Bell and young Hadley faced the judge on charges of disturbing the peace and resisting arrest.

Mr. Bell was not quite his usual elegant self, because of the fact that a dinner coat, even of the most fashionable cut, is not improved by being used as a jail-house pillow. However, at least J. Edwin's garments were all on him—which was more than could be said for Mark Hadley.

It had taken three cops to insert Mark in the paddy-wagon last night, and his rented dress suit looked like the costume a shipwrecked sailor would have worn—if the sailor had also been recently clawed by a tiger.

"A pretty pair," commented the judge. "A hundred dollars apiece—or three months at hard labor."

Young Hadley turned to the flesh broker. "I've only got forty left. Could you—?"

Mr. Bell could. With a noticeable lack of enthusiasm he reached for his billfold. He emptied out one hundred and sixty bucks just as gladly as a prospector lost on the desert would empty his water canteen onto the thirsty sands.

"Come on. It's money well spent," cried young Hadley, "because anyway I found out what a rat Gus Lennox is. And I'm going to tell him so right now."

Curiously enough, the Mogul receptionist said that Gus Lennox was expecting them. And they should go right in.

Gus Lennox sat in his private office, the walls whereof were papered with gold leaf and equipped with stained glass windows like a cathedral. Since the producer's chair was a Balkan king's ex-throne, and his desk of teakwood inlaid with ivory, the general effect was of a peanut mistakenly exhibited in a jeweler's window.

But Gus Lennox wasn't really taken in by all this splendor. He just used it to dazzle other guys.

"Hello, Bell," greeted the little producer with a chuckle. "Have a cigar! Have two cigars!"

"Huh?" grunted young Hadley. "You changed your tune, didn't you?"

"Yeah," acknowledged Gus Lennox, smiling blandly. "On account it seems this latest Henri Brei production is strictly

a turkey, with all the morning papers saying that prevue last night was the worst headache in years.

"Of course," he added hastily, "I never did like the guy, only he was box-office and you gotta give the public what it wants! But looks like I'm lucky he got so insulted he tore up his contract, so there ain't any hard feelings!"

"I see," muttered young Hadley. "That's why you hired me to spring that gag! In case his picture flopped?"

"Listen, do we got to start that all over from the beginning yet?" shrugged the little producer. "If I hired you or not makes no difference since I'm glad I got rid of Brei anyway."

"Yeah? Well, it makes a difference to me," Hadley yelled, "Lennox, you're fired!"

"I'm not going to argue—hey! What'd you say?" gasped the monarch of Mogul. "Bell, what looney house did you find this guy in?"

J. Edwin Bell chuckled unmerrily.

"He ain't looney, he's the heir to Ebenezer Hadley's dough. He's the second cousin you been looking for. And," grated the flesh broker, "you heard what he said. You're fired. On your way, peanut. Only first write me out a check for the ten grand reward, on account of I brung him here."

"JUST a minute, Mr. Bell," said Mark Hadley softly. "In the first place, I brought myself here. And in the second place, I've got a bigger reward than that planned for you. Now I've fired Lennox, I need an experienced man as producer—and you're it!"

J. Edwin Bell reeled, clutched the ivory-inlaid desk for support.

"You mean," he gasped, "if I don't claim that ten grand, you're gonna give me Lennox's job at fifty thousand bucks a year?"

"That's right," nodded the young man.

There was nothing wrong with J. Edwin Bell's arithmetic. Ten grand against fifty?

"Hot dog!" he exulted. "I mean, I accept."

"Grass-snaker! Now it shows what's under the sheep's clothing last night." Gus Lennox wailed. "Only, hold on. It ain't proved yet this guy is who he claims to be."

Mark Hadley shrugged. "I can settle that in a hurry. You see, Lennox, you've got a young lawyer in the legal department who went to college with me. I'm going to bring him right over here, so we won't waste any time while my fingerprints are being checked."

