

SING SING SWEENEY

BY THOMAS THURSDAY



- It wasn't his sense of direction Sweeney was losing that eventful day, when he slipped money into a lady's purse instead of out, as was his custom.

Into the lobby of the Sports Haven Hotel, Miami, walked Reginald Smythe, alias Sing Sing Sweeney, and plumped himself into one of the red-upholstered chairs. Brother Sweeney was between thirty and a rising hotel bill, with a net balance on hand of exactly ten bucks.

He had registered at the swank hostelry two days before, accompanied by two genuine cowhide bags. These bags he had carelessly allowed to stick to his hands as he strolled through a New York department store. One now contained six red bricks, for weight, two dirty shirts and a dime toothbrush. The other held a pair of white duck pants and a complete set of his original Seven Sure Systems for Soaking Suckers.

Business with Sweeney was not on the boom. On the contrary, it was on the bum. Three weeks before his descent into the Florida sunshine, he had been checked out of Sing Sing as a nonpaying guest of the State. He had served three of a five-year sentence. It seemed that Sweeney had a strange, uncontrollable passion for penmanship. Unfortunately, this yen misled him into trying his art on checks that were as blank as the accounts behind them. The judge, wholly lacking in a sense of humor, tossed him into the Hudson River clink.

At the moment, his tonsorial appearance was not bad. In fact, it was exceptionally good. He might easily pass for a successful young stockbroker or, at least, part owner of a nightclub. He had bought the outfit just before leaving New York and it had put a large dent in his bankroll. However, he believed it was a very important part of his business equipment, known to the trade as

the front.

As he lounged in the chair, eyes half-closed, he studied the other lobby occupants. Men to the right, women to the left, children to the middle. It was midseason and the hotel was operating full-bloom. All rooms were occupied, mostly by sporting folk who had come South for a whirl at the Hialeah and Tropical Park tracks.

Bored at looking at human faces, he shut his blue-green eyes and began to meditate about the why and wherefore of a hard world, and why, especially, his luck was so lousy. In his weird scheme of things, he believed that plain luck ruled all. His head was just that shape.

Presently, a tall, stately-looking gentleman sat down in the chair to the right of Sweeney. One quick glance at the newcomer told him that here was possible prey, complete with waxed mustache and spats. He also noted the fellow wore a finely-tailored Palm Beach suit, immaculately white buckskin oxfords and a Malacca cane.

Shortly after completing his inventory of the distinguished-looking gentleman, Sweeney fell asleep. Of course, he didn't want to fall asleep but sleep had a lifelong habit of reaching out at the most inopportune moments and throwing him into the arms of Morpheus.

"I beg your pardon." To Sweeney, the voice seemed from another world. He awoke with a shudder and, instinctively, his right hand reached to his pocket to see if his two fives were still there. Turning his blinking eyes upward, he looked into the aristocratic and cultured face of Mr. Wax Mustache.

"I . . . er . . . beg your pardon," Wax Mustache was repeating, "may I have a glance at your paper, sir?"

"Sure, O.K.!" Sweeney smiled, glad at the chance to make the acquaintance of this

distinguished-appearing gent. About fifteen minutes later, Wax Mustache returned the neatly refolded pages. By this time, Sweeney had observed that this bird was overripe for plucking.

"Thanks, old man," said Wax Mustache. "Some deucedly foul news, eh, what?"

"You ain't kidding," agreed Sweeney. "They sure pull off some tough murders these days. Take that Margulies-Murphy case. Why, I bet you that Murphy and Margulies tossed that poor old guy into the river and split the loot. And talk about a lot of crooks! Say, a guy don't know who he can trust any more."

"Isn't it just ripping?" remarked Wax Mustache. "These postwar times are quite uncertain. But I hope for a better world soon. I rawther like to help folk out of their troubles, in my own humble way."

All of which sounded fair, sunny and warmer to Sing Sing Sweeney. So this yamhead liked to help folks out, huh? O.K., swell. And, boy, was he going to shear this sheep!

"You know," went on Wax Mustache, "I like to loll around hotel lobbies and study people. I find it very interesting. I'm not residing at this hotel, you know. Just trotted in to have a look around. I'm stopping around the corner at the Prince Palm. May I offer you my card?"

Sweeney quickly and eagerly indicated that he'd be happy to receive it. It read:

SIR BERTRAM DE COVERLY-WICKHAM
RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL, LONDON

The eyebrows of Sweeney jerked upward and nearly knocked his hat off. This guy was much bigger game than he thought he'd shoot at. Everything indicated good pickings, let the feathers fall where they may.

