

FOUL PLAYING

by Tom Thursday

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Shrimpo Sands sure had a sob story to tell!

SHRIMPO SANDS was mad as hell. Two days before he had the world by the rear end; real jewels and six hundred bucks in cash practically in his hands. Now he was in the clink waiting trial for robbery, which would net him at least five years in the State pen. The luck was lousy.

His cell door opened and one Pokerpuss Sweeney joined him. Mr. Sweeney had made the major error of being caught while robbing a few assorted apartments. More, he will bet you ten to one that the cat's tail he accidentally stepped on in the dark was positively black.

"What did they grab you for?" asked Shrimpo Sands, by way of greeting.

The lanky and morose Pokerpuss ignored the question and stretched himself upon the cot.

"I says," went on Shrimpo, "what did they toss you in for?"

"I was selling strawberries out of season. Do you mind?"

"Aw, nuts!" snapped Shrimpo. "I ain't in no frame of mind to be kidded. Me, I got double-crossed so bad that I am gonna slug some mug when I get out of this rap."

"Oh, you got troubles, too?" asked Pokerpuss. "That is too bad, indeed. I know you was innocent, huh?"

Shrimpo, although a midget besides Pokerpuss, wondered what chance he would have if he smacked his fresh cellmate a straight right on the jaw. He was now sure that he would never like this guy,

but he was also positive that he had to tell his troubles to someone or go daffy.

"So you got double-crossed, hey?" asked Pokerpuss. "Well, you ain't got nothing on me; I double-crossed myself, when I already had enough jack to go to Florida for the winter."

"Yeah," said Shrimpo, "but I got knocked out for nearly three hours. Cold, what I mean!"

"Who slugged you?"

"The rat who tipped me to the layout," replied Shrimpo, lighting a new cigarette from the butt of an old one. "If I get my dukes on the snake that did it, I'll gladly go to the chair for murder. It will be a pleasure!"

"Did you get away with the dough?" inquired Pokerpuss, with another yawn.

"Hell, no!" snorted Shrimpo. "That is what burns me up. I do all the risky work, like cracking the crib and putting the dough in the bag, when I get one terrible sock on the back of the head. It is a mystery to me that I wasn't kilt."

"You got hurt, hey?"

"Hurt! Say, I thought the sword of Stalingrad smacked my dome."

"That's the trouble with our racket," sympathized Pokerpuss. "Us guys should stick together and be on the level with each other."

"What makes it worse," continued Shrimpo, "was that I had promised Gertie—that's the steady moll—that we would get hitched after this haul and that I

would go straight.”

“What does she think about it?”

“She’s sore as hell. Says I’m just a dumb damper with no brains.”

“Was she a blonde?”

“Nope; redhead,” said Shrimpo.

“Worse,” opined Pokerpuss. “Ever notice that all the traffic Stop signs are red?”

“Well,” sniffed Shrimpo, “I ain’t never noticed any dolls with green hair.”

“So the last job was a flopolo, hey?”

“A COMPLETE bust, I calls it. And the layout was a natural. It should of been a hundred-to-one shot to come off okay. I happen to be at the Louis-Pastor fight and the guy what sits next to me is a little toad named Simeon Jones. Anyway, he gets all excited when Louis clips Pastor the first time and I think he is gonna have apoplexy from excitement. We got to gabbing and he tells me that he is the assistant manager at the Crown Jewelry Store, on Front Street. He also says that he wisht his boss, Oscar McTabb, is on the floor in the place of Pastor, as the guy is a super louse. He don’t like the boss account of him not giving him the raise promised five years ago, see?”

“Sure,” said Pokerpuss, “I see. The little mug was sore, hey?”

“Yeah, he’s all sored up. So that’s how I get the big idea to use Simeon Jones. I figger this sap is ripe for picking and would be tickled silly to get revenge on Oscar McTabb.”

“You readied him up, huh?”

“Yeah, I give him the old hop. It is always human nature, I always says, to get even with a guy who has done you dirt.”

“That’s right,” agreed Pokerpuss Sweeney, emitting another yawn.

“Well, when the fight is over, I invite Simeon Jones to come with me and partake of a beaker or two of brew. I find that he

likes the stuff and by the time he is halfway between sober and cock-eyed I spring the works on him. He slaps his fist on the bar and says he will do anything to get even with Oscar McTabb, the big buzzard.”