He strode to the door, paused there. "Didn't I tell you, Mr. Bell, I wanted to reward your honesty in returning my wallet?" he asked, and went out.

"Honest! *You* honest?" Gus Lennox gasped. "Now I know why we couldn't find him before; because we didn't look in the looney-house he must be fresh out of."

A gloating chuckle bathed J. Edwin Bell's tonsils. "Nice office I got here, ain't it?" he inquired. "Take a good look around, Lennox, before you go. Take a last look at where you don't work any more—"

He checked as the door opened again, revealing a blond vision bearing a tray.

"The lunch you ordered, Mr. Lennox," began Miss Joan Valerie; and then her voice changed as she recognized the slightly stooped figure of the monocled flesh peddler. "Vulture-puss again!" she exclaimed. "How about that dollar tip you stole from me yesterday? Come on, give!"

Mr. Bell had the dollar in his pocket—for luck—but he wasn't giving.

"Get out!" he barked at the girl. "And stay out. You're fired."

Miss Valerie's blue eyes opened widely. "And just who," she demanded skeptically, "is firing me?"

"I am," asserted J. Edwin Bell. "And you ain't the only one, either. There's a lot of people around going to get their walking papers from me."

The girl whirled to Gus Lennox. "What in the world—?"

"He's right," admitted Lennox sadly.

"It's like he says, we got a buzzard for an executive producer beginning five minutes ago."

Joan Valerie's resistance wilted abruptly. "But you can't fire me. Mr. Bell, I've got a mother to support—a sick mother—"

"It's no use, girlie." Gus Lennox shrugged. "A heart is what Bell ain't got."

And indeed, a grin of merriment was on Mr. Bell's beaky features as he watched the young woman stumble blindly from the gold-leafed office—*his* office.

"SWEET ziggety," the flesh broker breathed. "I'm just now beginning to appreciate this job. It ain't only revenge I got on you, Lennox—it's everybody on the lot that ever done me dirt. It's dames like Serina Howe, the Krunchy Korn gun moll, and Ruby Acres, and guys like Jim Sheridan and Tim Yorel, and that shoe-shine brat—"

Mr. Bell beamed enthusiastically. "I'm gonna tie a tin can on every one of 'em. I'll grind 'em under my heel. I'll stomp 'em in the dust. Let me at that phone so I can get 'em all over here quick."

J. Edwin's arm darted across the desk, and J. Edwin's talony fingers curled on the gold-plated instrument. Curled—and froze there. His agonized glance stabbed through the monocle to recognize Mark Hadley in the doorway—and also in the hands of a blue-garbed studio cop.

"W-what?" spluttered Mr. Bell.

Young Hadley cringed abjectly. "The game's up, pal," he said weakly. "I was doing fine until a newspaper guy outside waiting for an interview got a gander at me."

"Winkle!" muttered J. Edwin Bell.

"Yeah, that's the guy," said Hadley, shrugging with the shoulder which the cop wasn't hanging onto. "He tipped off the bull here, on account he recognized me for Louie the Lifter."

"What?" yelled Gus Lennox. "Meaning you ain't the right heir, after all?"

"Nah-h," said the downcast Hadley. "I was only bluffing so's to get a chance at lifting some stuff around here like that

diamond-set ashtray on your desk, and the gold phone."

"Lippy!" groaned J. Edwin Bell, his sallow skin dotted with goose-pimples of cold realization. "Lippy Schmaltz framed this. And I give you fifty bucks, besides bailing you outa jail. Why, you dirty so-and-some-more!"

"Can that swearing," said Hadley. "You're gonna bail me out again—or sit in jail with me. Because you're in this just as deep as I am."

Snarled sound jarred from J. Edwin Bell's sourly drawn lips.

"You try and prove that," he challenged.

"It's easy," asserted Hadley. "You even made me sign a paper about splitting the swag with you—*hey, stop him!*"

IT WAS too late for anybody to stop J. Edwin Bell. Along with the lucky dollar, he had transferred the agency contract to his dinner clothes.

