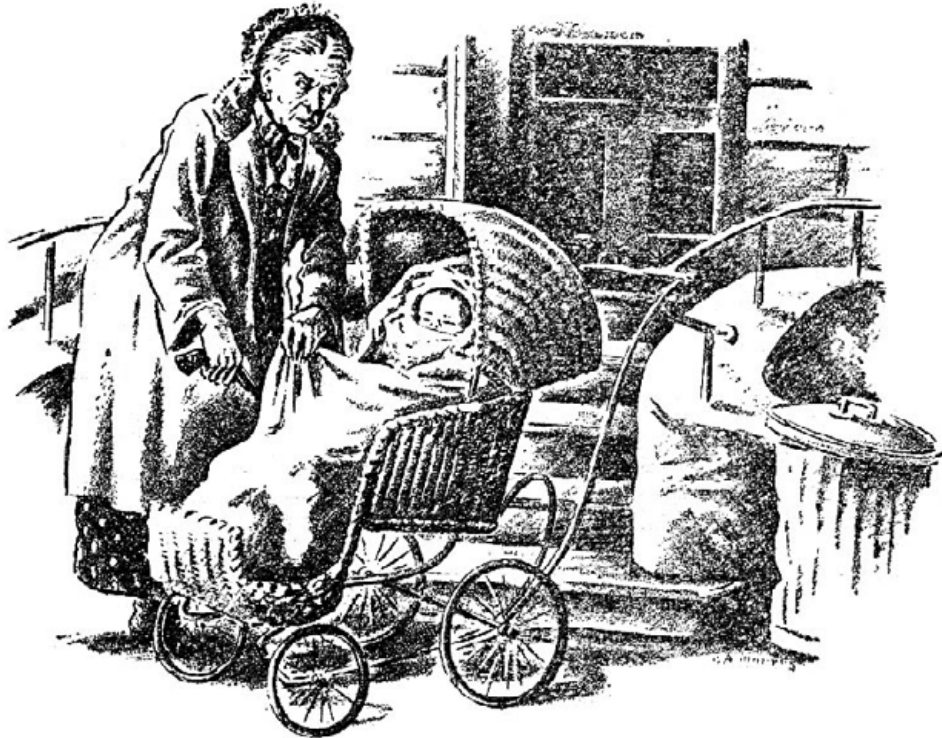


RUBBER BUGGY BUMP-OFF

By David James



No one paid any attention to the old woman . . .

An old woman wheeling a baby-carriage was the prelude to sudden shootings . . .

THE OLD woman glanced both ways on the street. Seeing it deserted, she pushed the baby-carriage off the curb and started for the opposite corner. The traffic cop helped her up the steep curb on the other side, and she smiled at him.

Downtown Manhattan, after six o'clock, is like a ghost-town. As the woman passed Canal Street, she started south on Broadway. Near the corner of Walker Street, the old woman paused a moment, making sure that the street was empty. Seemingly satisfied, the woman reached under the blankets in the carriage and pulled forth a snub-nosed automatic. With amazing agility, she raced up the stairs of one of the tall buildings and

furtively entered an office on the third floor. Stealthily, she went through the almost deserted office and stopped in front of a paneled door marked 'Private'. She turned the knob slowly, and opened the door wide enough to observe the single occupant of the room—a man in his fifties, who was busily occupied at his large, cluttered desk.

The shrill clamor of a ringing phone interrupted the man, who turned, facing the door, and lifted the receiver. "Hello."

"Hi, Jack; this is Al Edwards," came the voice over the wire.

"Yes, Al—how the hell are you? Haven't seen you in years!"

"Fine," the voice on the other end said, "just fine."

"What are you doing. . ." Jack said, as his gaze idly swept about the room and finally settled on the old woman. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Who am I?" the voice on the phone said. "Al Edwards, Jack."

"Not you, Al. There's an old woman here, who. . ."

The muffled report of a .45 going off silenced the speaker. Twin holes appeared on his forehead as the man slumped in his chair, dropping the phone to the floor.

"Jack! Jack! What happened? Jack!" the voice on the phone shouted. The woman smiled as she entered the office and cradled the receiver from which the startled voice was still shouting, "Jack!"

