



*And Now for
Some Real Humor*

WEST goes SOUTH

By THOMAS THURSDAY

LISTEN, my children, and you shall hear what every showman should know: Never count your pickin's before they're snatched!

Speaking of kumquats, as they do in Florida, you should of seen the beautiful bust in the pan that Shorthorn Shannon and his playmates delivered to Calithumpian Sweeney and his Rio Del Rancho land scheme. In case your pet radio station has carelessly failed to give you a full report, kindly adjust the headphones and I'll broadcast the fiasco myself. To begin with, Sweeney had a yard of nerve to an inch of reason and, as the monkey remarked to the banyan tree, thereby hangs a tail!

"Doc," says he to me, while we lounged on the veranda of one of Miami's misleading hotels, "this land boom makes show business look like a perpendicular pretzel. I admit that I'm a big time guy, and I belong to this Sand Rush like the Bearded Lady belongs outside of barber shops. Now—er—how much jack do you happen to have?"

"I happen to have about five hundred bucks, and I'll see that I happen to have it for some time to come. Ask me another."

"I wish you'd forget, for the moment, that you're a cheap circus and carnival grifter, and listen to me. We're in line for some important money, and I don't mean I just think so."

"Seeing that I ain't got anything else to do, I'm

still listening," I says.

"Atta lad!" he exhausts. "Now listen. You got five hundred. Good! Just add that to my wad and we'll have quite a bankroll, all of which will be enough to start a very nifty and novel subdivision."

"Pardon you," I says, "but I'm afraid I wasn't listening when you mentioned how much *you* had."

"And here's the big idea," he goes on, ignoring my well-bred question.

"It ain't big enough to get any of my dough," I says. "Right now there's so many new subdivisions in Florida that a adding-machine would get overheated trying to count 'em. Les' stick to show business."

"Doc," he retorts, "you give me a pain in the rear-housing. You don't know the difference between the feller on top and the guy on bottom. The lad on top is the one who took a chance and the gil on the bottom just watched 'im take it. Meantime, I have a scheme that will make Jack Rockefeller and Hank Ford collapse from pure envy. Listen, sap, while I give you the scenario."

For the next fifteen minutes, he told me the latest in bedtime stories. Get a load of this: For three hundred dollars, Sweeney claims he can get an option on twenty acres, seven miles north of Miami, right on the main road. He will stake this off in small lots, and peddling it by mail will be a

cinch.

"Just a moment," I interrupts, "how do we sell this mess, and who can we wish it on? From the looks of things right now, I have an idea that My Country 'Tis of Thee has already been milked dry of suckers."

"I've got that all figured out," he smiles. "The other promoters have been appealing to retired grocers, bankers, shoe merchants, lawyers, doctors, bakers, and lads of that ilk. One outfit on the West Coast is angling for ballplayers."

"Well, who do we shake down?"

"Cowboys!" he ejaculates. "Why, when I think how them poor cow gents and ranchers freeze to death in the Northwest every winter I could almost cry. That being the case, we invite them down to enjoy the Florida sunshine and assorted climate."

"Yeah," I says, "but will they bite without seeing what sort of land they're biting on?"

He shivers.

"See the land!" he snaps. "Do I look stupid? Doc, if they should get one slant at our trap they'd shoot up the whole peninsula. I'll take you out and show you what it looks like."

We leap into our Puddle Jumper, and twenty minutes later, Sweeney comes to a halt.

"Before you," he beams, "is beautiful Rio Del Rancho—the Cowboy's Riviera. A hotsy and totsy deadfall, hey?"

"Fine!" I admits. "What is it?"

"Use your imagination," he grins. "When I write up my booklet, Rio Del Rancho will make the French and Wop Rivierras look like diphtheria."

"You may have plenty of land here," I admits, "but I bet I could toss out a line and catch slews of catfish."

"Not catfish," he corrects. "Bass. But if need be, we could drain this off, via canals, same as they did around Okeechobee. However, that would take plenty of pennies, and mamma never reared no foolish children."

"Won't it dry up?" I asks.

