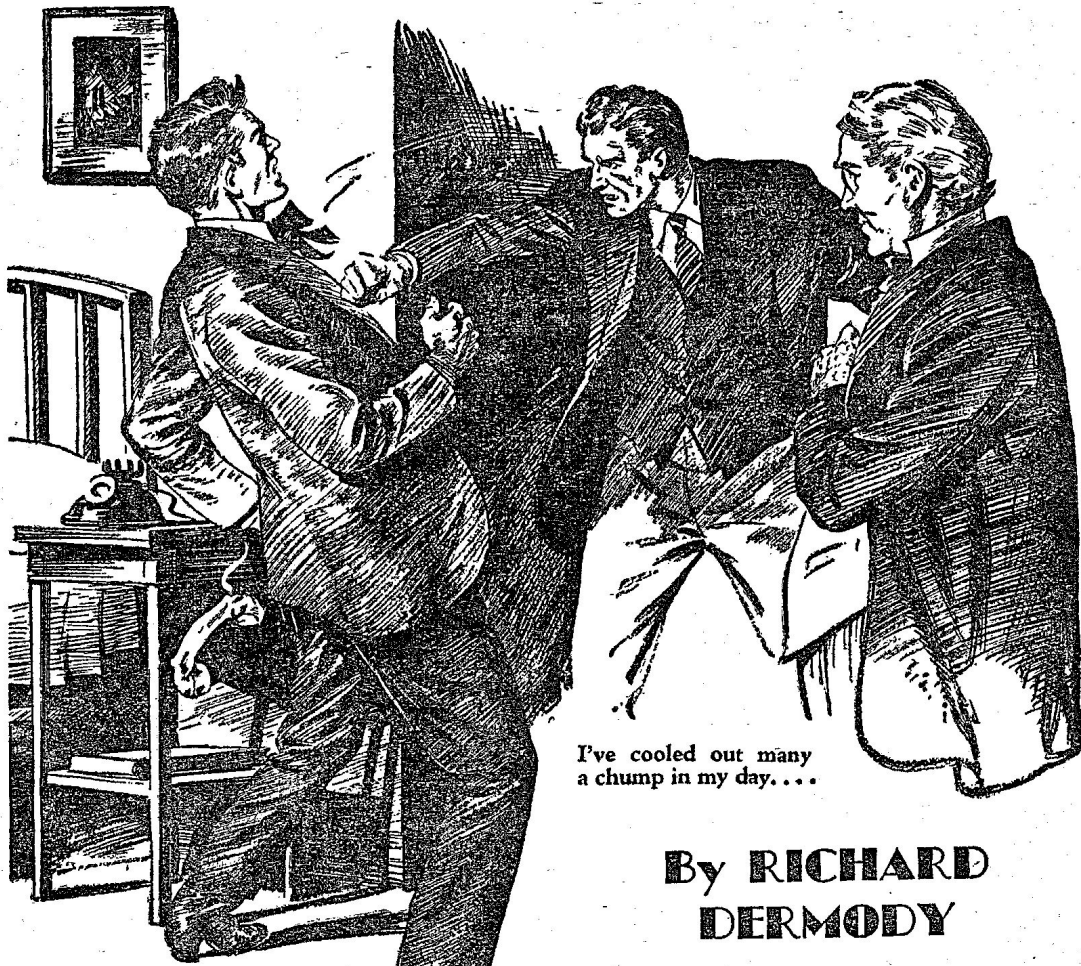


DOC PIERCE'S DOUBLE-XMAS



By **RICHARD
DERMODY**

IT IS a mild winter in the state of Arkansas. The air is crisp, the road is smooth, the heap is purring and we are on our way to a score, we hope. I slow for a crossing and grin at the Doc.

"Jingle Bells," I tell him. "This caper sounds like a real Christmas present to me. Does Santa Claus own the outfit?"

The Doc grins back at me. "I trust the good saint will smile on us," he says. "I like to be prosperous during the Yuletide

season."

Well, the Doc is always in season when it comes to trimming a sucker but he hasn't given me the details on this particular caper. He gets upset when I ask too many questions so I just hand-ride the heap and wait. Finally he chuckles.

"Santa Claus is not the proprietor of the Jingle Bells Novelty Company," he says. "Mr. Herman Chunker, president of the company, passed away recently. His

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widow, Mrs. Isophene Chunker, is now the sole owner.”