"Swell meeting you, Sir Bertram," said Sweeney warmly. "Put it there!" All the etiquette that he knew and possessed had been gathered in the vicinity of the Loop, Chicago, and when the Loop became too loopy, he looped to Broadway, New York, and added to his general culture and education.

"I left all my cards in one of my other suits," said Sweeney. "But my name is Reginald Smythe." He had plucked that one from the society pages of a Sunday paper.

"I'm charmed, indeed." Sir Bertram beamed. "May I presume, Mr. Smythe, that you are

interested in the onward, upward march of humanity, that you are interested in the welfare of less fortunate folk than ourselves?"

Sweeney made a noble effort to do some heavy thinking. But, no kidding, what the devil did this humanity stuff mean to him? That kind of mule radish was a yard of baloney to him. However, he figured it would be smart to humor this old dope along.

"I sure am," said Sweeney. "My heart always goes out to suffering people. No fooling, would you believe it, when I was young and poor, I used to give the shirt off my back to the first bum that asked for it? Why—"

Sweeney stopped his sentence in midair and stared in front of him. His eyes centered on a young lady seated at a nearby writing desk. She was evidently between twenty and twenty-five, blonde, demure and rather sweet-appearing. She had neither rouge, lipstick nor mascara on her face and her clothes were plain and dated. This was no much-advertised glamour girl; here was a very plain Jane. Her hat was more like Paris, Iowa, than Paris, France. In fact, it was a simple bonnet.

"Now, there," exclaimed Sweeney, "is a dame that is in some terrible trouble. I bet she got the wrong end of some lousy romantic deal."

"Quite so, quite so," conceded Sir Bertram, studying the young lady.

"I wouldn't be surprised that some big bum promised to meet her in Miami, marry her, and all that stuff," went on Sweeney indignantly.

"She seems to be in a jolly old mess of some sort," agreed Sir Bertram.

"Looks like she's fresh from the farm," went on Sweeney. "Dames ought to be more careful. I think they see too many of them movies, if you ask me. Me, I never married, but I never kidded any dame that I would marry her when I knew I wouldn't. I feel sorry for young dolls, like that one sitting over there. It happens all the time, all over the world."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sir Bertram. "I do believe she's crying!"

The girl began to dab her face with her handkerchief. Her whole body shook perceptibly. She gave her face a final dab with the handkerchief, replaced it in her shabby brown pocketbook, then took a sheet of paper and laboriously began to write.

"Do you imagine, Mr. Smythe," said Sir Bertram, "that the poor child is without funds and

perhaps hungry?"

"Yeah, sure. I wouldn't be surprised," agreed Sweeney, showing great interest.

Suddenly, the girl stopped writing. She opened her purse, extracted a stamp or something, then threw it back on the desk. First staring bewilderedly around the lobby for a moment, she walked dejectedly away from the desk, leaving the pocketbook on the top, with the latch open.

"I got an idear!" said Sweeney, with enthusiasm.

"Really?" asked Sir Bertram. "Really?"

"Yeah," went on Sweeney. "I'm going to help out that little dame without her knowing it. You know what? I'm going over and put some dough in her pocketbook!"

Sweeney rushed over to the open purse, extracted one of his two lone fives, and slipped it inside. He walked back, smiling.

"What's a hundred bucks when you got plenty, hey?" said Sweeney. "Besides, it makes a guy feel better!"

Sir Bertram rose, removed a large roll of bills from his hip pocket, and walked toward the desk. He quickly slipped in two new fifties and walked back to Sweeney.

"Now we both feel better!" beamed Sir Bertram, and sat down.

Less than a minute later, the young lady returned to the desk, placed her purse under her arm, then walked toward the side entrance.

"I wish she had seen what was in the pocketbook," said Sir Bertram.

"Me, too," declared Sweeney. "Boy, will she be surprised when she does open it!"

Sir Bertram glanced at his wrist watch. "My word, it's really getting late, you know. I almost forgot my appointment. Er . . . would you care to visit us at the Prince Palm tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Smythe? For a spot of tea and a little chat. I'm suah Lady Bertram will be delighted to meet you. Suite 3, second floor. I do hope you will come, sir."

"O.K., sure," said Sweeney. "I'll be there, all right. Goodbye, Sir Bertram!"

