



"Don't worry, honey, the police will see that I am protected . . ."

## You'll Kill The People

By Richard Brister

Right after he first appeared on TV, Buddy Burton began to receive warnings: *get out while you're still alive!* It didn't make sense to make any sense, but Buddy found that the party sending them meant business, and . . .

THE ORCHESTRA gave him a couple of bars, for an introduction, and he stood there, still a little uncomfortable under the staring eyes of the TV cameras and a dozen assorted studio technicians, and gave out with his rich baritone on an oldie, something called *Careless*.

He sang with feeling. Professionally, he now

called himself Burton, Buddy Burton, but he had been born plain Joe Caterisano, in a brick row house on the outskirts of Newark, N.J. His Latin blood showed in his raven black hair, in his slightly overripe but wholly natural gestures, as he punched emphasis into the worn-out words of the old song lyric. He was swarthily, masculinely handsome,

and he sang, people said, like a bird.

"You kill me," a girl had told him at a party, a few evenings ago. "I don't know what you've got, but every time I hear you sing something inside of me starts to flutter and then I just go all to pieces."

"I'll settle for that inside flutter," he had gagged. "I don't want to kill anybody, Miss Barney."

He wished everyone well. The world, of late, had been a wonderful place to be in, from his personal standpoint. After he'd knocked them dead in the three nightclub bookings, his agent, Max Gittman, had got him this spot on TV, a fifteen-minute, three-nights-a-week summer sustainer, and now things were coming his way so fast he was dizzy.

"Kid, you're a shoo-in," Max had told him. "Ever since you chucked that library of Como, Clark, Crosby and Sinatra in the ashcan, and started being plain Joe Caterisano—er, excuse me, Buddy Burton, that is—I could smell success on you. I mean strong, kid. Like garlic. I'll make a prediction."

"What, Max?"

"Two years from now," Max said, "you'll be so fat you won't know what to do with your money. You're on the way, kid, and all roads lead up, in a hurry."

He wrapped up his smooth rendition of *Careless*, giving it that characteristic Buddy Burton punch at the end, and a few seconds later the big red hand moved past the hour, and he could relax once more. The hungry eyes of the TV cameras no longer gobbled up each small detail of his face and figure for projection into millions of homes throughout the eastern half of the nation served by this TV network.

He rode the elevator down to the studio garage, and drove his car downtown and through the Tunnel, and an hour later he was relaxing in the living room of his modest house in the Jersey suburbs, listening to Marie tell him how she had reacted to his broadcast.

"I couldn't pick out anything to criticize, Joe," she said seriously, a little loving frown on her pretty face, for she knew how he hungered for any small criticism which might help him improve on his performance. "You put those three songs over perfect."

"Come on, baby," he pleaded. "There must've been something."

"I don't know what," she said. "Even when you were talking with the announcer, you seemed—just natural. Like it wasn't something somebody had written down for you to say."

"I was perfect then?" Joe kidded. "Better watch out, baby. I'll be getting swell-headed."

"No you won't," Marie said, and she smiled, a small and warm movement of her pretty lips. "You're too sensible for that, Joe. You worked eight years for this and you're thirty years old, a man with a wife and three children, and a sense of humor about things. I guess I know my husband by now, Joe." And she kissed him fondly.

THEY WENT up to bed and, at eleven-thirty, the phone rang. Joe threw a robe over pajamas and padded downstairs in bare feet to see what it was.

"Burton?" the voice said.

"This is Buddy Burton."

"You stink, Burton. I caught you on the TV tonight, and you stink."

He had only just begun to be somebody, but he had always known that once he got there he would have cranks to contend with. He couldn't help grinning, remembering what he'd said to Marie about getting stuck on himself. Not much danger of that, with characters around like this one on the other end of the wire.

"You may have something there, pal. Anything else on your mind? If not, I'll go back to bed."

"Put that voice or whatever you call it in mothballs, Burton. Go back to driving a truck for a living."

"Not till I have to," he laughed, trying to keep this exchange on a good-natured level. "There's more dough in the singing than in truck driving."

"Get off the TV, Burton," the voice gritted. "That's a warning."

The phone clicked dead and he stood there frowning at it for a moment before he replaced it in its cradle. Upstairs, Marie said sleepily, "Who was it, honey?"

"Just some squawk," Joe said. "Wanted to tell me I can't sing worth a damn." Marie's eyes opened, showing fright for a moment, and he said comfortingly, "Guess we're really on our way now, baby. Max Gittman says you can tell you're beginning to get there when people start pestering you this way."