Moving with speed which would have photographed as a blur by a slow-motion camera, Mr. Bell's skinny fingers whipped around the document, ripped off the signed end of it, and crammed the foolscap into his mouth.

He swallowed it.

"Send for a stomach pump," shouted Gus Lennox. "Get a doctor—"

Young Hadley laughed.

"Never mind, Lennox," he advised. "You see, I never got as far as the legal department. I overheard that newspaper

man telling the receptionist that J. Edwin Bell had promised him an interview with me—on the phone yesterday.

"So I turned back to ask Bell about that, and I met Joan Valerie coming out of the door crying, and it took her just two sentences to put me wise. She told me about the dollar, and about Bell firing her. So I ran and got the cop—"

A shudder travelled the entire length of J. Edwin's tallish figure. The eye behind his monocle registered a horrid suspicion.

"Huh?" he mumbled. "Then you really are Mark Hadley, after all?"

"Well," suggested the youth, "why else would I trick you into eating up that contract entitling you to ten percent of my income?"

"Great shivering snakes!"

The contract was gone; J. Edwin Bell had refused the ten grand reward. Hit in his most sensitive spot—namely, his pocketbook—the flesh peddler crumpled weakly to the floor.

For just a moment, he lay in a dreamy condition.

Then the cop's form loomed hazily over him, and he became aware of Miss Joan Valerie holding a glass of water to his lips.

"Stand back, the rest of you," the cop urged. "Stand back and give the guy air."

Mr. Bell's teeth rattled against the water glass. "It looks—it looks like I got it," he gasped; and passed out cold again.

The advertisement is a black and white illustration. On the left, a fan of playing cards is shown, including the Ace of Spades, Ace of Hearts, Ace of Diamonds, and Ace of Clubs. Tucked behind the cards are four razor blades, each with a different label: 'DE LUXE', 'THIN STEEL', 'SINGLE EDGE HEAVY DUTY', and 'REGULAR'. To the right of the cards is a large, stylized logo for 'SPEEDWAY BLADES'. Above the logo is a small cartoon character of a man shaving. Below the logo, the text reads: 'SPEEDWAY SHAVES SAYS: Are an honest deal To men who want Clean face appeal'. At the bottom right, a large vertical banner says '10¢ A PACKAGE'.



The Devil's Diary

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

CHAPTER XXIX

SATURDAY: MIDNIGHT

NO one said anything for the next minute. I watched the Chief try hard to get mad, as Barnes held sheet after sheet up to the light. Of course, it had been a real risk to take with a local cop. But as I said before, I had a deadline hanging over me. Besides, I was feeling too miserable at the way things were closing in on Dr. Joe. I had to create a diversion, or go berserk.

"What do you make of it?" asked Willis. I knew I was safe, the minute he opened his mouth.

"What can anyone make out of a ream of blank copy paper, Chief?"

"Eddie seems to be working pretty hard to make something," said Willis,

reaching for his cap. "As for me, I need fresh air. Want to look at that body now?"

So help me, Barnes was still studying each one of those blank pages separately when we went out. Daphne sat right where she was, mechanically stacking the sheets. I turned back from the doorway to apologize for the snatch, but she looked right through me, like someone who'd sat down to catch her breath after too much sleep-walking.

Everyone in the lobby tried to follow us when Willis picked up a flashlight, but two deputies stepped across the door one second after I'd trailed him. A car drove up as we started along the blue-flagged walk, and Kirby III jumped out, looking no more ruffled than usual.

"What terrible news, Chief Willis. I came as quickly as I could. If there's anything I can—"

"We'll see about that right away, Mr. Lake. Would you care to come along with us now?"

"I'm not too keen about it, unless you think it's necessary—"

But I had him by the hand already, and was leading him down that shortcut through the scrub, right on the Chief's heels. It gave me a certain satisfaction to note that the junior tycoon had a very damp palm indeed.

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for September 30