After Sir Bertram's departure, Sweeney lounged deep in his chair and half-closed his eyes in sweet meditation. Soon he was asleep and his dreams were opulent and very profitable. He was about to order two Palm Beach suits from a very exclusive tailor when a crude voice crashed right into the

middle of his dream.

"Mr. Sweeney, I presume?" said the voice. "Mr. Sweeney, of the Chicago, New York and Sing Sing Sweeney's?"

Sweeney jerked open his eyes. They stared straight into the somewhat porky face of Detective Mike Malloy, of the New York police, now on special duty as a house dick for the winter season.

"I see by the register," went on Mike, "that you are now no less than Reginald Smythe. Where did you grab that one—from 'Who's Who in Sing Sing' or 'Who's Through in New York'?"

"Hey, what's the big idear?" was all the startled Sweeney could say.

"The clerk just told me you were from Newport and Palm Beach," went on the jovial Mike. "What gives? Tell your uncle Mike all about it."

"Why . . . why— Hey, listen!" sputtered Sweeney, shocked at seeing his old nemesis. Mike Malloy was the dick who had hung the rap on Sweeney and had caused him to become a guest of the State. Frankly, he did not care too much for Mike.

"And who was that nice old gent," went on Mike, "you were trying to frisk, may I ask?"

"If you'll gimme a chance," fumed Sweeney, "I can explain everything. On the level, I was—"

"Incidentally, if I don't bore you, may I ask how much you took out of that young lady's purse? I just happened to see that act in person."

"Aw, you're nuts!" exploded Sweeney. "I did her a act of charity. I saw she was in some kinda trouble and so I just slips over and puts some dough in her poke. Honest, no kidding!"

Mike Malloy removed his Panama hat, placed his arms akimbo, then whistled softly in amazement.

"Please," said Mike, "don't make me laugh. I've been swimming over at Miami Beach and my lips are all sunburned. And listen, you clunk. Since when did you take up the habit of slipping dough into pocketbooks, instead of out of them?"

"I'm telling the truth, you flatfoot!" snorted Sweeney.

"Very sad story," said Mike. "I regret that I have no spare tears to shed. Meantime, hand over what you took out of that girl's purse!"

"I can prove it!" cried Sweeney. "Why don't you go an' ask the girl! You dumb dicks ain't got no brains!"

"O.K.," said Mike. "Fair enough. We'll walk

around and see if we can find her. But if you're telling the truth, I'm going to faint right in your arms. My mamma told me that the age of miracles had passed."

Holding Sweeney by the arm, recalling his sprinting records in the other days, Mike searched around the hotel for ten minutes. No girl, no trace of the girl.

"Listen," said Sweeney, "gimme a break, can't you? I'm going straight. I just come down to Miami for my health. I got neuritis something fierce, no fooling. The quack told me that the Florida sunshine would be the works."

"Going straight, eh?" sniffed Mike. "Fellow, your character makes such a racket, I can't hear a word you say. Which reminds me, have you called at the Miami police headquarters and registered your tasty criminal record? The Miami cops are funny like that; they like to know the names of all their new guests."

"I just got in town this morning," lied Sweeney. "I was going down this evening to register. Aw, gimme a break, can't you, Mike?"

"All right, clunk," said Mike. "Since I can't find the girl and since I can't prove that I saw you take any dough out of her purse, I'll give you a break.

But listen, smart guy, I'll be watching you. Now, beat it and keep your beak clean."

"Thanks, pal!" said Sweeney, with great relief. Two seconds later, he was dashing out the main entrance.

Let us return for a moment to Sir Bertram de Coverly-Wickham. Ten minutes after leaving Sing Sing Sweeney, he reached the corner of North Miami Avenue and Flagler Street. There he met a young lady who was blonde, demure and sweet-looking. She had neither rouge, lipstick nor mascara on her face, and her clothes were plain and dated.

"Greetings, toots!" beamed Doc Stanley, alias Sir Bertram de Coverly-Wickham, dropping his British accent for his original and natural Brooklynese. "How much did that hotel hick slip into your pocketbook, hey? I trust the chump contributed a hundred to our mutual welfare? I never met a bigger sap!"

"Sap!" snorted the doc's swindling companion. "Listen, doc, he only slips a five-bucker in my pocketbook and, what d'yer know? So help me, I musta lost it!"

For a long moment, they looked at each other mournfully. Then the lady went on, "Did you say sap? You shoulda said saps, and that's us!"

THE END.