Marie was up earlier than he, because of the

kids. She went down and brought the milk in, and promptly ran upstairs to show him a note that had been thrust under the kitchen door. It had been fashioned out of words and letters snipped from the New York newspapers. It said:

GET OUT OF TV, KID. BIG MONEY  
AIN'T WORTH IT. HOW MUCH DOUGH  
CAN YOU SPEND SIX FEET UNDER.

"I'm scared," Marie said. Her eyes were wide, under the dark lashes, and her mouth trembled. "What are we going to do, Joe?"

"Just some nut," Joe said. "Some—"

"You can't dismiss it like that, Joe. This is a threat on your life. Take it to the police. Please?" she said.

He frowned at the prospect, but looking at Marie, sensing her fear for his safety, he knew he had no real choice in the matter. . . .

"UNDER the kitchen door, hey?" the Chief of Police said. He bit the end off a stogie and stared hard at Joe across the tip of it, before striking his match. "I been seeing you on my television, kid. You sing pretty. On your way, I'd say. Maybe another Sinatra."

"Thank you," Joe said, and his cheeks reddened.

"Now," said the chief, "lemme get this thing straight. A guy phones you last night, tells you you stink as a crooner, and tells you to go back driving a truck, right?"

"That's right," Joe nodded.

"You laugh him off, so this a.m. the wife finds the note. All right, now whaddaya want me to do, Burton?"

"You know your business, Chief. What's your usual—"

"Usually, in a case like this, we'd turn the story over to the newspaper and the publicity, plus the information we're holding ourselves responsible for your personal safety, would be enough to scare whoever put that note under your door back in his rat hole." The chief blew cigar smoke at him, and frowned thoughtfully through it. "But somehow I ain't worried about your safety, Burton."

"What does that mean?"

"Judging from the way you're coming along as a crooner, I'd say you got a smart business manager. Right?"

"Right. Max Gittman."

"Give Max Gittman a message for me, will you, kid?"

"What message?"

"Tell him my police department is gettin' tired of bein' the patsy for every young Tom, Dick and Harry in show business that wants to stir up a fuss and get his name splashed around in the papers, complete with a picture showing his best profile to his public."

"You think this is just a publicity stunt," Joe said woodenly. "But it—"

"Get outta here, Burton. I'm gonna tell you something. I got three girls home that are coming the dangerous age, and I don't like crooners."

"But—"

"I give you enough time already. Get out. Tell that Gittman what I said. You want publicity, you go out and earn it. Go overseas and entertain some of the boys that are fighting to keep this country safe for you crooners."

"I did my share of that," Joe protested hotly. "I spent three years as a dogface, back in—"

"Don't cry on me, Burton. I lost two boys over there in the last one. Now get outta here, before I lose my temper."

HE DROVE in Tuesday afternoon to rehearse for that evening's show, and Alec Thornbush, the program director, remarked that he seemed nervous.

"It's nothing," Joe told him. "Been off my feed the last day or two, Alec."

He got through the show better than he had hoped to, rising to the occasion like any seasoned campaigner, but he hurried down to get his car when it was over. In the back of his mind was a nameless worry; somehow he was eager to be home again, to know that Marie and the kids were okay.

As he nosed the car out to the street, he had to wait for the light to change at the corner. A man in a light tan topcoat, wearing a felt hat pulled low over his eyes, stepped casually up to the car, on the passenger side, opened the door, and slid in beside Joe.

Joe felt a tightness in his throat as he peered toward the intruder.

"Sorry," he said, underplaying his role. "No riders."

"I guess you said that a lot back when you were wheeling a truck for a living, didn't you, Caterisano? This is a gun in my pocket." He jabbed

it through the tan cloth of the coat, stretching the cloth out to a little cone against the gun's muzzle, so Joe could get the idea. "Drive," he suggested.

Joe saw that the street was momentarily clear and he swung out from the garage, heading toward the Avenue of the Americas. "This is a stickup," he suggested hopefully. "You recognized me. You want my money."

"Drive," the man said. He kept his face averted. He had on thick-lensed glasses. His coat lapels were turned up, hiding his chin and partly concealing his mouth. "And don't do anything I might not like, pal. You just did another TV show, Caterisano. After I asked you not to. You get me kind of mad, pal. I don't know what I'm goin' to do with you."

"What's this all about?" Joe said angrily. "I never saw you before, friend. Why should you have it in for me?"

"Another thing," the man said. "You went to the cops, after I left that note under the kitchen door."

"I—"

"I happen to know you did. Because I tailed you. You make me plenty mad, pal. What did the cops say?"

The man not only talked mad, he looked mad. The gun again made a cone-shaped bulge against the pocket of the tan topcoat and, like a dog, the man seemed to be bristling with anger.

