

# What's a Hundred Dollars?

*Fear Rides at Marty Connell's  
Elbow as His fever-Ridden Brain  
Envisages a Bloody Fate!*

By ROBERT WALLACE

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**B**Y six o'clock that afternoon, long after the results of the final race had come in, Marty Connell's desperation verged on frenzy. He put down the telephone and looked at his wife. There was a touch of wildness in his eyes, and his forehead, despite the coolness of the day, oozed perspiration.

"No good," he said thickly. "Bert says he hasn't got it."

Sylvia, sitting rigid on the arm of a chair, frowned at the carpet. She puffed nervously at a cigarette, swept yellow hair out of her eyes with a jerky, impatient gesture. "How about Ed?"

Marty scoffed at the name. He began to pace the room rapidly, restlessly, pushing distended fingers back over his head. "Ed wouldn't lend a blind beggar a cent. No, it's got to be Pa again. There's nobody else. He's *got* to come across!"

"You know what he said last time." Sylvia's voice was weary.

"This isn't last time. Besides, it's only a hundred bucks. Hell, what's a hundred to him?"

Crushing the half finished cigarette in a tray, Sylvia said slowly, "If you think it'll do any good to try, go ahead. You ought to know. He's *your* father."

And Marty snatched up his hat, tugged it over his head. "One way or another," he whispered huskily as he strode toward the door, "I've got to raise it. What that mob will do if I don't settle their bets to the last cent—" He didn't finish. He didn't have to finish. Sylvia knew as well as he did.

His father owned a haberdashery shop on Broadway in the heart of the Neon-glaring Eighties.



*As the tiny light flared he worked quickly*

By the time Marty reached the place, his whole lean body was moist with the sweat of anxiety. He drew a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his light grey suit, wiped the back of his neck.

The clerk was busy with a customer, but Marty saw his father—stout, grey, bulbous of jowl—seated at the ancient table that served as a desk in the small rear office. He went straight to the back of the store and met the old man's astonished upward glance.

"Hello, Pa!" His throat was dry and his words were staccato. "Can—can I talk to you alone?" Without waiting for an answer, Marty shut the glazed door, leaned against it.

"You are talking," Frederick Connell said dryly, turning from the table. "What are you so jittery about?"

Marty tried to steady his breath. "Pa, I—I need a hundred dollars!"

"Again?"

"I've got to have it tonight; by morning at the latest!"

"What's the matter this time?" Frederick Connell couldn't quite quell his sarcasm. "Spend the

stakes again?" Instead of waiting for an acknowledgement, he went on with increasing anger: "A man like you has no business holding other people's money! I've told you that a thousand times. What *right* have you got to be a bookie, anyhow? And on your own? Last week they hit you for three hundred, and you couldn't make good. God knows what would have happened if I hadn't come across. And now—"

"Pa," Marty said hoarsely, "I can't welsh on this bet! It's a tough crowd. They—they won't stand for it. I've got to pay up by morning, or—"

"Pay up, then!" the Old Man snapped, rising. His fleshy face seemed to puff out, to exude crimson heat. A mixture of rage and disgust stormed in his voice, blazed in his eyes, "For two years I've been fool enough to dig you out of the same hole time after time. I've thrown more money into your damned books than I've earned, and I'm sick of it! Absolutely fed up! I don't care if it's a hundred or a dime—I'm not giving it to you!"

It went on for fifteen minutes. The more desperately Marty pleaded the more obdurate the Old Man became. In the end an influx of customers called Frederick Connell out to the store, and he finished decisively:

"I can't afford it. That's final!"

Then he went out of the office.

For a while Marty Connell stood pale, breathing heavily and plucking automatically at one of his vest buttons. He looked around the office in a daze, his eyes reflecting all the frustrated agony of his thoughts. You couldn't welsh on a Broadway bet—not if you wanted to go on living in peace. You couldn't—

That was when his glance paused on the small safe.

It held no secrets from him, that little steel vault in the corner. In the old days, when he'd worked for his father, he had opened it a thousand times. He remembered its combination as clearly as he knew his own telephone number. And he knew, too, that every night after closing his father left the day's receipts in that safe; invariably well over a hundred dollars in cash.

Marty lifted stunned eyes to the window. It was locked. It had been locked for months. He recalled exactly how to get into that window from the narrow, concrete area behind the building. Crushing his breath on a pang of fear, he stared over his shoulder into the store. His father was busy; so was the clerk. Marty swallowed hard.

He moved the glazed door slightly, just far enough to screen himself. Then he reached quickly

over the table and unlocked the window.

IT was four o'clock in the morning when Marty Connell slid over the dusty sill into the small office. The place was blindingly dark. With his nerves throbbing, he leaned against the wall and waited for his sight to become accustomed to the blackness.

He hadn't told Sylvia of this last hope. When he had left her at ten he had mumbled something about going over to Jersey City to try Pete Lannick for a loan.

"Pa will guess it was me, all right," he thought bitterly as his heart thundered. "But what the hell? *He* won't send me to jail! Maybe he won't talk to me for a couple of years, but—I can't help that. I've got to do it!"

At last, quivering a little, he knelt in front of the safe. He needed a light to see the dial. The office door was closed behind him, so he lit a match. And as the tiny light flared, he worked swiftly, his face gaunt in the yellow glow.

It never occurred to him that his shadow was suddenly thrown on the glass panel of the door—a grotesque, distorted shadow, abnormally wide of shoulder. Nor could he guess that two men, waiting for a taxi, chanced to look around through the window of the store and saw that shadow.

Marty knew only that after a time he found the precious steel box in the safe. It had no lock of its own. When he opened it with trembling hands, he saw packets of bills in the clasp of rubber bands. He snatched them out, stuffed them into his pocket. A kind of exultation pounded in him. Then he rose and turned—to see the uniformed bulk of a policeman in the open window!

"Drop it," the officer ordered sharply. A revolver glinted in his hand. "Come out of there—"

Exactly what happened, Marty could never adequately explain. Something seemed to explode in his brain. He fell back, cried out in anguish. On insane impulse he hurled the steel box with all the strength of his arm and saw its edge cut deep into the policeman's forehead. There was a shot, but the bullet ripped futile splinters out of the floor. Then the uniformed bulk slumped limply over the window ledge, arms dangling.

The man wasn't dead, but Marty didn't wait to discover that. He clambered wildly over the still figure, out into the area. And there he rose from his knees—to confront the two men who had summoned the policeman.

One of them promptly smashed a rocky fist against Marty Connell's jaw; and for a time that was

all he remembered.

“**I**—I can telephone my wife, can’t I?” he pleaded when he stood, chilled and shaken, in front of the police sergeant’s desk. “I’m entitled to notify her.”

“That’s about all you are entitled to.” The tight-lipped sergeant nodded to two uniformed men. “Drag him over to the phone and let him spend his nickel.”

So Marty Connell, white as his shirt, called his wife. He roused her out of sleep.

“Listen, Syl—” he began hoarsely.

“*You* listen,” she interrupted, and he heard a note of eagerness in her voice. “Your father dropped in right after you left. He’d calmed down beautifully. He said he’d been thinking things over and he didn’t want to see you get into a serious jam with a dangerous crowd because of a simple hundred.”

“Of course, he swore this would positively be the last time—you know the way he gets: ‘Never another cent!’ and all that. *But he left the hundred!* So come home, Marty, and quit worrying.”