

PAID

by
RAOUL DU PRIEST

THE rat-eyed Italian squirmed in his chair and looked sadly at the hook-nosed man behind the big desk. "What makes you so hard on a poor guy?" whined the dark-skinned Martini. "Can't you see that if they make this rap stick, I'll be behind bars for—for life? Those damned Baumes Laws are—Jakan, you've got to help me."

The shrewd black eyes of Julius Jakan grew hard. He reached across the desk and snatched up a ledger.

"I've got to help you, hey? Quicker than you've helped me, I'll bet. Here's your account. For five years you've owed me eleven hundred dollars and—"

"I—I know. I'll pay you that and more if you get me out of this jam. I ain't forgot what I owe you, Jakan. I ain't never had the money to pay you."

A bitter smile swept over the criminal lawyer's face. "You never had the money? What did you do with the ten thousand in bonds you lifted from the Gorley mansion? What'd you do with the diamonds you got out of the Baisley affair? What'd you do with the cold cash you got when you poked a gun in the face of Paymaster Billings? Oh, no! *You never had the money!*"

Martini gulped and thought fast. "Why all that went to . . ."

"Where every crook's money goes. For gin, jazz and Jennies!"

"No! It all went to paying lawyers. And none of 'em was any damned good. I did time for all those jobs, Jakan."

Jakan laughed raucously. "What a sucker you are, Martini! Those kind of lawyers you pay, but you forget about me and my bill. And now that you're broke and in a jam again, you come back to the old reliable Jakan." The lawyer paused and hunched over the desk. "This time you won't gyp me out of my fee. This time you'll pay me *in advance*, just as you did the others. And you'll clear up this five-year-old balance, too!"

Martini looked distressed. "But I'm broke, I told

you. I ain't got a dime or . . . Listen, Jakan. I promise you that as soon as you get me out I'll pull a good job and square up everything."

His voice oozed. He knew Jakan was the one shyster lawyer who could save him—or it was the bars for life!

Jakan's eyes riveted to the figures. He said thickly, "Once I took your promise to pay. I never make the same mistake twice. But I'll meet you half way. Pull that job first, bring the swag here for safekeeping and I'll get you out of this latest scrape."

Martini's eyes filled with tears. "I can't! I just got here by the skin of my teeth. The bulls are hot after me. If I show my mug too often, I'm sure to get nailed. Take my word just this once and . . ."

"No! Your word is no good. Five years ago Palagoni was here to drag you back to Italy and if it wasn't for my brain-work, you'd be rotting in an Italian prison right this minute. They wanted you extradited and brought to trial in Italy for that murder. I spent three hundred getting witnesses to prove you were American-born in the first place and that you'd never even been in Italy."

Martini winced. "I know," he squeezed out. "But . . ."

"Shut up! I'm telling you a lot you *don't* know," Jakan interrupted. "They swallowed the first half of my defense, but I certainly had to work hard to make them believe they were barking up the wrong tree. And I did prove you were *not* the Antonio Martini they wanted, didn't I?"

"Yeah. Sure! And that's why I need you now—because nobody can lick you when it comes to law."

Jakan was unimpressed with the flattery. "Never mind the soft soap," he said sharply. "All I'm interested in is that you owe me eleven hundred dollars and when you *did* have money, you went to half-witted lawyers who couldn't and didn't help you. And all the years I've been waiting for my money, I've had some dope that would have brought you around to see me damned quick! But I never use force to collect my bills. I knew that

some day you'd be in here begging me to help you once more: I knew that some day I'd have you just where I wanted you."

Martini stiffened. "You—you ain't got anything on me, Jakan. You're bluffing now."

"Bluffing?" roared Jakan. He flung himself out of the swivel chair and crossed the dismal office.

"Is that bluffing?" he shouted, waving some papers before Martini's worried eyes. "Is that bluffing?"

Martini needed one glance. He saw a letter in his own handwriting. Pinned to the top was an old envelope also addressed in his scrawled hand. The envelope was postmarked, "Florence, Italy." The letter was the usual product of an untrained hand and dull brain. It went to great length to implore a relative in America to lend him a hand to escape the Italian law. It asked the loan of passage money to America and, worst of all, it contained a frank confession of the murder: motive, method and all!

"Well?" rasped Jakan. "Is that bluffing? Did I have the goods on you? Doesn't it prove you are a native of Italy; wasn't entitled to the protection of United States, and most important, that you *did* commit the murder?"