"Well, this is the rainy season, but when winter comes you'll hardly notice any water at all."

"Just about enough to fill Lake Erie, huh?" I remarks.

"Be good," he says. "We're gonna sell this land by mail, ain't we? And anybody who buys land by mail deserves all they get—including the water. Meanwhile, our present business is to promote Rio Del Rancho—the Cowboy's Riviera. Les' go!"

All aboard for Griefftown!

II

DURING the next few weeks Calithumpian Sweeney was as busy as the word itself. After getting the option on the twenty acres of moisture, he hired a flock of carpenters to erect a field office—knowing that no sub-division would be genuine without one.

"Brother," says the boss nail-and-hammer expert, "what you want is a houseboat. You better sink a few caissons or your joint will float away."

"Omit the wit and humor," says Sweeney. "I admit it's a little damp, but slip on your boots and get busy. I would like to have that field office erected by tomorrow night, so's I can send photographs of it to our prospective clients."

"Who you goin' sell this to," demands the carpenter, "ducks?"

"I'm paying you to work, not wisecrack," snorts Sweeney.

"See that you do, brother. The last guy who tried to gyp me became a treat for the undertaker."

Well, to dwarf a tall story, when the field-office was erected, Sweeney had it painted in real showmanship colors, meaning bright orange with vermilion borders. In short, a circus wagon. On top, he has a large sign, reading RIO DEL RANCHO, and underneath *The Cowboy's Riviera*. Next, he has a bevy of stick-in-the-ground signs painted, and scatters 'em along the highway. Here's just a few of 'em: WATER? YES!—LIGHTS? YES!—ELECTRICITY? YES!—FREE TAXES FOR TWO YEARS AT RIO DEL RANCHO!—NEW HOTEL AVOCADO TO BE ERECTED SOON!—WHY FREEZE IN THE NORTH? SWIM IN THE SOUTH!—MOTHER EARTH IS THE BEST ONE HUNDRED PERCENT BET!—WATCH RIO DEL RANCHO GROW!—BUY FOR HOME OR SPECULATION. YOU CAN'T LOSE EITHER WAY!

After we got the signs planted, Sweeney has a photographer to take snaps of 'em, and then spends two days writing up his booklet. Speaking of booklets, Sweeney used to be a press-agent for a small mud-show, and when it came to concocting fairy tales he had Hans Christian Andersen and the Grimm Brothers resembling pikers. On the first page, he has a photo of no less than himself, encased in full cowboy regalia, hair-pants and all.

He's also wearing a ten-gallon lid that fits him the same way a baby's B.V.D.'s would fit an elephant. Beneath the tasty chromo is this caption: *Cactus Sweeney—Cowboy Realtor and Developer of Rio Del Rancho*. The rest of the booklet is devoted to just how our beautiful swamp came into being, although he carelessly forgot to mention the swamp part. According to Mr. Sweeney's own statement—and he wouldn't fool anybody, except himself—he had spent thirty-odd years in the bleak and frozen Northwest, such as Montana, Colorado, Oregon, and the two Dakotas. He sweated in the summer, and during the winters he'd freeze his ears off, and collect double-pneumonia, triple-chilblains, or what have you. One day Cactus Sweeney received a letter from a former pal, down in sunny Florida. The pal invites Cactus to visit him, and Sweeney buys a ticket and goes down. After he had been in Florida less than a month his rheumatism disappeared like Swiss cheese at a convention of rodents. So Cactus went back home, sold out his ranch—which he had worked for twenty years, in the booklet—and decides to make Florida his permanent home. Of course, he had many more pages of sauce from the apple, such as how easy it would be to own a lot in his new development, etc., etc., and boloney.

"A appetizing dish, hey?" he remarks. "Once more I'm obliged to admit I'm clever."

"You're too good for this world," I says. "When you kick in they'll declare a dividend in Heaven. By the way, where was your ranch—New Jersey?"

"Connecticut," he corrects.

"What did you raise—hell or potatoes?"