"They laughed at me," Joe tried to mollify him. "They seemed to think I was gunning for some free publicity at their expense, if you must know."

"You know something?" the man laughed. "I can believe that. I don't think you're lying."

"What's your angle?" Joe said. "What do you want of me? I don't—"

"Pull up to the curb down there in the next block, Caterisano, and turn off that ignition. We'll talk a little."

**J**OE PARKED at the curb and turned for a better look at his rider. The man said, "Uh-unh. You keep staring straight ahead, through the windshield. Now, you asked what I want, and I've already told you, but I'm ready to give you one more chance, pal. I want you to quit singing. Get out of show business, see? Find some other way to earn a living, pal."

"I worked hard for the break I'm finally getting," Joe said. "What are you, some kind of a nut? You don't know what you're asking."

"I'm telling, not asking. Get out of show business, Caterisano, or—"

"Or what?"

"I'll kill you," the man said in a matter-of-fact tone of voice that sent a sharp chill up Joe's backbone.

"Why?" Joe said. "Be reasonable. I'm entitled to at least some explanation."

"I'll give you some explanation," the man said. "I'm a guy who never took to working for a living, pal. The way I get mine is my own business, see? And let's say the cops would like to make it their business, but I'm just a little too smart for them. Get the idea?"

"More or less."

"I've never been mugged. I've never been printed," the man said. "I don't pull off many jobs, and when I do pull one off, I make it a big one. I operate solo. I trust nobody. I never go after anything but the hard cash. Jewelry has a way of fingering a guy, sooner or later. I won't have anything to do with it."

Joe said, "I guess I'm not very bright. What does all this have to do with my getting out of show business?"

"So far I'm an anonymous," the man said. "I'm Mr. X. Oh, I been seen by a few people. But you know, it's kind of funny how little help that is to the cops, pal. A guy walks into a place and holds it up, let's say, for a couple of thousand, and gets away clean. So the guy on the unhappy end of the stickup goes to the cops and gives his description of the man, and what's it add up to? Tall, dark, maybe handsome, dressed in this or that color suit. So what of it? What are the bulls going to do with it? Nothing."

"If there's a gimmick here somewhere," Joe said wearily, "I still don't get it."

"Don't worry about it," the man said. "Start the car. Get it rolling. When we get down to that next stoplight, I'll be getting out, pal. And you'll keep on rolling."

"I see," Joe said, and it did not occur to him to disobey the man's curt instructions.

"One thought I'm goin' to leave with you, pal. Get out of show business. Break clean, see? One more TV show, like tonight, and I'm goin' to have to do for you. You can make your own choice, pal."

Joe had come by now to the stoplight. It was red. He pulled up, waiting. The man opened the

door and stepped onto the paving. "Just drive on when the light changes," he said. "Don't look back."

The light changed. Joe started the car, started across the intersection, and pivoted on the seat for a quick look at his man. Bright headlights from the oncoming traffic flickered momentarily across the man's face, spotlighting him, half-blinding him for one instant.

Joe Caterisano got a very good look at the man, despite the lowered hat brim, the turned-up lapels of the coat, the eyeglasses. A sharp pulse of surprise slid through his tense body as he drove the big car down the street, and he said softly, "Well, I'll be damned. So that's his angle."

THE CHIEF of Police stared at Joe across the glowing tip of a mangled cigar and said, "I checked that claim of yours, that you put in a couple years as a dogface in the war, kid."

"Three years," Joe said. "Not a couple. I was at the Normandy beachhead, and in the Bulge, and—"

"And in a psycho ward for a couple months, after, accordin' to my information," the chief said. He scowled at Joe, obviously still not liking what he saw, still disapproving the way Joe earned his living.

"Maybe you're havin' a relapse," he suggested.

"I tell you, the guy means to kill me," Joe said.

"Yeah. Sure."

"I saw his face. He's a dead ringer for me, Chief. I'm sure of it, even if he did have on those cheaters. Are you such a knucklehead that you can't see why he's scared?"

"Kid," growled the chief, big shoulders bunching up within the confining blue uniform coat, "you better go easy. You ain't that big a shot yet, you can talk to me that way."

"Look," Joe said wearily, "suppose I was a big shot. Like say, Sinatra. A big enough shot so that everybody, well, practically everybody, knew what I look like. And this guy happens to be a dead ringer for me. So what happens, the next time he tries to pull off a job, Chief?"

"What?"

"Somebody gets a good look at him. Ordinarily they couldn't describe him, except in a general way. But this time—"

"They'd say," cut in the chief, "he looks just like Buddy Burton, the famous crooner on TV and in the movies. Is that what you're selling me, kid?"