She went directly to a filing-cabinet and found a small slip of paper, hidden among the folders, which had scrawled on it the combination of the big safe that stood, tightly locked, in a corner of the room. Skillfully, the aged one spun the dials and then swung the huge doors open. Two or three papers were quickly transferred from the safe to her pocket and she locked the safe, returning the combination to its hiding place.

Minutes later, the old woman was back on the street, slowly pushing the baby-carriage back toward Canal Street. The traffic-cop stopped the light traffic to help her up the steep curb; moments later, she was heading up Broadway.

THE YOUNG, almost handsome, man said into the receiver, "Lieutenant Lou Seller speaking."

"I—I want to report a murder," the frightened caller said.

"What is your name?" Lieutenant Seller asked.

"My name is Tomas. Philipe Tomas. I'm night watchman at the Striker Export Company Building, down at Walker and Broadway."

"Who was murdered?" Seller asked, picking up a pencil and scribbling on a pad while the man spoke.

"A man named Jack Youd."

"Are you at the Striker Building now?"

"Yes, I'm in the lobby."

"Stay right where you are and don't touch a thing. I'll be right over," the lieutenant said. A call to his assistant, and a few to the other agencies necessary to a murder case, and Seller left his office.

The siren disintegrated any traffic left at that hour and the police-car lost little time in arriving at the Striker Building. "Wait here," Seller said to the driver as he got out of the car.

"I'm Philipe Tomas, the man who called you. The dead man is in his office on the third floor. You want to see him, no?" Tomas said.

"Yes, I want to see him; where's the elevator?" Seller asked.

"The elevator is closed. The operator, he closes it up at night before he leaves."

"When was it closed tonight?" Seller asked.

"About six-thirty. Usually, he closes it about then," Tomas said.

"Well, let's see the body," Seller, annoyed at the delay, tried to get the frightened watchman to show him the body.

Producing one key from a large ring, Tomas opened the office door. "Like in the movies, I locked the door," Tomas bragged.

"What do you want? A medal?" one of the patrolmen said.

"I just want you to know," Tomas was squashed.

"Wow, the gunman sure was a crack shot. Two bullets not more than six inches apart in his forehead. No powder-burns, so the killer stood far enough away to show us that he's no slouch with a gun," Seller said.

The medical examiner looked up at Seller and said, "A .45, Lieutenant. Died about an hour ago; killed immediately."

The photographers came and, after taking numerous pictures of the body, departed. The men from the meat-wagon, as Seller referred to them, came to take the body away.

"Nothing in the office disturbed, Lieutenant. The guy still has his wallet with about \$350 in it," Seller's aide, Marty Luckstram said.

"He sure as hell won't be needing it."

"I'd say that the shots came from the doorway, judging by the position of the body," Marty suggested.

The phone jingled, and the lieutenant went to answer it. "Lieutenant Lou Seller speaking."

"What happened to Jack?"

"Who are you?"

"My name is Al Edwards; is anything the matter?"

"Sure there is. Jack Youd is dead!"

"I knew something was wrong. I was talking to Jack on the phone about an hour ago, when he said something about an old woman being there. Two loud noises—and Jack didn't answer when I called to him. Next thing I know, the phone is hung up and the connection was broken."

"You're sure the receiver was hung up?" Seller asked.

"Of course. Why?" Edwards asked.

"Because if Youd was shot in the temple, as he was; and if he died instantly, as the examiner said; he wouldn't have had time to hang the phone back in the cradle. The killer must have done it."

"Will you need to see me, Lieutenant?" Edwards asked.

"Depends. When did you see him last?"

"A few years ago—went to school together. I just called up tonight when his home told me that he was staying late at

the office," Edwards said.

"Did you have any business together?"

"None at all; just school chums," Edwards said.

"OK. Give us your name and address, and don't plan any long trips for a while," Seller replied, turning the receiver over to one of the men in the office to note his address.

"Marty," Seller said, "do you remember a case similar to this one over on the west side about three months ago? An old woman shot a man to death while he was talking on the phone to his friend..."

"Yeah, that hits a responsive chord. Want me to check on it?" Marty asked.

"It's worth a try," Seller said.