I don't feel so good when I hear this. “Look, Doc,” I tell him. “No dames. Every time we cut into a caper with a dame in it we run a bad second. Especially when the dame is a widow.”

The Doc chuckles again. “Do not be alarmed, Pony Boy,” he says. “We will not take a profit from Mrs. Isophene Chunker, except indirectly. In fact she will benefit from the little plan I have in mind. The important target in this operation will be our friend Mister Jasper Slummit of Cowflat, Texas.”

I am feeling better. We meet Mr. Jasper Slummit a few weeks before this and of all the prime chumps I ever encounter, Mr. Jasper Slummit is the juiciest and the ripest.

Mr. Jasper Slummit is a bulky, loud party who spends his early years pestering cattle and riding around in one of these armchairs they use for saddles in Texas. A few years back Mr. Jasper Slummit falls out of his armchair into an oil well and comes up dripping with dollars.

Of course this gives Mr. Jasper Slummit the idea that he is a smart business operator and it also gives him an appetite for more dollars. At the time we meet him he is itching for action, but the Doc does not have a little plan on tap so we file him for future reference.

“I am in favor of a green Christmas financed by Mr. Jasper Slummit,” I tell the Doc. “How do we hook him into this Jingle Bells Novelty Company?”

“It will be a simple operation,” he tells me. “The Jingle Bells Novelty Company

manufactures toys, cheap jewelry and such matters, including Christmas tree decorations. At this time of year the business will be booming and Mrs. Isophene Chunker will have many problems. I think she will jump at the chance to sell out to Mr. Jasper Slummit at a high price.”

I think this over. I know better than to ask him how he figures on getting Mr. Jasper Slummit to jump at the chance to purchase this Jingle Bells outfit. The Doc has many ways of encouraging chumps to jump at chances.

“How do we score?” I ask him. “Do we collect a commission?”

“That's right,” the Doc says. “I expect to collect two commissions, as a matter of fact.” He gets out a map and looks at it.

“The Jingle Bells Novelty Company is located in the thriving hamlet of Cliffjump, about twenty miles from here,” he says. He thinks for a minute. “I shall ask Wall-Street Walter to join us,” he says finally. “This deal will appeal to him.”

I feel much better when I hear this. Wall-Street Walter is a top operator and he is also expensive. The Doc never calls him in unless he expects a big score.

THIS town of Cliffjump is a small burg hidden up in the woods. The Jingle Bells Novelty Company is in a brick building on the edge of town and looks neat and tidy. We check in at the local fleabag and the Doc gets out his typewriter and starts in putting the bait together for Mr. Jasper Slummit. He tells me what to say and I mope down to the station and send off telegrams to Mr. Jasper Slummit

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and Wall-Street Walter.

When I get back the Doc tells me he has talked to Mrs. Isophene Chunker on the telephone and we have a date to see her at eight o'clock. We put on the feed bag and dust off our working clothes, and at exactly eight o'clock I punch the bell at the Chunker residence.

A blonde dame opens the door. She is a few years younger than me, maybe twenty-three or four, and after I take a careful look at her I figure this Cliffjump is not such a dull burg, at that. She gives us a big smile.

"I suppose you are Doctor Pierce and Mr. Allan," she says. The Doc sweeps off his black skimmer and I take off my own hat. She lets the smile out a couple more notches. "Mother is in the living room," she says. She leads us through a wide hall into a long room with a heap of logs burning in a big fireplace.

Mrs. Isophene Chunker is parked in front of the fire. She is a tall dame and by no means a bad job for her age. In fact Isophene is still shaped like a dame and not like a sack of something. I notice the Doc looks her over carefully and I figure we better get this caper over with as soon as possible.

The Doc opens his swayback coat so Isophene can get a good gander at his fresh white vest. He walks over to her and holds out his mitt.

"This is a pleasure I have long anticipated," he says. His voice gets low and solemn. "Although I hoped to meet you under happier circumstances." He shakes his head. "Dear old Herman often spoke to me of your beauty and charm."

Isophene stares at him. "You knew my late husband?"

The Doc nods. "Yes," he says. "Dear old Herman."

