



Dreer threw a hard left which caught the racket man on the nose

A PHOTO AND A VOICE

By DAVID GOODIS

Private Detectives Dreer and Burns find plenty of action when a racketeer attempts to spring a vicious shakedown!

THINGS were dull and Bill Dreer was getting ready to close up the office when the telephone rang. Dreer looked at bulky Don Burns, his assistant.

"You expecting a call?" he asked.

"Who ever calls me?" Burns said. "Answer it. Maybe it's something big."

It turned out to be something big.

It seemed that there was a man named Marsh, and he had a new kind of vending

machine, that would take a fellow's picture and at the same time make a disc recording of his voice, all for a half-dollar. This Marsh was an independent sort of person, and he had financed the thing himself. He manufactured the machines, had formed his own distribution agency, and had started to put the things on the market.

Along came the racket boys. They had scared most of the vending operators into

paying a protection fee. When a few of the operators protested, the racket boys had caught up with their trucks and smashed their machines. One of the big shots in the vending business had had his nose broken one day, so the other boys had got scared and decided to pay off.

When Marsh's machine went over big, he had been approached by the racket lads, who told him an interesting story.

They said that it would be healthy for him to join the Amusement Machine Protective Association. They said that he would pay exactly ten per cent of his monthly net profit to the association, for which he would receive protection.

Marsh said that he did not need any protection, and he told the racket boys to go to a hot spot.

This had peeved the protectors, and they had walked out of the office and on the following day caught up with one of Marsh's trucks and turned it over, beat up the driver, and smashed ten machines. . .

NOT long after that phone call, Marsh was in Dreer's office. Marsh was a good-looking man in his early forties and he dressed as if he had money.

"What made you call me up?" Dreer asked him.

Bill Dreer was just an average private sleuth. He was a year over thirty, was of average height and average weight, and had gray eyes and a short nose.

"I'll tell you," Marsh said. "I've got a feeling that the police wouldn't be able to help me much with this thing. The racket boys are plenty smart. I looked you up in a directory. That is, I opened the directory and just let my finger fall on a name and it turned out to be yours."

"Whaddya know about that?" Burns said.

Don Burns had a pink face and a lot of curly brown hair, and he had been a

wrestler, a bouncer, and an all-round tough guy.

Dreer grinned at Marsh. "Let's talk business," he said.

"Sure," Marsh said. "I want you to bust up this protective association. I'll pay you a hundred bucks a week for two weeks and when you get something on these thugs and they go to jail I'll give you three thousand dollars."

"You talk as if it's worth a lot to you, Marsh," Dreer said.

"Sure it's worth a lot to me," Marsh admitted. He acted as if he didn't want to waste any time. "I'll make it five thousand."

"That's fine," Dreer said. "What do I have to work on?"

"Nothing but what I've told you," Marsh said. "From now on it's your job."

He put his hand in his pocket and took out a roll of bills. . . .

On the following day, Dreer and Burns took jobs in the factory where Marsh turned out his Photo-Voice, as he called it. The machine was a classy job about four feet high, all chromium and lavender enamel and mirror. You inclined your head into a metal hood and put a half-dollar in the slot. You smiled or made faces or tried to look intelligent, and then the lights went on inside the machine and things buzzed.

In thirty seconds a neat-looking package came out of the machine and you opened it up and saw a black disc, to which was attached ten pictures of yourself. When you played the record, the pictures flapped around to make a continuous motion-photo, with your lips moving in accompaniment to your voice.

Marsh was showing Dreer how the thing worked when a few smart-looking boys walked into the big shipping room. They were racket men. They wore double-breasted suits and loud neckties, and they

had grease on their black hair and powder on their blue chins. One of them stepped forward and smiled like a rat filled with cheese.

He was short and heavy and he had a big yellow stone on the little finger of his right hand.

"How ya doin', Marsh?" he said.

"I'm doing fine," Marsh said.

The racket man looked at Dreer and Burns and then at the machines. "Are you ready to see things our way?" he asked.

"Don't be a fool," Marsh said. He acted as if he was bored with this little meeting. "Sorry, but I'm busy. You can talk with our new plant manager if you want to. He's in charge of our new distribution set-up. He may be interested. Mr. Dreer, meet Mr.—"

"Lucchi," the racket man said.

He had a black look on his face now. He shook hands with Dreer and watched Marsh walk into another room.

"Mr. Marsh is a funny type of man," Dreer said. "Very nervous. I got a feeling that this business is too complicated for him."