"Chickens," he replies. "That's why I left. They crowded too early, and besides that little inconvenience, the sheriff foreclosed the mortgage."

"Tough," I concedes. "As to this little story you've written, it's good fiction, although the plot ain't so snappy. All the same, Big Boy, I don't think them cow lads will nibble at the bait."

"Don't bet against it," he says. "Florida is in the air today, and before the boom flops, some wise guy will buy the Gulf Stream and six acres in Biscayne Bay."

"We might get a first payment on this stuff, but how about the balance?" I want to know.

"Balance—hell!" he snorts. "The first payment will net us about one thousand percent profit. After that, I don't care if school keeps or not."

"Suppose some of them six-gun toters decide to come down and get a eagle-eye view of their investment? If they get one peek at this aquarium, they'll sling assorted lariats around our necks."

"Forget it," he says. "If I wanted 'em to see the property, I'd ask 'em to call, and not peddle it via mail. And never mind about cowboys shooting us up, or even down. Nowadays, they do all their shooting in the movies and magazines."

"We'll see," I says, and we did.

III

A WEEK later Sweeney has the mails clogged with five hundred booklets, addressed to Wyoming, Colorado, and all points northwest. Along with the booklet, he enclosed a typewritten form letter, smeared with some extra banana lubricant, and telling the boys to get in on the ground floor, and to do it now. For one hundred berries, any cowboy or ranchman could grab off a morsel of Rio Del Rancho, and live happy ever after. The price, according to Sweeney, was a dead steal, and the only reason he was letting the lots go so cheap was because he sincerely wanted his fellow cowpunchers to share in his success. No fooling, Cactus Sweeney had a big heart—about the size of one-half of a split oat.

"Some letter, hey?" he gloats. "Within the next few weeks we ought to get a whole flock of checks."

"Maybe so," I says. "Maybe so."

"There's no 'maybe so' about it," he admits. "This whole Florida boom was put over by showmen, and ain't I a showman?"

"Maybe so," I says. "Maybe so."

"Aw, shut up!" he snaps. "You ain't got any more backbone than an angleworm. Here I let you in on a racket that should net us at least twenty grand, and you moan around like a giraffe with a two-inch neck. What's eating you? This here development of ours is just about as legitimate as most of the others, and I don't mean maybe! Besides, it's all good muck soil, and is great for raising almost anything. Quit beefing, kid—you'll lose your complexion."

"I ain't worrying about my complexion," I says, "I'm worrying about losing my neck."

"Very fine soil," he repeats. "I should of played that up in the booklet. Why, I bet you could plant a rusty flivver and come back three months later and

find a Rolls-Joyce in blossom."

Well, to come to the end of a perfect fray, I'll say that those darn fool cowboys began to shower us with hundred-buck checks. By the end of the first month we got more than five thou in the bank, and I begin to apologize to Sweeney for my lack of faith.

"Business," remarks Sweeney, as he nonchalantly opens a fresh batch of mail, "is what might be called good. It wouldn't surprise me, Doc, if we cleaned up about fifty grand. Pat me on the back, Big Boy; pat me on the back."

"If we don't watch out," I says, "somebody might come around and pat you on the head. If you ask me, this is too good to be true."

"Stick with me, kid, and you'll wear silk suits."

"With stripes," I adds.

Two weeks later we have cornered another supply of loot, and it goes to Sweeney's head like a squirrel toward a nut, and the way he begins to swagger around is positively disgusting.

"I need a stenographer," he moans one day, chin-deep in mail. "I ain't used to typewriting; all I know is the select and slam system. Run a ad in the paper, Doc, and get me some sweet lady for about twenty berries per week."

When I placed the ad I thought we'd be swamped with applicants, but we had to run it three days before we got a reply. At that time, Florida was loaded with business (some of which it wouldst like to have now!) and help of any kind was as scarce as sideshow fire-eaters with celluloid teeth. We was about to give up hope of employing a fair assistant, when the Miami-Fort Pierce bus stops in front of our trap and a neat little gal hops off. I won't try and describe this eye-widener, because any guy who attempts to describe a beautiful lady is crazy. It can't be done in print, what I mean!