Well, I have a hard time keeping my face straight while I am being put away with Isophene. The Doc is closer right now to dear old Herman than he ever gets in his life. We all park in a row around the fire and Isophene and the blonde pay close attention to the Doc.

"My meetings with your late husband were strictly business," the Doc says. "But I grew to love him and to respect his fine business judgment."

Isophene frowns. "I'm sorry," she says. "But I don't think my husband ever mentioned you."

The Doc looks sad. "That is easily understood," he says. "Herman wished to spare you the knowledge of his business troubles."

Isophene sits up straight when she hears this. "Business difficulties? I'm afraid I don't understand. The company was in excellent shape when Herman passed on."

The Doc looks sadder. "I am afraid I must take all the blame for that. I did my best to cover up the results of Herman's enthusiastic and over-ambitious errors. You see, Herman incurred certain obligations that do not appear on the books."

Isophene lets out a gasp. I take a look at the blonde. She is leaning forward and her blue eyes are bugged out. I can see it is time to sink the hook.

Isophene takes another gulp at the bait. "Do you mean that my husband owed you

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money?”

The Doc shakes his head and smiles. “Let us forget the past,” he says. “We must keep our gaze fixed on the future.” He leans forward and looks Isophene in the eye.

“Dear lady,” he says, “you must not be distressed. I am sure everything can be arranged in a satisfactory manner. In fact, I have wonderful news for you.”

Isophene is losing ground every minute and I have to admit I am several lengths behind the Doc myself. The blonde is breathing heavy.

“News,” she says. “What news?”

The Doc looks at her and smiles.

“I am prepared to offer your mother one hundred and eighty thousand dollars in cash for the Jingle Bells Novelty Company,” he says.

There is a dead silence in the room. Then the blonde jumps to her feet and runs across to Isophene.

“We'll never have such a chance again, Mother,” she says. “You must accept it.”

Isophene's face is dead white. She grabs the blonde by the elbow and shakes her head. “I can't believe it, Nanette.” She looks at the Doc. “It isn't worth that much.”

The Doc chuckles. “Not to the average buyer,” he says. “But I have a special client who is willing to pay that much. Dear old Herman was ready to close this deal just before his untimely demise. I have refrained from discussing this with you until after the first shock of your loss had been softened by time.”

Isophene and Nanette look at each other and then they both break out in big

smiles. Nanette walks over and gives the Doc a big kiss on the brow.

“Your name is not Pierce,” she says. “It is Saint Nicholas.” She smiles at me. “Are you sure you haven't got eight tiny reindeer parked outside, Mr. Allan?”

“Well,” I tell her, “we've got eight tiny cylinders, when they're all working.”

Nanette laughs and turns back to her old lady. “Now we can get out of this awful town and go to Miami for the rest of the winter.”

Isophene nods her head. “Yes. We will leave right away.” She looks at the Doc. “How soon do you expect to close the deal?”

“IMMEDIATELY,” the Doc says. His big red face sobers. “I must tell you that there are one or two minor conditions of sale.” He waves his mitt at me. “Mr. Allan and myself have put in a lot of time and effort on this sale. We feel that we deserve a small commission, say ten per cent.”

Isophene frowns. “Ten per cent,” she says. “Why, that would be eighteen thousand dollars.”

The Doc chuckles. “I forgot to mention that my client is prepared to pay you two hundred thousand in cash. We expect you to hand us twenty thousand as our commission. That will leave you one hundred and eighty thousand dollars net.”

Isophene cheers up again when she hears this. She lets out a big sigh of relief and smiles.

“You frightened me for a moment, Doctor,” she says. “I think ten per cent is a most reasonable commission under the circumstances. In fact, you are being most

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generous. I think you know that we would have sold for a much smaller amount.”

The Doc smiles back at her. “I could not take advantage of dear old Herman’s widow and orphan child,” he says.

Nanette looks at the Doc and her face is puzzled.

“That is a lovely sentiment,” she says. “But Mr. Chunker was not my father. Mother was married before she met Mr. Chunker.”

The Doc looks surprised. “I did not know that,” he says. “Herman always spoke of you as his own dear child.”

Isophene is a little pink in the face now.

“My first husband was named Pilkins,” she says. “Wellington Pilkins.”

“Pilkins,” the Doc says. “I once knew some people of that name.”