"That's what I'm selling. A couple more months on TV and I'll be fingering this guy. And he knows it."

The chief stared ruminatively at him through a cloud of cigar smoke. "This is like something out of a crummy paperback, cops-and-robbers story. Go back and tell your friend Gittman, or whoever dreamed up this one, that I ain't buying. I still ain't handing you any free publicity, kid."

"This is on the level," Joe protested.

"Yeah, sure," the chief scoffed. "Go on. Get outta here, kid. You told your story. I listened, but only because I'm paid to listen to stories. But I ain't paid to believe 'em. And I still don't like crooners."

"I want a police guard when I put my next TV show on," Joe said insistently.

"You want publicity, kid. Go buy yourself some. You're makin' money."

The chief sat there, grinning impudently at him, still mangling the fat stogie between his wide lips. Joe threw up his shoulders in a tired gesture, and walked out.

HE HADN'T told Marie anything, but she noticed. That tension was in him, working away all the time, making its presence felt in small signs that reached the surface.

"Joe what's wrong?" she said. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Joe, were you threatened again? Did that man—"

"Honey, everything's all right. Honest. Now, don't you worry your pretty little head over nothing."

He got his gun out of mothballs, the one he'd picked up on the other side, during his Army service, and he took it down to the studio, had it in his coat pocket as he rehearsed the new show for that evening.

He ate his light dinner in the luncheonette down on the street level, with Alec Thornbush. He kept looking around, as he nibbled at the food, and Alec said shrewdly, "What's eating you, pal? What's with this hunted man act?"

"I dunno. Working too hard, I guess. Just nerves, Alec."

That satisfied Alec. They got up and Alec picked up the check for both of them, and walked toward the cashier's cage with it. Joe tarried to

leave a tip, got up, and almost bumped into a man with a hat pulled down over his forehead, wearing glasses, a man who bore a striking resemblance to Buddy Burton, of TV fame.

"Hello," Joe said.

"Get sick," the man suggested. "Throw up or something. Don't go on tonight, pal."

"I'm show folks. There's a tradition. The show must go on," Joe said slowly.

"I'll stick around," the man said. "I'll be right here, in the building. I guess you know how things stand, pal."

"Who was that?" Alec asked, as Joe joined him.

"Just a guy, Alec." Joe glanced at his watch. "Getting toward show time. Let's get up there."

The clock in the studio said a quarter of the hour. Joe Caterisano, or Buddy Burton, faced the TV cameras and exchanged a few lines of banter with the announcer, Ben Barlow, and with Kitty Anderson, his feminine guest star. He sang a song and the studio audience, the far greater audience watching his image on TV sets throughout the city, noticed a strangeness in his manner as he sang this evening. He was obviously tense. His gestures were jerky.

When the big red hand moved past the hour and the fifteen-minute show was over, Joe suddenly turned to Ben Barlow, and snapped, "You think you're pretty smart, don't you Ben?"

The portly announcer stared at him. "What's the matter with you, kid? Are you nuts?"

"You loused me up on my lines," Joe gritted at the startled announcer. "I'm wise to you, Ben. Tryin' to make me look bad. I'm onto your game. You never did like me, did you?"

"Kid," Ben Barlow said smoothly, trying to put a pudgy hand across Joe's shoulders and steer him off stage, away from the startled eyes of the studio audience, "you're kind of mixed up. You—"

"Take your hands off me!" Joe said. He had the gun out of his pocket. "I don't like you either, Ben. You know why?" he said, pointing the gun right at the popeyed announcer. "You look like a Kraut. That's what you look like to me, a Kraut."

"Kid, kid," Barlow said weakly. "Take it easy. You're upset. You—"

"Shut up," Joe said. He heard stealthy footsteps behind him and wheeled to see Alec Thornbush sneaking up on him. "Back off," Joe grated, "before I have to plug somebody with this thing. It's been a long time, but I guess I still have the

knack of it."

Alec Thornbush stood still, not breathing. He appeared to have lost all desire to play the hero.

HE HALF-RAN from the television stage, brandishing the gun with the air of a man who itched to kill somebody with it. He raced toward the hallway. The receptionist stared at him. She wore glasses.

"Why, Mr. Burton—"

"Baby, give me those glasses."

"Whatever—"

"The glasses, baby. The glasses."

He let her see the gun. She seemed to freeze for a moment. Slowly, like a person confronting a deadly snake, she slipped the glasses off and handed them to him.

On the way out of the reception room he paused beside a coat-and-hat rack long enough to appropriate a tan coat and a tan hat to match it. He ran out into the hallway just as Jimmy stopped at that floor with the number five elevator.

