

The Man Who Never Forgot

by C. S. Montanye

IT was known throughout the Manhattan underworld that "Frisco Ed" never forgot. There were many who, at one time and another, had crossed his trail or aroused his resentment, and while he had said nothing at the time, the San Francisco dip had jotted down the incidents on his mental index, obliterating them only when in some way he had arranged matters to his own satisfaction, causing those he fancied had wronged him ample suffering.

There was, among others, "Limpy Lou," who unconsciously, in a moment of intemperance, had dropped information into the ear of a certain stool pigeon, concerning a package of bonds Frisco Ed had helped himself to. Frisco Ed, through lack of evidence, had been discharged. He bided his time, and one dark night, several months after the incident, he encountered Limpy Lou in a blind alley adjacent to the Bowery. After the meeting Limpy Lou limped no more.

Thus it was that the friends of one Joe La Grand, a yegg of some reputation and fame, were greatly perturbed when they learned he had, while pressed for immediate funds, stuck Frisco Ed up in a waterfront cafe, relieving him of a tidy bank roll. The friends of La Grand, learning of this, hastened to impress him with Frisco Ed's remarkable faculty for remembering things. They quoted various cases to illustrate the point, but La Grand only laughed at their fears.

"You guys give me a pain!" he said. "If that cheap dip pulls any of that revenge stuff, I'll break his neck!"

His words failed to quiet the fears of his friends. They shook their heads dubiously and begged him to keep his eyes open and his wits about him until the gentlemen from the Pacific coast was picked up and sent along for a stretch at the stir on the upper Hudson. The one they

addressed listened to them with a smile on his lips and, when they completed their recital, shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

It was almost a year later that La Grand, dropping into a West Street restaurant known familiarly as the "Dirty Spoon," seated himself at a wet table directly opposite to Frisco Ed. Time had not treated La Grand any too well. The dip from San Francisco noticed this in a quick glance as the yegg sat down and they exchanged looks.

"Hello, La Grand," Frisco Ed said pleasantly. "How's tricks?"

The safe blower gave an order to a waiter, who made passing the queer a side issue, and laughed curtly.

"Rotten!" he looked curiously across the stained table top. "You still got a grudge against me for the time I stuck you up at Clancey's?"

Frisco Ed looked grieved.

"Forget it!" he said. "What do you think I am? You cleaned me, but I got to give you credit for it. The guy that can get away with it, I take my lid off to." He laughed. "And it teach'd me a lesson—never to go out without a gun."

Slightly relieved, La Grand turned to the watery stew the waiter placed before him, eating vociferously, conscious of the other's gaze upon him as he did so.

"What's the matter, La Grand?" Frisco Ed said after a moment. "Broke?"

His voice was tinged with sympathetic interest. La Grand laid aside his fork and looked up.

"Luck's agin' me," he replied harshly; "and the town is full of square toes keeping the lid down so tight it's harder to find a box to bust than a million bucks!"

The dip appeared to meditate on this as La Grand finished his stew and gulped down a cup of

muddy coffee. Then Frisco Ed leaned across the table, his narrowed eyes suddenly glowing, his voice pitched in a confidential key.

"I think you're the yegg I've been looking for," he murmured. "I'll tell you why. For the last couple of weeks I've had the dope on a safe, ripe to be cracked, and I've been looking for somebody to tackle it on a fifty-fifty split. How does that listen to you?"

La Grand found the half of a cigarette in one pocket of his shabby coat and set fire to it, inhaling deeply.

"Where's the box?" he inquired.

Frisco Ed's lip curved in the suggestion of a smile.

"Before I go into particulars," he said smoothly, "I want your word that we *do* divvy on it. It's a soft job and anybody who can handle soup can get away with it. Private house, family down in Florida for the winter. The stuff is jewelry, cash and bonds. I can get a floor plan of the place inside of twelve hours. It's the softest job that ever happened, and you're the guy that can handle it. Give me a buzz that I figure for half the stuff, and you're on!"

For a moment or two La Grand smoked in silence. Then he tossed away the stub of his cigarette, wiped his mouth with the back of one hand and leaned across the table.