Isophene shakes her head. “I doubt if you knew my first husband,” she says. “We lived in Tatertown, Virginia. He was a banker there and he disappeared under most tragic circumstances.”

Well, the last thing I wish to hear about is these tragic circumstances but the Doc is the kind of party that looks under every flat stone he sees.

“That sounds interesting,” he tells Isophene.

Isophene takes out a handkerchief and takes a dab at her eyes. I can see she is all set to enjoy herself.

“My husband was cashier of the Tatertown Trust Company. One night Toodles—I always called him Toodles, it was a little pet name—worked late at the bank. The next morning he was gone, the bank vault was found open, and one

hundred and forty thousand dollars was missing.”

Nanette leans forward. “Of course a lot of people said that father had stolen the money,” she said. “But we know he couldn’t do such a thing. I was twelve years old at the time and I simply worshipped him. He had the cutest little mustache and beard.”

Isophene takes another dab at her eyes and butts in:

“Yes,” she says. “Toodles was a very handsome man. The bank officers agreed with us that the bank had been robbed and the robbers murdered Toodles and concealed his body.”

The Doc nods. “I suppose he was legally declared dead after seven years had elapsed.”

“That’s right,” Isophene says. “I married Mr. Chunker five years ago.”

The Doc looks sad. “You have had more than your share of hardship,” he says. “But there are brighter days ahead.” He gets to his feet. “To return to business. My client will be here in Cliffjump tomorrow with the cash. I suggest that you swear your attorney to secrecy and have him draw up the papers for an immediate sale.”

Isophene frowns. “Secrecy? Why?”

“That is another of the little conditions I mentioned,” the Doc tells her. “My client insists that this sale be kept secret until he is ready to announce the change of ownership. You must not discuss the sale or the terms with anyone but your lawyer.”

Isophene thinks it over and then nods her head.

“I see,” she says. “Secrecy is

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sometimes necessary in big business.” She smiles. “The money is the important thing. I have implicit confidence in your judgment, Doctor Pierce. I shall do exactly as you say.”

Well, I am not surprised when Isophene says this. The Doc learns how to make people trust him years ago when he peddles snake oil around the carnival circuit, and he makes a good living out of it ever since. He pats Mrs. Isophene Chunker on the shoulder.

“Fine.” He bows at the two dames and sucks in his haybelly. “With your permission we will retire to our hotel. When my client arrives, I will bring him to your office at the factory.”

Isophene and Nanette follow us to the door and when this moonlight hits Nanette’s blonde hair I suddenly start working out a little plan of my own. I don’t mention this plan to the Doc as I am sure he will not be sympathetic. Especially after the remarks I make to him about deals with dames in them.

WE ARE stowing away the last of the ham and eggs the next morning when Mr. Jasper Slummit walks into the dining room. He is even bigger and louder than I remember him and he is rubbing his hands together. He is wearing a big hat and a pair of these high-heeled Texas boots and he has a fat briefcase tucked under his wing.

He winks at the Doc and pats the briefcase before he shakes us by the hand. I figure I will rather shake him by the briefcase but I know that comes later. We get him up to the room and the Doc loses no time in going to work on him.

“I trust you have brought the sum of money I suggested,” he says.

Mr. Jasper Slummit winks again and slaps the briefcase.

“That’s correct, Partner,” he says. “I forked a plane this morning as soon as the bank opened. I’ve got two hundred and fifty-thousand-dollar bills right here. I’m all ready to double it the way you promised in your telegram.”

The Doc smiles. “You’ll double it,” he says. “We will all make a tidy profit.” He hands a letter to Mr. Jasper Slummit.

I watch Mr. Jasper Slummit while he reads this letter. Of course the letter is creased and grimy like it has a lot of age, although the Doc writes it just the night before.

Mr. Jasper Slummit looks up. “This letter is an offer to buy the Jingle Bells Novelty Company from Mr. Herman Chunker,” he says. “It was written two months ago and the price named is five hundred thousand. Where do I come in on this?”

The Doc smiles. “That is an intelligent question, Mr. Slummit. You have a keen and alert mind.” He takes the letter and slips it back in his pocket. “You will notice that it is signed by Mr. Elander Throggle, the owner of the big chain of drug stores.”

Mr. Jasper Slummit nods. “Yes, I have heard of Throggle. He is a big operator.”