"Yeah?" Lucchi said. He glanced at his boys and they were all looking at Dreer and Burns as kids look at new arrivals in the neighborhood.

"What's it all about?" Dreer asked.

He took out a pack of cigarettes and flipped one up for Lucchi. The racket man took it and Dreer took one and they lit up. Dreer acted very friendly.

Lucchi sat down and Dreer pulled a chair over. Burns stood behind him. The racket men stood behind Lucchi.

"You know how these things work," Lucchi said. "The vending machine business is sort of complicated. Unless everyone cooperates, things get messed up. There has to be some sort of organization to control the industry. If we didn't do it, the city or state would."

"Sure," Dreer said. He took a long drag at his smoke and added, "I've been in this game a long time, Lucchi. That's why Marsh hired me. He knows that I have all the angles. He'll listen to me."

"That's fine," Lucchi said. "That's really fine." He leaned forward like an old chum. "Tell you what we'll do, Dreer," he said. "We'll come to terms right now. Talking in round figures, what do you know about Marsh's weekly take with these machines?"

"Five thousand dollars," Dreer said. He wasn't kidding.

"That gives us five hundred," Lucchi said. "And this business is growing steadily. When it's doubled, we get a thousand." He was talking to himself now, swimming in money. "We'll come around every week and take our ten per cent. In return for that, we'll see that you have no trouble. We'll bust up any competition that tries to snake in on your territory and we'll—well, you know how it works—we'll protect you."

DREER looked at the floor and puffed hard at his cigarette.

"Well?" Lucchi said.

Dreer grinned. "You're new to this racket, aren't you, Lucchi?" he asked.

"Whaddya talkin' about?" The short, heavy man looked mean.

"I used to work it myself, Lucchi," Dreer said. "I had a protective association for amusement machines, out on the Coast. But I did it the smooth way. Take my advice and learn the business before you go around making transactions. You'll only get yourself in a lot of trouble, the way you're doing things."

Lucchi was dumbfounded. All he could say was, "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah," Dreer said.

And even as he said it he knew that he had pulled a boner. This Lucchi couldn't

be oiled out of five hundred, or maybe a grand, each seven days. He was a tough customer and the only way to deal with him was the tough way. Either that—or payoff. And Dreer was thinking that now was no time to be tough.

A moment later he was knowing it. He was on the floor and there was a lot of pain around his mouth. Blood was running down his chin and he was staring up at Lucchi. Lucchi was caressing his right fist.

“So I should take your advice and learn the business,” Lucchi was saying. “That’s good. That’s the best one I’ve heard in a long time. Why that’s—”

He couldn’t get the next word out because Burns’ fist was pumping it back down his throat. Burns was standing in front of Lucchi and punching him in the mouth. And then Lucchi was sitting down.

The racket men were reaching in their pockets and Lucchi was spitting blood and curses.

“Not that way boys,” he was saying. “We don’t really want to hurt them, do we?” He was getting up and wiping the blood from his lips. Then he was saying, “I’ll give you a big break, Dreer. I’ll give you a few hours to think it over. We’ll be back. . . .”

Marsh and Dreer and Burns were sitting at the big desk in the inner office.

“Well?” Marsh said.

“We can’t do anything except wait for him,” Dreer murmured. “We can’t call the cops because this Lucchi is smart, and besides the cops will mess it up so that we can’t bring complete charges. The only thing to do is wait for them and figure out some way to get something on them we can prove.”

“I don’t like the way you’re handling this,” Marsh said.

“Just let me work it my way and I’ll pull you through,” Dreer said, and smiled. “I need that five thousand badly, and if I

do anything dumb, at least you’ll know that it’s not on purpose.”

He walked out of the office and Burns followed him. Marsh stayed there to look over some new orders.

In the shipping room, Dreer examined a few of the machines. He plugged one of the wires into a wall socket, took out a half-dollar, and took his picture and voice recording. It came out fine. He told Burns to go change two dollars, to bring back four half-dollars.

Burns asked him what he had in mind, and Dreer said that he just wanted to kill time until Lucchi and the boys came back.

When Burns returned with the four half-dollars, Dreer took his picture again. Then he grabbed hold of one of the machines, picked it up, and rested it horizontal on a shelf. He put a chair near the face-hood and then pulled over another chair. Finally he was arranging the machine and the chair and measuring distances, and making a big fuss over the chair and the machine.