“So you get him lined up, huh?”

“Plenty. It’s a natural that I been hoping to fall into all my life and I fail to see how it can fail to go off swell and proper.”

“How’s the layout?”

“Perfect! It seems that Simeon Jones is trusted by Oscar McTabb and the boss lets him have his own key to the joint. He also has the combination to the safe. So when I suggest that Simeon let me borrey the key and also give me the combination to the crib he says okay by him. Of course I promise to give him half of the haul and he is tickled silly at getting his hands on some real dough. He has been keeping company with a expensive doll and she is driving him nuts with expenses. I also suggest that he stick to the job for about two weeks after the haul, so the boss won’t get hep that he is in on the deal. After which he is to meet me in Perth Amboy and I will give him his share of the loot.”

“Haw!” laughed Pokerpuss, “that is a very hot one. If he looks for you in Perth Amboy, you will be waiting for him in Los Angeles, huh?”

“Let’s forget about that,” said Shrimpo. “I never get to Perth Amboy or Los Angeles, either, and I don’t know where he is, but I hope he is in the middle of the ocean when a submarine comes along.”

“Then what?”

“Simeon Jones draws a little map of just how the joint lays and gives me all the directions I need.”

“Boy, what a setup!”

“You telling me! I write the combination to the crib on my shirt cuff, and he says there ought to be at least six hundred smackers in it, besides about three

grand worth of diamonds and the like.”

“Nothing like that ever happened to me!” moaned Pokerpuss, forgetting to yawn.

“It’s a good thing it didn’t,” snorted Shrimpo. “Just wait till I tell you what happened tome!”

“Go on,” urged Pokerpuss.

“Well, the store is right on the main stem of the burg and I decide to call around 3 a. m. I don’t even take a jack or a gat, figgering the job is in the bag. I get to the joint without nobody seeing me and the key clicks swell. I find that Simeon Jones has told me the truth and I am sorry that I might not be able to meet him in Perth Amboy. The crib is in the back of the store and in less than no time I have the jewels and the jack in my poke. I am about to rise off the floor when—*bam!*—the whole world hits me on the back of the head. When I come to it is daylight and I see no less than four cops and Oscar McTabb standing over me.”

“Lousy luck,” said Pokerpuss.

“ONE of the dicks remarks that it is about time that I come to, saying I have been napping on the floor for three hours.”

“What happens to the diamonds and the dough?”

“That’s what I would like to know. I figger that I have been framed by Simeon Jones. He must of waited till I had the stuff and then sneaked up, grabbed the swag, and beat it. What would you think, hey?”

“What did the dicks say?”

“They bullied me for two hours, wanting to know what I did with the jewels and the jack, but I told them the truth.”

“You mean you welched on Simeon Jones?”

“Hell, no! I just told them that I had it onct, but ain’t got it now. That gave them a big laugh and what do I care now? One

mug wants to know if I swallowed it. They search me all over and when they don’t find anything they get the wagon and haul me to Headquarters. Then they give me the woiks—and how!”

“So you figger that Simeon Jones framed you, huh?”

“Well, what would you think? I figger that after I leave him in his room he sobers up early and begins to think that he has made a bad mistake. He gets the idear that he would be a chump to divide up any dough with me—and so he would, if you ask me.”

“So you think he comes down and crowns you, then grabs the loot, knowing that when they find you there they will blame it all on you, hey?”

“That’s it. All he has to say is that he caught me robbing the crib and it would be my word against his, and you know what that means. Meantime I don’t know where he is. I haven’t heard a word about him since. Maybe he will show up at the trial, the little tramp!”

“That certainly was a tough break, kid,” said Pokerpuss.

“They don’t come no tougher,” admitted Shrimpo Sands. It was his time to yawn. Then he stretched both arms toward the ceiling. “Well,” he went on, “I guess I will hit the hay. Goo’night, pal—see yuh in the morning.”

“Goodnight, kid,” said Pokerpuss. For a moment there was quiet. The moon shone through the window, the stars twinkled, and the night was nice and beautiful.

Without removing his shoes or his clothes, Pokerpuss Sweeney flopped lengthwise on his cot and grinned. It was a sly, worldly grin.

“Jeez,” mused Pokerpuss, with another yawn, “so *that* was the guy I slugged!”

THE END