The Doc leans forward and speaks slowly.

“Elander Throggle is due here in Cliffjump on the evening train,” he says. “He is ready to write a check for five hundred thousand for the Jingle Bells

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Company. Mr. Herman Chunker is dead. Before he died, he asked me to look into this matter for him. I have kept all knowledge of this deal from Mr. Chunker's heirs, his wife and daughter."

Mr. Jasper Slummit thinks it over. I notice this look come over his face, the same look I see on a thousand suckers in my time. Mr. Jasper Slummit sees a chance to get the best of it.

"I take it you have advised this widow to sell the business for two hundred and fifty thousand," he says. "Is that the deal?"

"Something like that," the Doc says. "Mr. Allan and I had a long talk with Mrs. Chunker and her daughter last night. After a great deal of discussion, we persuaded them to accept the paltry sum of two hundred thousand for the business. Their lawyer is preparing the papers right now."

"Two hundred thousand?" Mr. Jasper Slummit says. "But you said you needed two hundred and fifty."

The Doc smiles. "The extra fifty thousand is for Mr. Allan and myself. I insisted on cash for that reason. Mrs. Chunker will receive two hundred thousand in cash. Tonight you will receive a check from Mr. Elander Throggle for five hundred thousand dollars. You will then pay us fifty thousand commission."

Mr. Jasper Slummit smiles back at him. "That's a fine deal, Partner." He slaps his leg. "You sure know how to work on a widow, Doc." He laughs out loud. "The widow gets two hundred thousand, you get fifty, and I get a profit of two hundred and fifty. That's a fine deal." He opens the briefcase. I never see a prettier sight in my life than all that lettuce tumbling on the

bed.

The Doc looks at the money and his fingers curl a little at the ends. "We must work fast," he says. "We must have everything sewed up before Mr. Elander Throggle arrives."

Mr. Jasper Slummit nods his head. He separates the lettuce into two piles and waves the smallest stack at the Doc.

"I will place this in your hand the moment I get a check for half a million dollars from Elander Throggle," he says. "Now let us go and take the widow's business away from her."

THE office at the Jingle Bells Company is a small room with a desk, three chairs and a big safe in the corner. The Doc and Mr. Jasper Slummit are both two hundred pounders and by the time I squeeze in with them the joint is packed so tight you can hardly breathe.

Isophene and Nanette are on deck and a party with whiskers is sitting behind the desk. Isophene puts him away as this appleknocker attorney and says he has the papers all set. I give Nanette a wink and jerk my head at the door. She squeezes past her old lady and joins me outside. By the time the Doc and Mr. Jasper Slummit come out of the office I am doing all right.

The Doc gives me a dirty look when he sees me in the corner with Nanette but he can't say anything because he has Mr. Jasper Slummit in tow. We go back to the hotel and park in our room until it is time for the evening train to arrive with Mr. Elander Throggle.

I am pleased when it comes time to meet the train as I am getting weary of Mr.

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Jasper Slummit's adventures among the cattle and oil wells. The way Mr. Jasper Slummit tells it he never meets a cow in his life that is half as smart as he is.

I am a little nervous while I wait for the train to come in. I am always nervous when a caper gets to the pay-off, but I feel much better when Wall-Street Walter climbs off the train and mitts me.

Wall-Street Walter is around the Doc's age, maybe fifty, and he looks more like a big somebody than any big somebody I ever see. He is a handsome gent with wavy gray hair and a ruddy face and he looks like he is on his way to clip a flock of coupons or maybe sell a million shares of something or other at a tremendous profit.

Walter is not surprised when I tell him he is now Mr. Elander Throggle, the owner of a large chain of drug stores. I give him the history of this caper up to date and by the time we get to the hotel Walter is ready to take over the play.

I tell him about the fifty G's we are to take from Mr. Jasper Slummit and he agrees to accept ten thousand as his cut. Of course I do not mention the twenty thousand we will also collect from Mrs. Isophene Chunker that evening.

The Doc and Mr. Jasper Slummit are sitting over a fresh jug of bourbon the Doc breaks out. He pours a dose for Wall-Street Walter and informs him that Mr. Jasper Slummit is the new owner of the Jingle Bells Novelty Company and is ready to do business.