"My name is Sally Smith," she says quietly, tripping into the office, "and I called in reference to your advertisement for a stenographer."

"Okay," beams Sweeney. "Toss your lid onto the rack and wade into this pile of toil. The salary to start will be twenty a week, and the same to finish."

"That," she says, "will be lovely."

"Atta girl!" enthuses Sweeney. "I won't expect you to do any heavy thinking; just take my dictation, and box this typewriter snappy and often."

"I'm fair at the machine," says Miss Smith, "but I must confess that my shorthand is not of the best."

"My shorthand is a little short, too," beams Sweeney. "Grab them envelopes and scatter the addresses over 'em. I think we'll get along fine."

"I'm sure we shall," smiles Sally Smith.

Not wishing to keep you in suspense, I'll confess now that when we employed Sally we treated ourselves to another load of grief!

Meanwhile, business is going along like a shark in a nest of sardines. Pretty soon we had collected about fifteen grand, or in English, fifteen thousand dollars.

"Once again, Doc," says Sweeney, "I admit I'm good; very good. Believe me, this boom is a showman's paradise, and I don't mean I just guess so!"

"Put on the brakes, fellow," I says. "I have a hunch we'll start to skid soon. If some of those cow secretaries should happen to get a slant at their property I'll bet a pair of hair-pants against a queen's necklace that they shoot us in the sit-spot."

"Not a chance, Doc; not a chance. I admit we got a few inquisitive notes from the boys, but you know how easy I pacified 'em, don't you?"

The very next day we received a letter from Mr. Shorthorn Shannon, habitat, Death Canyon, Wyoming, and it was very annoying. Shorthorn was one of the first lads to bite on our bait, and we had almost forgot 'im. His lot was in the dead center of the development, and was damp enough for a whale to raise her family in.

"I'll settle this boy promptly!" says Sweeney, after reading the message.

"What does he want—his money back?" I enquires.

"Nothing so unthinkable," he replies. "He has just taken it into what passes for his head that he will come down and pay us a friendly visit. Not so good!"

He dictates the following telegram to Sally Smith:

Shorthorn Shannon,
Death Canyon, Wy.

Advise against coming. Florida in grip of smallpox.

Cactus Sweeney,
Developer, Rio Del Rancho.

“Shoot that right off, girlie,” says Sweeney. “Maybe he can comb that out of his whiskers!”

Promptly the following morning we receive Shorthorn Shannon’s jovial reply. Take a peek:

Cactus Sweeney,
% Rio Del Rancho,
Florida.

Don’t care if it’s mumps and measles. On my way.

Shorthorn Shannon.

“The dizzy boob!” whoops Sweeney. “I’d like to see the shape of his head!”

“And he’d like to see the shape of his property,” I adds.

“Let ‘im come! I’ll kid the spurs off ‘im, and send him back laughing. You know me, Doc!”

While we’re waiting for Shorthorn to arrive, another assortment of trouble rolls in. The following afternoon, a hawk-nosed gent alights from the bus, and with a face as stern as New England’s rock-bound coast, flatfoots into our office. He’s got an eye as sharp as a whole family of eagles, and he didn’t prove to be any Santa Claus to us!

“My name is John Carter,” he snaps out. “Inspector, U.S. Post Office, Washington, D.C.”

“From Washington, hey?” says Sweeney, not knowing what it was all about. “Greetings! How’s Coolidge?”

“I called to investigate your project,” goes on Mons. Carter, paying less than no attention to the brilliant Sweeney. “I understand that your development is not exactly as represented in the mails.”

“Who’s selling anything to the mails?” demands the dumb Sweeney. “I ain’t swiped any stamps, have I?”

“Your literature says nothing about the actual condition of the property,” continues the government lad. “How do you expect your clients to build homes in a semi-swamp?”

“What d’yer mean—swamp?” yelps my playmate, innocently. “It may be a little moist, but this is the rainy season and the whole state is a bit damp just now.”