"I'm on my way," Marty said, bowing low to the Lieutenant as he smiled. "That's all right with you, isn't it, Commissioner?"

"Go on, get out of here," Seller grinned as he aimed his toe to where Marty's seat had been a moment before. "The guy's a nut, but he's worth a dozen brains when it comes to the real thinking," Seller said to no one in particular.

WITHIN twenty minutes, Marty had gotten the facts. The west side shooting was almost a carbon copy of this one. Nothing was apparently stolen from the office, or the murdered man's body; and no one could remember seeing an old woman in the vicinity. The killing had taken place after hours, when the victim was alone in his office. The whole scheme showed clearly that the old woman knew who, when and why she was going to kill. It was no ordinary murder, but one that set a pattern.

"There's more to this than just revenge," Seller said to assistant. "But the funny thing is this: Youd is in the exporting business, uh—*was* in the exporting business—and the man that was

shot on the west side, Fred Cooper, was in the ladies jewelry line. Anybody can buy junk jewelry abroad, so there doesn't seem to be any logical connection between the two killings," Seller puzzled.

"You know, Commish," Marty smiled and ducked a slap on his pants, "I think that there was a connection. Unless Murder Inc. is back in business, there is, as you say, no *logical* connection. But maybe there is an illogical connection: jealousy, old school ties, a crooked deal or something like that. You can't tell me that an old woman would kill a jewelry dealer on the west side and, three months later, an exporter on lower Broadway just for kicks."

"Maybe you have something there, Marty. I think a beer will loosen up the kinks in our minds, don't you?" Seller asked.

"Come to think of it, it might just do that," Marty said. .

THE OLD woman walked slowly up Broadway, pushing the carriage in front of her. Nearing Houston Street, she pushed the dilapidated buggy into one of the doorways and slowly, but deliberately, surveyed the sidewalk while ostensibly fixing the baby's blankets.

A pedestrian rushed by, trying to catch the bus on the corner. She waited until the puffing man caught up to the bus and the big vehicle rolled off. Quickly flipping the blankets back, the old woman took the gun and put it in her shopping bag. Leaving the carriage behind in the doorway, the woman walked toward the subway kiosk and disappeared from sight.

Forty-five minutes later, she emerged from the train in Brooklyn and went to a public phone booth. Inserting her dime in the slot, she dialed a number, waited until it rang twice, and then hung up. She took the rejected coin, put it in the phone again,

and dialed the same number. She waited until it rang three times and, once again, hung up.

A waxy smile creased her aged features as she stepped out of the booth. She walked slowly toward the subway again and went through the turnstile marked "Manhattan and The Bronx".

Jack Youd's business partners, Olly Grant, Frank Bruvers and Arnie Lewis were seated in Lieutenant Seller's office. As each was called, he stepped into the next room and was interrogated. Marty and the Lieutenant questioned each man as to motives, possibilities and business acquaintances. Each satisfactorily offered an air-tight alibi for the previous night. Youd's wife, a woman in her middle forties, was quite broken-hearted over the whole affair.

"But Jack was good to everyone, Lieutenant. He gave to charity. He was well liked by his neighbors and was president of several welfare groups. His two sons thought the world of him, just as I did . . ." the black-veiled widow sobbed.

"Thank you so much for coming down," Seller said. "If we know anything further, we'll call you, Mrs. Youd."

"Find his murderer, Lieutenant. Tell him that two sons and a wife would like to know why he killed a good, respected man like . . ." the woman said.

"Marty," Seller said, "get one of the boys to take her home."

WHEN MARTY returned to the Lieutenant's office, he asked, "Well, Commish, where are we?"

"Damned if I know, Marty."

"Any ideas?" Marty inquired.

"Let's attack the problem logically. Youd's three partners," Seller said, "all had alibis for last night! Grant was home with his family; Bruvers was at the movies with his wife; and Lewis went to bed at an

early hour—his wife says that he never left the apartment. She claimed that she was reading until midnight, when she went up to bed—and Lewis was already asleep.

“So it’s obvious that none of them had anything to do with it. There were no friends who had had any arguments with Youd before last night and Al Edwards hadn’t seen him for years. The whole office-staff—secretaries and such, were either home, or visiting friends, or at least had good alibis for the entire evening.