“What’s it all about?” Burns wanted to know.

“Just sit in that chair,” Dreer muttered. “Sit in that chair and act natural. Just face this other chair and act as if I was sitting there and you were talking to me.”

Burns shrugged and sat down in the chair, faced the other chair and started to give out with double-talk. Dreer walked behind him and put the half-dollar in the slot of the machine. Burns’ head was near the hood and in thirty seconds the package came out. Dreer tested the record and it was a perfect job.

“Do you get the idea?” Dreer said.

“Sort of.” Burns grinned. Then he laughed. “Lucchi’s just about my size, ain’t he?” he said.

“Sort of,” Dreer said. He walked into the office to talk to Marsh.

About two and a half hours later,

Lucchi returned. There was a patch of adhesive on the side of his lip and he gave Burns a dirty look as he walked into the shipping room. He was alone this time.

“Well?” he said.

Dreer shrugged. “I guess you got us, Lucchi. We can’t call the cops in on this because we haven’t got anything on you.”

“Of course you haven’t,” Lucchi said. “I work smooth, see? And once you start monkeying with the cops, you find out that they are useless to you after you are dead. You get the point?”

“I get the point,” Dreer said. “That’s why I’ve decided to come to terms with you.”

He scratched his chin and Burns moved toward the machine.

“Good,” Lucchi murmured. “Now let’s talk like business men,”

“Sure,” Dreer said.

HE SAT down and motioned Lucchi to a chair.

“Nobody monkeys with the cops,” Lucchi said, “When we started with this association, a few fools called up and tried to bring the law in on this. But I pay protection too, Dreer, You tell me you were in the racket yourself. You know how it works, A handout here; a handout there. I got big police names on my payroll. That’s why it’s foolish to fight me.”

“Sure,” Dreer said, as Burns slipped a half-dollar in the slot.

“I been investigatin’ these machines,” Lucchi went on, “I see a lot of money in them. If Marsh is netting five grand a week now, he’s going to double it and triple it and maybe multiply it by four. There’s millions in this game, Dreer, and that’s why you need protection.”

“Sure,” Dreer said. “By the way, you weren’t kidding me about paying tribute to big shots in the police force, were you?”

Lucchi laughed.

“Of course not. Ever hear of Bart Endicott?”

“No,” Dreer said.

“I pay him plenty,” Lucchi muttered, without getting any amusement out of it.

“You’re smarter than I thought you were, Lucchi,” Dreer said. “You got the cops and politicians in on this and you’re set for big things. There doesn’t seem to be any way we can fight you. We’ll have to pay your ten per cent.”

“Now you’re talking the way I like to hear a sensible man talk,” Lucchi said. “I—”

He stopped and leaped up from the seat as he heard the click and saw a neatly wrapped package come out of the machine. Burns grabbed the package and Lucchi, eyes wide, lips wet, grabbed for his lapel.

Dreer threw a hard left and it caught Lucchi on the nose. The racket man fell back and Burns put a nelson on him while Dreer took the revolver away. Lucchi still wanted to fight, so Burns let him have a slow right that hit him on the point of the jaw and knocked him unconscious.

Marsh opened the door of the office and Dreer held up the package.

“You can call the cops now, Marsh,” he said. “And then you can make out a check for five grand. . . .”

A few days later Dreer was in his office, cleaning out the desk, when Burns walked in.

“What’s this?” Burns said.

Dreer grinned. “I think you’re out of a job.”

Burns shrugged. “Well anyway, you were nice enough to split that five grand with me. What are you gonna do now—invest the dough in something new?”

“No,” Dreer said. “I’m going back on the force.”

Burns’ eyes were blank. “Whaddya mean? What force are you talking about?”

“The police force,” Dreer said.

“You never told me you were a policeman.”

“I wasn’t a policeman,” Dreer said. “I was a detective. It’s been my bitter secret for a few years, Burns, but I’ll give you the lowdown now. I was a detective and I was doing okay until I tried to get something on a few big shot politicians who were disgracing the police force. They framed an inefficiency charge on me and threw me out. I never thought I could

get back at them, but the happy day has come.”

“Tell me about it,” Burns said.

Dreer shrugged. “There’s little to tell. The photo-voice machine gave us all we needed to put Lucchi in jail. But it did more, than that—I mean for me, personally. It brought out the fact that Bart Endicott was connected with Lucchi. You see, Burns, this Bart Endicott happens to be the low-life who framed me.”