“Ha, ha,” I laughs, trying to remove the tension. “You know how it is, brother.”

“Perfectly,” says the agent. “Do you intend to drain this land or don’t you?”

This is a terrible slap in the slats, and what’s more, we know it! If we’re compelled to drain it, bye-bye bankroll!

“Drain it?” gloops Sweeney. “Why, of course! Do we look like a coupla gyps?”

“Just when will you start the drainage?” fires back the cold-brained boy from Washington. “Besides, I failed to see any reference to drainage in your booklet.”

At that, Sweeney shifts his temper into high and steps on the gas.

“Listen to me, wise guy!” he barks, tossing diplomacy to the winds. “We’ll drain this drum when we get damn good and ready, see if you can get a giggle outta that! The idea! You walk in on us and all but hint that we’re a gang of burglars! Maybe we didn’t tell about the—er—dampness in the litterchure, but we thought the customers would have brains enough to know that we’d drain the works. Anyway, we’re selling the lots so cheap that it should be called philanthropy.”

“I repeat—when do you intend to start draining?” coos John Carter.

“Give us a chance, can’t you?” begs Sweeney, calming down considerable. “Rome wasn’t built in a day, was it?”

“If Rome was as wet as this, I fail to see how it *could* be. Meanwhile, gentlemen, I’ll give you one week in which to start draining. Good afternoon.”

A breezy customer, huh?

“Well,” I says, when the gent blew out, “how can we untangle that beard?”

“I ain’t sucker enough to try!” he retorts. “We’ll just stall him off as long as possible, then let him do the draining himself. He thinks he’s the whole works, but I’ll show him that he ain’t even the whistle on the works.”

SOON after, we begin to receive very annoying letters from some of our clients from the Northwest. One lad writes that he has heard it rumored that our development ain’t exactly high, wide and handsome. Another corral-addict shoots in a special-delivery to the effect that, if our trap ain’t on the level, he’ll take pleasure in coming down and try his aim in our direction.

“Aw, let ‘em rave!” snaps Sweeney.

“Listen, smart boy,” I says politely, “les’ get down to business. If you ask me, somebody has tipped these customers off on our deal, and I bet it’s our little friend, John Carter. If we don’t be

careful, that feller will be poison to us."

"Stop moaning, you grifter," he snorts. "I been in worse jams than this, and if I can't guess my way out of this mess I'll rent me a space in a mausoleum and retire from life."

"Maybe so," I says. "But how about this gent, Shorthorn Shannon, who's due to look in on us at any moment?"

"Forget 'im! I'll take that boy like Barnum took the public. Wait and see!"

Late that night it began to rain, and when it rains in Florida, each drop is as big as a lake. It kept up all night, the whole of next day, and when it made arrangements to halt, Rio Del Rancho resembles one of the finest natural harbors in the world!

"We made a mistake in our selection of buyers," I remarks, as I wade into the field-office. "We should have appealed to sailors, instead of cowboys. We got enough water here to hold a regatta of racing motor boats."

"Never mind the cluck comedy," he growls. "I admit that this moisture ain't helping us any, but—"

A weird looking flivver stops in front of our office, the engine pounding like a blacksmith on his anvil. The wreck is covered with the mud of at least ten states, while the spoke wheels were so smeared that they appeared like solid discs. In the driver's seat is a bronzed, wiry chap, looking as sober as a drink of grape juice. He stretches, yawns, gives our lake region the once over, then hops out and splashes into the office.

"Howdy, folks!" he greets. "My name is Shorthorn Shannon, and I'm shore glad to meet up with you hombres."

He didn't smile, and I get the idea that he ain't as sincerely charmed to meet us as he says. Sweeney comes to life, and starts to do his stuff.

"Well, well, well!" he enthuses, grabbing Shorthorn's hand and pumping it snappy and often. "So this is Mr. Shorthorn Shannon, hey? Well, we're mighty glad you called!"

Lik'ell we were!

"Thanks, pardner," says Shorthorn. "Been storming around here lately?"