“The company’s books were examined and found clean. There was no shortage, or anything to arouse the slightest suspicion. The bookkeeper, who was on vacation, is still in Maine and couldn’t possibly have done it.

“Youd’s wife was at her mother’s house last night. Jack had called here about 3 in the afternoon and told her that he was working late, so she should make her own plans. Philipe Tomas, our janitor-night-watchman, had no reason to do it. Besides, if a guy making \$50 a week kills a big executive, he’d sure as hell take the wallet from the body. Don’t forget—Youd still had \$350 on him when we first saw the body. . . . To put it mildly, Marty, I’m up a tree,” Seller concluded.

“Here’s something you hadn’t thought of,” Marty said.

“Well, let’s have it,” Seller demanded.

“Commish, don’t you think I deserve a promotion?”

“What for? Withholding evidence?”

“Not evidence, Commish, just thoughts,” Marty winked.

“Ok, Marty, stop kidding around and out with it,” Seller smiled.

“Well, Commish, if Youd was murdered almost exactly like this guy Cooper on the west side, don’t you think that it must be more than coincidence’s long arm?”

“You may have something there,” Seller said, “get Cooper’s file.”

“I’ve already got it, Commish,” Marty said, “here it is.”

“You old son-of-a-gun, letting me steam off like that. ‘N you just sat there with a big smile on your ugly face while I made a jackass out of myself. I oughta. . .” Seller said.

“Tut-tut, Lou,” Marty said, “let’s have no dissention in the ranks.”

“All right, Sherlock, what’s on your mind?” Seller said.

“I’ve noticed in this file that Cooper lived rather well for a man who claimed to be making roughly \$7000 a year. Traded his car in every year for a new one, and such. The jewelry-shops that dealt with him said that he ordered a usual amount of paste imitations, and sold a usual amount. Yet, he paid rent in a very fashionable hotel in midtown and sent his kid to one of the best schools in the country.

“ ‘Nother thing, Commish, is that a guy who buys stuff for 25 cents and sells it for a buck isn’t earning enough to rate his surroundings. The outlet where Cooper bought his junk-jewelry said that he never ordered more than \$5000 worth of stuff in any one year, and he’s not been in the business too long. Seems that he decided—after the war, when there was a boom in junk jewelry, that he’d go into that line.

“Well, aside from all that, we find one more bit of fascinating info. It seems that Cooper and Youd sailed on the same ship to England in ‘49. As a matter of fact, their staterooms adjoined each other. Put that in your pipe, Lou, and smolder over it a while.”

“What did you come up with, Mr. Vance?” Seller asked.

“I come up with this. Pure logic, I might add. Exporting and junk-jewelry add up to what?” Marty asked.

“Well—what?”

MARTY TAPPED the desk. “I come up with the thought that, possibly; the junk-jewelry that Cooper claims to have bought was either not fake, or that he shipped it out—under the guise of cheap imitation jewelry, but in reality real stuff—through Youd’s exporting firm. Maybe Youd thought he wasn’t getting a fair shake, and had Cooper killed. Then, the guy who was running Cooper’s end got rid of Youd.”

“But who is running Cooper’s end, Marty?” Seller asked.

“The jewelry-business was sold to a broken-down actor who just could scrape enough together to buy it. The old geezer—queer duck named John Brothers—seemed immensely happy over his purchase.”

“So you think that there may have been a connection? I don’t think a jury would be convinced by the fact that they happened to have adjoining rooms on a ship in ‘49; they’ll want more definite proof of guilt. And, perhaps, it is possible that Cooper actually did ship merchandise overseas with the idea of selling it. I’m sorry, Ellery; but you’ll need more than that to bring in a conviction,” Seller said. “Of course, Marty, it all sounded very good.”

“Lou, my eternal friend, do you remember the Vincent case?” Marty smiled at his partner.

“Vaguely—why?” Seller puzzled.

“Do you recall, Commissioner, that I figured out the business of the killer switching gun-barrels so as to fool us, and that I had to convince you of the possibility?” Marty asked.