"Shoot the piece," he said tersely. "I'm your man!"

II.

TWO nights later, La Grand, concealed in the shadows adjacent to the park wall, awaited what he considered the proper hour to make his way into the house which lay slumbering down the quiet side street before him. According to the information given by Frisco Ed, the place was untenanted save for two elderly caretakers, who resided on the top floor.

Lurking in the shadowed gloom, La Grand waited for the patrolman on duty to "ring in" at the patrol box on the corner and start toward the farther end of his beat. The yegg knew that he would have at least an hour before the policeman's return. Finally he saw the bluecoat, whistling, softly, disappear down the street.

When he was out of sight, the yegg gave a twist to the soft cap he wore and, coming

cautiously out from his place of concealment, sauntered unhurriedly through the lamplit darkness, passing the house that had been marked as legitimate prey, and continuing to the corner. Then, grinning a little, he turned and retraced his steps.

This time, upon reaching his destination, he dropped quietly down into the basement areaway and crossed to the latticed gate. Here it was but the work of a moment to make certain there was no wiring for burglar alarms and to cut away one of the pliant metal bars of which the gate was made. This accomplished he inserted his hand through the aperture and drew the latch, opening it. Now he was confronted by a wooden door, and several moments elapsed before he found the skeleton key which would unlock it.

He emerged into a darkened hallway, redolent of the faint odor of recent cooking. He had committed the floor plan of the house to memory. Cautiously he felt his way along the narrow corridor to the flight of stairs he knew lay somewhere ahead of him. Presently he found it and, mounting the steps, came out upon a landing on the first floor. Here La Grand employed his small electric torch, catching an impression of heavy rugs, hanging tapestries, and oil paintings in their glass boxes. Then he turned to the stairway looming up before him, and ascended it quietly.

On the second landing he stopped to recover his sense of direction and, turning, cut across the hall and entered the large front room, carefully closing the door behind him.

Now he felt a little easier. At least one-third of the night's work was finished and the balance could be concluded quickly and accurately. The room was furnished as a library. As he explored it cautiously, La Grand laughed to himself, recalling what his friends had once told him of the dip's unflinching memory. He always knew Frisco Ed was a four-flusher, a boob. Instead of remembering the sticking-up incident, the Californian had found a soft job for him. He laughed again as he thought of his promise to divide the spoil equally. He had no more intention of keeping his promise to the dip than he had of being elected president of a temperance society.

The floor plan, as he recalled, showed the safe in the right-hand corner of the room from the doorway. Advancing to the spot, La Grand divested himself of his coat and dropped to one knee, flashing the thin pencil of light across the wall. But instead of focusing upon the outline of a

small steel safe, the yellow beam of radiance disclosed the glass front of a bookcase.

He stiffened. As he did so, a sudden footfall sounded from behind him, shattering the silence. His light winked out as he crouched back, cursing silently.

For a tense instant he waited for the footsteps to pass, but, instead of doing so, they drew nearer. He reached for his gun just as a hoarse voice bade him throw up his hands and the room was flooded with electricity from the hanging chandeliers overhead!

Blinking in the white glare of the lights, and cursing fervently, he fell back at the sight which confronted him.

Before him, with drawn revolvers, two plain-clothes men, a patrolman and a roundsman met his bewildered gaze. Cold fear swept through him as understanding came. He had walked into the trap with open eyes! *Frisco Ed had not forgotten!* There was no job, no safe. He had swallowed the

bait like a hungry trout. The place was, no doubt, guarded without as well as within, by those who had simply awaited his coming. The whispered word of a stool pigeon had been enough!

With hands held high above his head, La Grand stepped forward, only his red-rimmed eyes showing the emotion within him.

“You are certainly there with the nerve, kid!” one of the detectives murmured as steel bracelets were neatly and quickly adjusted to his wrists. “Some brass to pick out *this* place!”

La Grand shifted his savage eyes.

“What do you mean?” he muttered. “Whose dump is it?”

Those about him laughed.

“*Can* you beat it?” the patrolman said. “He doesn’t even know where he is!” He turned to the manacled yegg; the smile left his lips. “This is the chief’s home, bo—the police commissioner’s house.”