"I'll tell the cockeyed world!" confesses Sweeney. "You see Rio Del Rancho is a little low, and when it rains it gets a bit damp. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" echoes Shorthorn. "Er, whar did you say my lot was?"

All of which was a very sad question. Mr. Shannon's lot was in the dead center of the

property, and I'll bet a kumquat against Hank Ford's roll that a dreadnaught could of floated there.

"Well, brother," says Sweeney, "due to the terrible storm we had the other day your lot is a bit submerged. But don't let that worry you none; when the sun comes out for a day or so it will dry right up."

"Oh, that's all right," says Shorthorn, greatly to our relief. "Les' see now; I paid you fellows one hundred dollars down, as a first payment, didn't I?"

"Correct," admits Sweeney. "And your second payment ain't due—"

"I ain't worrying none 'bout that, pardners," he replies. "I aim to pay up for the other four hundred and own the lot outright. I happen to have the cash along with me, and if you hombres will just make out a bill of sale I'll shore appreciate it."

Well, you could have knocked me over with a toothpick! Will wonders never cease? Here we been expecting this clown to let out a yelp and howl for his money back, but he comes right in and begs us to let him pay the balance. A boob is a terrible thing, hey?

"Er, what's the idea?" demands the dazed Sweeney. "You got a whole year to pay up."

"I know that, pardner, but I shore hate to buy anything on the installment plan. I bought a pianner for my kid sister, onct, and just as she begin to learn how to play, I went plum broke, and they took it back. Anyway, I'm downright tickled at my lot."

Sweeney and me exchanges glances. Sweeney's look says, "A natural born nut!" and my look says, "Maybe so. Maybe so!"

"Very well, Mr. Shannon," says Sweeney; "if you wish to pay up, that's your affair. But we didn't want any of our clients to pay up until we had drained the property. We're gonna dig canals, and some spots, like yours, may have to be filled in a little."

"You gointa drain my lot?" demands Shorthorn, a bit crestfallen.

"Certainly!" replies Sweeney. "Why?"

Shorthorn removes his sombrero, and scratches his sandy head.

"I'd ruther you don't touch my lot," he says. "I allus wanted some property with water around it, and this just suits me. Please don't drain it, pardner." He replaces his hat on his head, and walks toward the door. "Wal, s'long, hombres—I'm gointa take a pike at Miami. See you later."

“How do you figure that out?” I asks, when Shorthorn had left.

“Must be a dream,” says Sweeney. “Here’s a guy who’s not only satisfied with his purchase, but pays up in full, and don’t even want us to drain it! Somebody’s crazy!”

But it wasn’t Shorthorn Shannon.

IV

WE DIDN’T hear anymore from Mr. Shannon for a week or so, but we got plenty of action from the customers, and John Carter, the government lad. As to the clients, they write in that they have seen some tasty snapshots of our development, and they wanted to know if it was in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico or just a large swimming hole. One enraged cow-banger coyly remarks that, if we don’t do some speedy explaining, he’ll come down and give us a reproduction of “Custer’s last stand,” using us as the enemy. Speaking of sagebrush, the outlook for us don’t seem so good!

“Wherein hell d’yer suppose they got the photos?” demands the puzzled Sweeney. Then he turns to Sally Smith, and asks, “Did you see any fatheads snooping around here lately?”

“No, sir,” she replies. “But it seems strange that they got some photographs, doesn’t it?”

“Not only that,” admits my boyfriend, “but it’s very annoying.”

“Well,” I says, “I guess we’ll have to drain this drum or get drained ourselves. All I see ahead is a complete assortment of grief!”

“Your feet getting chilly?” he sneers.

“Not exactly,” I retorts; “but at the same time they never was much good at running. Anyhow, we have already collected enough jack to dig a few canals, ain’t we?”

“Blaah!” he snorts. “D’yer suppose I’m sap enough to let go some of this easy sugar? Be your age, Big Boy. Other realtors are peddling much worse junk than ours, and if they can get away with it, why can’t we?”

I’m about to make one of my usual witty rejoinders, when in walks Mons. John Carter, the Washington gumshoe.