“Well, after all, Hawkshaw, that wasn’t so astute an observation,” Seller said. I clearly understood it and made the capture, single-handed, while you were at

home, you poor dear, nursing a cold. Or was it a hangover?”

“Lou, my friend, my companion, I figured the thing out and you captured the murderer. Who gets the promotion? Me? Of course not. The lieutenantancy goes to a lunkhead who luckily captures a small-time hood.”

“Minds are a dime a dozen. But a man of action, one to go out and bring a criminal to justice. . .” Seller said.

“Can it, Lou,” Marty said. “Of all the lucky . . .”

“Tut-tut, Sherlock, let’s not have disrespect for a superior.”

CHECKING into bills of lading entered by the Striker Export Company during the last five years, the two men discovered that there were no shipments listed as having come from Fred Cooper. However, a sizeable list of junk-jewelry was listed as having been sent to England by a group who called themselves the Allerson Jewelry Company. The address given turned out to be that of a rent-box Fifth Avenue address. The operator of the place said that two men, who signed as John Smith and James R. Smythe, had suddenly cancelled their rental four days earlier. A letter from England had arrived yesterday, but it had been called for by a messenger.

“Lou, I think I have it!” Marty said.

“Have what?” Seller asked.

“The answer. I think that either Cooper’s outlet or one of Youd’s three partners set up the deal and, having gotten short-changed, cancelled the arrangement with two bullets in the head,” Marty smiled, confidently.

“Your logic, as such, belongs in the movies,” Seller said. “Did you pause, Poirot, long enough to think that, should your statement be true, the partner would be out of the money altogether now? That

would be similar to killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. There'd be no percentage in that."

"Never thought of that," Marty admitted, begrudgingly.

"That was more than obvious, Sergeant."

THE OLD woman with the baby-carriage seemed out of place amid the new, towering buildings of Park Avenue. She hesitated as she pushed her stroller across 86th Street and down toward Lexington Avenue.

Once on Third and Second Avenues, she seemed to blend in with the surroundings. Determined and set, she headed toward exclusive East End Avenue. She stopped near the service entrance of one of the houses and shoved the carriage under the back staircase. She looked about and entered the back elevator.

She pushed the button that closed the elevator doors and soon was whisked up to the fifteenth floor. She nervously stepped out and walked to the apartment marked 15J. She rang the bell and waited impatiently for an answer. Soon, a maid opened the door and motioned to her, "Whatcha want?"

The old woman held forth a menacing .45, aimed at the colored girl's stomach. She motioned the girl to turn away from her, toward the rear wall. With a sickening crunch, the old woman laid her gun-butt against the maid's head.

Voices floated in from a card game, somewhere in the apartment. The old woman pushed the swinging kitchen door ajar with her foot and took careful aim. Two sudden shots sent the man seated with his back to her to the floor; two mushrooming holes at the base of his neck.

The women, partners in the card game against their husbands, fainted dead away. The other man turned toward the old woman and the words formed by his mouth froze there as two more shots fled from the smoking .45 in the old woman's hand. A hole appeared in the man's head and another beside it as he, too, slipped to the floor, his blood staining the rich carpeting even redder. The woman put the gun back in her purse and went out the back way, down the service elevator and into the street, slowly pushing the baby carriage in front of her.

The Lexington Avenue subway swallowed the old woman up, minus her carriage, as sirens on the police cars wailed their mournful song. An hour and a half later, somewhere in the city, a phone rang twice then silence. Seconds later, it rang thrice and, again, silence. Grant and Lewis had been murdered.

Before the news had a chance to wing its way to Frank Bruvers, the old woman struck again. As the last remaining partner stepped out of a restaurant with some friends that afternoon, a pair of pistol shots rang out and the crowd ran. No one thought to question an old woman pushing a baby carriage across Chambers Street, then north to Franklin Street—where she abandoned her buggy and was lost in the shuffling, hurrying mob at the IRT subway station.

Once again, the woman went through her curious routine of dialing a phone number, letting it ring, hanging up; dialing the same number again, hearing three buzzes, and hanging up. And then she was gone again.

SELLER'S voice called, "Marty! Marty!"

"Yeah, Lou, coming," Marty answered.