A man started to step out, but backed up quickly, staring at the gun Joe brandished. Joe followed him into the elevator, pointed the gun at Jimmy, and said, "Take her down a floor or two, kid."

"Hey," the kid gulped. "What kind of a gag is this, Mr. Burton? That thing looks real. Quit pointing it—"

"Let's go down a floor or two, Jimmy. Nice and easy."

"But—"

"You heard me all right, didn't you, Jimmy?" Joe asked.

Jimmy looked at the gun. Jimmy said, "Yes, sir. Okay, Mr. Burton. Down, nice and easy."

"Look here," snapped the man Joe had backed into the elevator, "you can't—"

He was a portly, red-faced man with an officious manner. Joe pointed the gun at him and said, "Shut up, please."

The man gulped. His mouth closed and he was sullenly silent.

"Stop here, between floors," Joe suggested. "We'll sit awhile, Jimmy."

"Okay, Mr. Burton," the kid said placatingly. He stopped and they stood quietly in the motionless elevator for perhaps three minutes. The portly man's face grew increasingly sullen, but he didn't say anything.

"All right," Joe said. "Street level, Jimmy."

The kid took him down. He walked out into the tiled corridor, with the glasses in place over his eyes, the hat brim turned down over his brow, the gun in his hand hidden under the topcoat he had borrowed.

THE MAN came over from the other side of the newsstand and stood nonchalantly beside him. Jimmy had hurriedly closed the door of the elevator behind Joe, taking his important passenger up where he'd intended to go in the first place.

The man said, close to Joe's ear, "Pal, you should've known better." His voice was almost plaintive.

"It's in my blood," Joe said. "I just had to do it."

"What's the gag with the glasses? And that hat you're wearing. It don't even fit you, pal. . . . Walk, friend. I'm focused on you."

"You're taking a chance, aren't you?" Joe stalled, and he was wondering how long it would take them to get there. A phone call from up above there shouldn't take more than a matter of seconds, and the cops had radios in all their prowl cars, didn't they? A guy gone berserk, with a gun in his hand, should rate faster action than he seemed to be getting. "You can't get away with this," he said.

"Walk, pal."

"Maybe I called in the cops. Maybe they've got the building staked out."

"Walk."

"Maybe I don't even walk. Then what?"

"You're makin' me nervous, Caterisano. Walk."

Behind them, an elevator's doors opened, and passengers disgorged from it. "There he is," somebody said, and some of the hardier souls edged carefully across the tiles toward Joe and his nameless companion.

"Which one?" somebody was gasping. "Which one is Burton?"

"Pal," the man hissed at Joe's ear, "you been up to something. I—"

The first cop came in then. He must have been an excitable rookie. He came barging in with his gun out, just asking for trouble from an armed man gone berserk.

The man at Joe's side swore gutturally and shot

through his coat pocket. The cop groaned and went down. Joe knew he was almost certainly next in line for it, and he acted upon instincts developed during his hitch in the Army. He shot the man, his gun still hidden under the topcoat draped over his right arm.

He hit his man in the chest, mindful of the crowd in the corridor, of the very real danger to all those present. The man went down like a stone, coughing and gasping. Joe kicked the gun out of his fingers, dropped his own gun, and the tan coat he had used to conceal its presence, and lifted his hands high as more of the cops spilled into the building.

"ALL RIGHT," the chief said, disgruntled. "I guess I owe you an apology, kid. That dumb rookie, O'Hara, will live, and it could be he owes his life to you. The corpse could be your twin brother, so that proves you were telling me a straight story."

"Who was he?" Joe asked.

"John Davis," the chief sighed. "Accordin' to the identification card in his wallet. We got nothing in our records to tab him, and that checks with the story you said he told you. One of those smarties. A top operator, but working alone. I guess you did the public a service when you plugged him," the chief admitted, somewhat grudgingly, it seemed to Joe. "But did you have to be so melodramatic about it? Where was the need of staging that nut act, up in the studio?"

"You wouldn't listen to me," Joe grinned. "I had to do something drastic. You put the bug in my bonnet, Chief. I really ought to thank you for that."

"Don't thank me for nothing," the chief snapped. "I still don't like crooners."

"Well, thanks for the publicity, anyway," Joe grinned. "I'll get a big play from the papers on this. And a sponsor, if I know the radio business. Be seeing you on your TV set, Chief."

He turned his back on the chief, who was muttering into the mangled stogie, and went out to his car. He drove pretty fast, on the way out to Jersey. Marie would be waiting up, to hear all about it, and they always garbled things on those newscasts.