“Well, gentlemen,” he begins as sober as a wise bootlegger, “I’m sorry to find that you have not started your drainage system. You will be gracious enough to explain, I presume?”

“Positively,” says Sweeney. “You know how hard it is to get any service in Florida these days, don’t you? Well, we been trying to get a firm in Tampa to come over and start work, but they’re so busy they keep stalling us off.”

“That,” says Mr. Carter, “is really too bad. In fact, it puts you in a very unenviable position. What’s more, it might put you in jail.”

“All right, fellow,” replies Sweeney, holding his redheaded temper with difficulty. “I’ll do my best to get some action within the next few days, if I don’t—”

“I’ll take you for a trip,” adds Carter, and walks out briskly.

Although we continued to get some more donations from the Northwest, they became a few fewer than few, while the threatening letters became bigger and better. One genial rancher remarks that he might gather a posse and come down for an interview.

“I guess,” says Sweeney, “we better start draining.”

“The guess,” I agrees, “is one of your best. Send out feelers to all the contractors, and knock down the job to the cheapest burglar.”

At that moment, Mr. Shorthorn Shannon chugs up in his Detroit Demon, hops out, and presents us with a pleasant smile.

“Hello, brother!” greets Sweeney. “Glad to see you again. How’s tricks in Miami?”

“Shore had a swell time, pardner,” he says. He takes a squint at the property, and continues, “I’m prime tickled that you ain’t done no drainin’ around Rio Del Rancho.”

“Stop kidding,” says Sweeney. “We’re gonna get busy on emptying this moisture darn pronto.”

“Wal, you can suit yourselves about the other lots, but I don’t want you to monkey with mine.”

“You ain’t serious, are you?” demands Sweeney. “You must be kidding, fellow!”

“I ain’t kiddin’ you, pardner, and you ain’t gointa kid me, either. I have paid for that lot in full and you ain’t got no right to mess around with my personal property!”

“You must be daffy!” snaps Sweeney. “How in Gehenna can we drain the other land without also draining yours? Brother, get yourself a straightjacket, you need a keeper!”

“Careful with loose remarks, pardner,” fires back Shorthorn, with narrowing eyes. “I don’t aim to stir up any ruckus, but back in Wyoming we

resent personal references. And I repeat once more that I don't want my lot drained, and I mean what I says!"

At this point in the debate, a car stops, and in comes our little admirer, John Carter. Honest, he couldn't have picked a worse moment to call, and was as welcome as arsenic in the soup!

"What!" begins John, right off the griddle; "nothing started yet?"

This is too much for Calithumpian Sweeney. He gets as red as a bottle of ketchup, and begins to pop off like a string of firecrackers.

"Do I see your ugly pan again?" he snorts. "Besides, how can we drain this dump when this prize chump here refuses to have us touch his lot?"

"I'm afraid that I don't quite gather your meaning," replies Mons. Carter.

Sweeney explains the situation and, after he had exploded for five minutes, Shorthorn tells his version.

"Well," says the government gent, after hearing both sides of the scenario, "I admit this is a very peculiar situation. However, under the law, Mr. Shannon is justified in demanding that you refrain from draining his property."

"Then where do we stand?" barks Sweeney, working up more steam.

"That's your affair, not mine," says Mr. Carter. "You are probably correct when you state that you can't drain the land without also draining Mr. Shannon's lot; but you'll have to drain the rest, and that blame quickly!"

A tasty situation, eh?

"Well, wise guy," says Sweeney to Shorthorn, "maybe you can figure it out. This man is a government agent, and he demands that I drain the property or go to the can. And I can't drain the rest without also draining yours, seeing that your slice is right in the middle. Say something!"

"Wal," drawls Shorthorn, "maybe we can get together and figger it out."

"Not with my head, you can't," admits Sweeney. "Let's see what's in your nut."

"As I see it, pardners," obliges Shorthorn, "you claim you can't drain the rest of the property without draining mine with it. But since I don't want mine touched, that leaves you holding the steer's tail. I also understand that if you don't get busy, you will be arrested for usin' the mails to defraud. Is that right, officer?"