"I've just got a report that an old woman just shot Grant and Lewis. Same way that Cooper and Youd got killed."

"I'll go you one better, Lou. Bruvers was shot to death as he and some of his friends came out of a restaurant!"

"How does that woman know where they'll be? She must have the luck of the Irish; somebody must set her up on where they'll be and when they'll be there. It's uncanny," Seller muttered.

"I checked with the British customs officials. They said that reports have come in of enormous amounts of diamonds and gold being smuggled into England, over to France and eventually behind the Iron Curtain. I am positive that the source is right here, right in this case. The shipments have been getting larger and larger, the British tell me, and it started about 1949."

"Just after our friends took an ocean-cruise, I'll bet," Seller said. "Let's go take a look at the bodies, Marty."

"Sure."

"You know, Holmes, maybe you were right about the smuggling-deal; of course, any fool could have figured that out!" Seller said.

"Any fool—but you," Marty rubbed. Seller thought just as he did, Marty knew. Whenever Lou started telling him how easy the deduction was, Marty smiled to himself, he was giving in to logic.

The examination showed nothing, save that all five killings had been done by the same person, something the two men already knew.

Questioning of the maid and the two wives elicited even less, so Lou Seller suggested a beer to think over. "Good enough," Marty replied.

Barney's Bar, an unquaint name for a first-class dive, was the drinking-place usually suggested by one and OK'd by the other. It was no different this time, and,

when Barney looked up from behind his bar, he knew that the two detectives would be a long time in draining their glasses. "Are you goin' to pay rent this time, lads, or will ye be drinkin' fast?" Barney asked.

"What do you think?" they muttered in unison.

"If I may suggest, lads, take a table in the back, so's your deep thinkin' won't be disturbin' me other customers," Barney grinned.

"All right, Barney, all right," Seller said.

"Two beers, I suppose," Barney inquired.

"Two beers, is moighty good supposin'," Marty imitated.

"Fer the life of me," Barney said, "I can't see how the city can see payin' you two loafers when all's you do is sit with Barney and protect him from nobody," Barney started. "I . . ."

"Save it, Barney," Seller said, "how's about the beers?"

"Comin', comin'," Barney said, "don't be frettin'."

"Ah, Barney, me mouth is frothin' for a quaff of your sparklin' beer," Marty grinned, "but I'm afeared that I'll be long dead and buried afore I get to do so."

"I'll be bangin' you with me shillaley, iffing you're not more respectful to your elders, lads," Barney grinned back. "Here are the beers. Let's not wait all night 'n half the day before orderin' more."

Once alone, the two stared at nowhere and thought deep thoughts. Cooper, Grant, Lewis, Youd and Bruvers were dead—murdered. Diamonds and enormous quantities of gold were being smuggled to Russia via France and England. The method was right under the noses of the two men, but as Barney so often put, "You can't think your way out of a duncecap, lads," and they were almost ready to believe it.

Each of the two arranged the pertinent facts in front of his mind. Various avenues of deduction were investigated, but each was discarded as blind alleys loomed. After a long and fruitless afternoon of burying their minds in the case, Seller and Marty arrived at somewhat the same solution. Nothing. Except, maybe, "Could it be that the outlet had something to do with it?" they asked each other.

The outlet, Harry Randell, had a thriving business. A large mail-order business added to being one of the largest distributors of facsimile jewelry—known as junk-jewelry—gave Randell a sizeable income. When questioned, Randell offered to be of service and open his books to scrutiny. A quick look told the lawmen that any errors had been too carefully concealed to show glaringly to the inexperienced men who stood before them.

However, once in solitude again, they both looked at each other and Seller said, "I know what you're thinking."

"What?"

"A phone-tap," Seller said. Marty handed over the two bits that usually accompanied the bet.

"Well—do we?" Marty asked.

"M-m-m-m-m—yep." Seller said. "Arrange it."

"To hear is to obey, Commissioner." Marty ducked the foot that was aimed at his pants. "Last three times you tried, Lou, you've missed my behind by a good three feet. Probably getting old." Marty ducked again. This time, it was too late.

"Too old—huh!" Seller said.