Walter scowls at the Doc. "I can't say I approve of this, Pierce," he says in a sharp voice. "You assured me that I would have first chance to do business with Mrs.

Chunker."

The Doc shrugs. "I tried to persuade Mrs. Chunker to wait until you arrived. But Mr. Slummit is a shrewd man. He also has a way with the ladies. Mrs. Chunker was just putty in his hands."

Wall-Street Walter scowls again. "I will not trust you in the future," he says. He turns to Mr. Jasper Slummit. "Well, Sir, what is your price?"

The Doc butts in: "Just a moment, Mr. Throggle," he says to Walter. "I resent your suggestion that I have conspired with Mr. Slummit against you. Mr. Slummit was able to purchase the company for a sum slightly less than the amount you offered the late Mr. Chunker. Mr. Slummit has agreed to take a small profit and sell to you for the same price, five hundred thousand dollars."

Walter smiles when the Doc says this. "Well, in that case I shall not criticise you, Doctor Pierce." He reaches into his pocket. "I am prepared to write a check for that sum."

Mr. Jasper Slummit twiddles his fingers and gets a smart look on his face. "Let us not be too hasty," he says. "I am not sure I care to sell for that price."

Well, I can see everything is going fine. I get up and walk over to the Doc.

"Mrs. Chunker and her daughter are packing to leave for Miami in the morning," I tell him. "I promised that I would stop by and see them this evening." I lower my voice. "The oughday?"

The Doc nods. "Yes," he says. "Give them my regards and say farewell for me. I think we will be ready to leave in the morning ourselves." Of course the Doc is

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telling me to go ahead and collect our commission from Isophene.

I go down to the garage and get the heap. On my way through the lobby I hear music and I notice a dance is going on in the hotel dining room. I figure out a little plan.

ISOPHENE and Nanette are strapping up a couple of big suitcases in the living room and I can see they are set to take off for the beach. I put the bite on Isophene for the twenty grand commission right away. She goes over to a safe on the wall and hauls it out. I notice a big stock of lettuce in the safe and I figure she has the whole take right there handy.

Isophene breaks out a bottle of champagne and we have a few doses. Finally I mention this dance at the hotel. Isophene pats her hands together.

“That is a splendid idea,” she says. “We will have a little celebration. Perhaps Doctor Pierce will join us. I will take a few bottles of our champagne along.”

Well, this is not exactly what I have in mind, but there isn't much I can do about it. I remember that we have a small jug of brandy in the glove box in the heap. I figure that I can boost this champagne along a little and maybe Isophene will pass out on the way home and I will have a chance at Nanette and this moonlight.

I manage to slid the brandy into my pants pocket on the way to the hotel. We get a table in the middle of the room and I start operations. About an hour later I am doing fine. Mrs. Isophene Chunker has lapped up four boosted glasses of champagne and Nanette is giving me

plenty of grip while we are dancing.

The music slows down and I take Nanette back to the table so I can boost Isophene's next glass of champagne. We are just about to sit down when I notice a movement at the doorway. The Doc, Mr. Jasper Slummit and Wall-Street Walter walk in.

They are all smiling and I can see a bulge in the Doc's coat pocket so I know the deal is made and the commission is safe. I start to wave my hand when I hear a scream beside me. I look around.

Isophene's face is dead white.

“Toodles,” she yells. “Oh, Toodles.”

She slides to the floor and passes out.

Well, this is quicker than I expect. I lean over her and then look up at Nanette. Only Nanette is not there. In fact she is now across the room with her arms around Wall-Street Walter.

“Daddy darling,” Nanette is saying. “You have come back to us at last.”

Well, this is a fine scene. It is easy to figure that Wall-Street Walter is also Mr. Wellington Pilkins of Tatertown, Virginia. I figure it is a dirty trick for Walter to be related to these dames at this time. However, I don't discuss it with him.

I leave Isophene on the floor and hustle over to Mr. Jasper Slummit. I can see that Mr. Jasper Slummit is confused by this scene and is about to ask questions.

The Doc has Mr. Jasper Slummit by the wing. I also put the arm on him and we rush him up to the room. We get the door closed and then we turn him loose. The Doc sits on the bed and mops his brow.

“That was an affecting meeting,” he says. “I did my best to prevent it.” He

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gives me a dirty look. I can tell the Doc intends to criticize me.