"It is," replies John Carter—the big stiff!

"For cripes sake, kid," yelps Sweeney, "come to the point! What are we gonna do? What are you driving at, anyway?"

Before replying Shorthorn walks over to the desk, takes a seat, and mops some Florida climate off his brow.

"Wal, gentlemen," he says finally, "if you can't drain the land without also draining *mine*, there's only one way out."

"And that is?" requests Sweeney.

"Pardner," says Shorthorn, "you must be kinda dumb. If I was in your boots, I could see it plum plain. All you gotta do to settle the matter is to—buy me out!"

A fine sock in the whiskers!

"Oh, so that's the game, hey?" whoops Sweeney, fit to be tied. "You admit you're a wise bird, huh? Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, mister—I'll just give you back the price you paid for the lot, and that's all!"

"Not interested," says Shorthorn. "I crave a little more in the rebate line. I paid you five hundred dollars, and if I get back only five hundred, how can I tell the folks back to home that I made any money in Floridy real estate? So if you will just add fifteen hundred to my five, mebbe we can talk business."

"Call his bluff!" I shouts, getting dizzy from the thought that we got a good chance of landing in the cooler. Besides, I knew he held the whip hand and could of held us up for a king's ransom. "It's robbery, but show the lad we're no pikers."

"I consider that a wise move," huts in Mr. Carter. "I'm afraid it's the only way out."

Sweeney chokes with rage, dashes over to the desk, grabs the checkbook, and makes out a check for two thousand dollars, payable to Mr. Shorthorn Shannon. Without even drying the ink, he picks it up and fires it at Shorthorn.

"Here's your dough, smart boy!" fumes Sweeney. "Pick up the marbles, you win! And now that it's all settled, I'll just give you a sock on the nose for remembrance!"

Sweeney rips off his coat, and is about to ruin Shorthorn, when Sally Smith leaps from her seat, and runs between 'em.

"Don't you dare assault my husband!" she screams. "You crook! You're just mad because we beat you at your own game, that's all. Oh, I just wish I had a hat-pin!"

Business is good, huh?

“Ah ha!” squeaks Sweeney, “so that’s how the game was worked, hey? Little wifey plays detective for her darling husband! Well, I know when I’m licked and I give you kids credit for putting over a fast one.”

“Thank you so much!” mocks Mrs. Shorthorn Shannon. “Er, perhaps you’d be interested to know just how it was done?”

“For one, I would!” I snaps out.

“Well, little boys,” says née Sally Smith, “when Shorthorn sent in his first payment from home, I had a hunch that he was going to be cheated, so I came down to investigate. I didn’t think I’d be so fortunate as to land a job in the same office, but when I saw your advertisement I leaped with joy. That was my profession before I married Shorthorn, and I’m sure glad that I took the course!”

“Go on,” mumbles Sweeney, “I’m all ears.”

“Shoot, kid,” I adds, “you’re faded.”

“Well,” continues our cute stenographer, “when I found out how things were going I got in touch with some of the other buyers back North, and

hinted at the situation. Then I had some snapshots taken, while you gentlemen were out, and sent them around. Maybe that will explain why you received so many letters from your clients. And when you sent Shorthorn a telegram, telling him not to come, I sent a counter telegram, stating that there wasn’t any smallpox, or anything, in Florida, and for him to come ahead. But we owe most of our success to father’s kind assistance.”

“Father?” echoes Sweeney. “Did you have your whole family in on this?”

“Who’s your pop?” I asks.

“His name is John Carter, agent for the U.S. Post Office, and he’s standing right behind you!”

Weep, no more, my lady!

“Well!” ejaculates Sweeney. “For a bunch of saps you birds get along fine!”

“Saps?” echoes the cute little gal. “Say, brother, let me ask you something: When a man buys a lot for five hundred dollars, and then sells it back to the man he *bought* it from for two thousand dollars—well, who’s the sap?”

Ask me another!