"One good thing, Lou, is that if this old woman keeps knocking off our suspects, she'll do such a good job that we'll just arrest whomever is left alive," Marty said.

"I hear that you're next on her list, Marty."

"That'll never do, Commish," Marty said.

"It might do wonders, Sergeant," the sarcasm was back in Seller's voice. "Yup, just wonders."

THE PHONE-TAP was a complete fiasco. Only legitimate calls came or went from Randell's office; and the only strange thing that the police could not understand, was the series of calls that came in on an untapped, hidden phone. The police broke into the office at night and found that the hidden phone, in reality, was a direct line to the warehouse. High hopes went spiraling downward again.

In the midst of their lonely vigil in the basement of the outlet store, Marty suddenly leaped up and shouted, "I've got it!"

"Oh-oh, not again," Seller hoped. However, upon hearing the reasoning, Seller was quick to agree.

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At nine o'clock next morning, a phone-call to Randell's office sprung the trap. Two hours later, a complete confession was signed by the killer, who was safely in the hands of the law.

"Well," the Police Commissioner said, "you boys have shown good sense in this case."

"Thank you, sir," they answered.

"I understand, Seller, that you thought this whole scheme up," the Commissioner said.

"Yes, sir," Seller lied.

"And you, Luckstram, executed the whole matter," the portly man said.

"Yes, sir," Marty lied, too.

"I admire a man of action," came the reply, "but brains are still uppermost on the force. Luckstram, you'll get a medal for this, but for you, Seller, there'll be a

promotion!"

"Y—Yes, sir!" Seller almost choked. Marty would liked to have helped him choke.

As the two dazed men wandered out of the office, they couldn't help laughing to themselves. "Barney's?" Seller said.

"Barney's," Marty answered.

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Marty was saying, "And so, Barney, when we were sitting in the cellar, it suddenly hit me. Sure, it was Randell all along. He got hold of the gold and had it fashioned into junk-jewelry, setting real diamonds in place of the imitation paste. He sold these specially-marked cartons to Cooper, who used Youd's Export Company to ship the stuff to England, where it was finally smuggled from France to Russia. However, as in most cases, an illegal dollar always seems too small, so Cooper wanted a bigger cut. Randell had known an actor, who used to play woman's parts in the theatre, and had him kill Cooper. This actor—a ham named Brothers—then found a better way to get rid of the stuff and had to get rid of the export end of the deal; so he knocked off Lewis, Youd, Grant and Bruvers. He wanted to be seen as an old woman because of the ham in him, and he ran more danger than he had to—but he got away with it.

"Then, I got the idea of having one of our men call Brothers and tell him that Randell is on to his cross. We called Randell and told him that Brothers was going to cross him up. Brothers got dressed as a woman—as we expected—and we nabbed him just as he was about to take a pot-shot at Randell. We found that Brothers had been part of a European pistol-act in his youth. The reason that

Brothers could buy Cooper's end of the deal, no doubt, at such a ridiculously low figure, was that Brothers must have had something on Randell.

"Brothers called the warehouse and they, on a private wire, called Randell to tell him that the murders had been committed. Randell had to know, since many of the records that were kept by the Export Company—together with duplicates he possessed—had to be destroyed before we could get to them.

"The old ham in Brothers is what caused his downfall. He had to dress up like a woman, to please his vanity. If it weren't for that, I think that they might have gotten away with it, with a break here or there. Randell, of course, being so clever, never suspected the gimmick we pulled on him."

"Well, lads, at least old Barney c'n offer a beer, on the house, to the promotion of Lieutenant Seller," Barney said.

"That you may, Barney, my friend," Seller said.

"Hey, where's mine?" Marty asked.

"We don't offer this service to ordinary sergeants, do we—er, General?" Barney asked.

"I don't think we should," Seller replied. His laugh was cut short by a perfectly aimed foot to the trousers. "You old son-of-a-gun, Marty, uh—where'd you pick that up?" Seller asked.

" 'N where will you be thinkin', General?" Barney smiled.

Two foaming glasses of beer oozed from the shiny tap. Marty reached for one and Barney hoisted the other, "To the General?" Barney asked.

"To the General," Marty smiled, flecking the head away from his lips with a practiced hand. "To the General, indeed."