I pat my coat pocket. The Doc looks a little better. The Doc always feels better when he realizes he is near fresh money.

Mr. Jasper Slummit is still on his feet. He has a big scowl on his face.

“What is this Toodles business?” he asks the Doc. “Why did that young lady call Mr. Elander Throggle daddy?”

The Doc sighs. “It is a long, sad story,” he says. “The scene you just witnessed is the reason poor old Herman Chunker did not tell his wife that he was selling the Jingle Bells Novelty Company to Elander Throggle. He knew she hated Elander Throggle and would object violently.”

Well, this is fairly good for a quick speil, but I can see that Mr. Jasper Slummit is not too fond of it. He scowls again.

“Do you mean that Elander Throggle is that young lady’s father?”

The Doc nods. “It is a long story.”

MR. JASPER SLUMMIT is looking good and nasty now. “I do not have time for a long story,” he says. “In fact I think there is something fishy about this.” He starts across the room for the telephone. “I think I will call the police.”

The Doc gets to his feet and sighs. “I detest violence,” he says.

Of course I know what he means. I speak sharply to Mr. Jasper Slummit.

“Just a minute, Brother,” I say.

Mr. Jasper Slummit turns around.

Well, I have cooled out many a chump in my day but I have to admit that few of them come as tough as Mr. Jasper

Slummit. I lay three big right hands on his chin and a couple of left hooks before he relaxes.

He has a big bandana in his pocket and we tie his hands and feet together with it. I donate a pair of clean socks and we stuff one in his mouth and wrap the other one around his jaw. By the time I have him tucked under the bed the Doc has the keisters packed.

He makes several nasty remarks about parties who get mixed up with dames during a caper and I have to hold still for it. He pays the bill at the desk and I hustle the bags out to the heap. I take a look in the back seat. I am still standing there with my mouth open when the Doc arrives.

Wall-Street Walter is in the middle with Isophene and Nanette beside him. Walter gives Isophene a squeeze and us a smile.

“I have been suffering from amnesia all these years,” he tells us. “Those bank robbers abducted me and struck me on the skull with a blunt instrument. It all came back to me when I saw Isophene and Nanette there in the dining room.”

Well, I figure Wall-Street Walter is telling a big lie but it is none of my business. I am quite nervous as it is better than a hundred miles to the state line.

The Doc speaks to Isophene:

“Did you deposit that one hundred and eighty thousand dollars in the bank?”

Wall-Street Walter speaks up. “No,” he says. “Isophene has told me everything. She has the money at her home in the safe. I have suggested that we all go to Miami together. It will be a pleasant holiday and we will be glad to have you with us.” He

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hesitates for a minute, then he says: “I have told Isophene that we should take the one hundred and eighty thousand along.”

The Doc grins. “That is an excellent program,” he says. He climbs into the heap. “On to Miami, Pony Boy,” he says.

We stop by the Chunker residence and pick up the luggage and the bankroll. When we start out again I have no trouble shifting Nanette into the front seat with me. Naturally the Doc wishes to sit in the back with Isophene and Wall-Street Walter and Isophene’s handbag.

We cross the state line about midnight. Nanette is taking a little nap on my shoulder. I let my breath out and slow the heap down a little. She wakes up and stretches.

Nanette smiles at me. “We are so grateful to you and Doctor Pierce,” she says. “You have made this a lovely Christmas. You brought daddy back and

you sold the factory to that horrid man.”

The Doc chuckles. “Nanette is right. Mister Jasper Slummit is a horrid man. I do not approve of parties who are willing to take advantage of a poor widow woman, especially at Christmas time. Mister Jasper Slummit does not have the true Yuletide spirit in his heart.”

“Well,” I tell him. “I don’t know about the spirit, but I would say that Mister Jasper Slummit got a first-class trimming.”

The Doc chuckles again. He pats the fifty grand in his coat pocket and then reaches over and pats the handbag on Isophene’s lap. I touch the twenty G’s in my own pocket and look down at Nanette.

“I shall always think of Mr. Jasper Slummit kindly,” I say. “In fact, Mr. Jasper Slummit is the closest thing to Santa Claus I ever run into. He has set us up for a real merry Christmas, and a good start on a prosperous New Year.”