Martini surrendered. "You win," he said sadly. "You win. But all this stuff wouldn't do you any good *now*. You yourself told me they can't try a man *twice for the same crime*."

"Who said they can't? You were tried once in America. I got you out. But they could re-try you in Italy."

Martini's face turned a sickly gray, his eyes danced with fright. "You won't use that letter, will you?" You wouldn't kick a guy when he's down?"

Jakan laughed hollowly. "Not at all! I'm going to help you beat this latest rap—on one condition. The minute I get you out, you'll get to work and raise my money."

"And—and this letter?" inquired Martini anxiously.

"I'll show you," said Jakan.

He dug into his vest pocket and took out a paper of matches. He lit one and touched it to the tell-tale letter.

Martini felt as if the weight of the entire world had been lifted from his shoulders. "You're a prince, Jakan. I won't forget this favor."

Jakan went back to his desk. He smiled. "I hope you won't—for your own sake. Maybe that filing cabinet holds other things that could do you a lot of

damage. But I want to see just how good your word is, and I want your new business, and that eleven hundred dollars."

"So help me God, I'll pay you as soon as I'm able to pull this job I have in mind," said Martini solemnly. And even as he spoke he looked desperately at the filing cabinet. He could cheat Jakan again—providing he looked through that "M" folder and removed whatever aces the lawyer held! Martini already had it figured out.

"Now then," said Jakan curtly. "What's the latest rap?"

"Forgery."

"Did you do it?"

"Y-yeah. It looked safe and easy. You see, I find this guy in the gutter last Thursday morning about half past two. He's cock-eyed drunk. I rolled him for his cash and ran across his check book. I took out a blank from the back of the book and . . ."

"How'd you get his signature?"

"Easy! Next morning I went up to the same joint where I took him. He didn't know me from Adam. I told him I had a letter—an important one and I'll have to have a receipt for it."

Jakan wagged his hand sympathetically. "That wasn't nerve, Martini; that was insanity. But go on. What was in the envelope?"

"Nothing. What difference does that make?"

"None—*now*."

"Well, he was still drunk and so he signs my paper. Then I take a piece of carbon paper and trace his name on the check. Going over it with ink was easy. The check was for five hundred. How'd I know he'd be in the same bank to cash another one just five minutes after I left? At Headquarters he looked over the pictures in the Rogues' Gallery. Why, I never thought he'd remember my mug."

Jakan's keen mind grasped the significance of those last five words. "He *couldn't* remember it. He *guessed*. That's what I'll claim and that's what I'll *prove*."

Jakan's eyes closed. They always did when he was deep in serious thought. This time they remained closed longer than usual. That was because Jakan was mapping a course with *two* distinct objectives. First, he wanted to establish his client's innocence; second, he wanted more than just Martini's word that both old and new accounts would be paid.

Suddenly Jakan's eyes popped open. He had the thing all figured out. "And you forged this

signature, hey?" He laughed hilariously. "Why, that's impossible!"

Martini looked interested. "Did you say *impossible*?"

"You heard me! I'll prove that you came from a family on Mulberry Street; that you never went to school a day in your life. I'll prove that you can't read nor write a single word and that you're so dumb you wouldn't know the difference between a bottle of ketchup and a bottle of red ink. Forgery! Why, you poor unfortunate man!"

Martini knew a good joke when he heard it. This was a good one. "I'm supposed to be a regular goof, is that it?"

"Certainly! And if they dig into your past record I'll prove that since you've been out of jail there's been an accident to your head. Why, between us we'll prove that you don't know you're alive. But go on. What happened next?"

"Well, Jimmy the Coke tips me off that the bulls are looking for me."

"Humph!" grunted Jakan. "Well, I guess we might as well go to work. Tell you what to do. Take a taxi to Headquarters. Bust right in on Inspector Kingsley and tell him you're innocent."

Martini gasped. "Gee! He'll slap me into the Tombs!"

"And I'll spring you just as quick with a *habeas corpus* and a nice fresh bail bond. All you've got to do is watch out for a trap and remember that you're more than half goofy and can't read or write."

For a moment Martini's brain clicked fast. Involuntarily he looked at the filing cabinet, then back to the lawyer. "I—I— Well, I won't go downtown right away, Jakan. I've got some business to do tonight. But first thing in the morning, I'll see Kingsley."

"Suit yourself," drawled Jakan. He looked happy for he seemed to sense that Martini was following the marked trail already. "Phone me from the Tombs."

Martini hoisted himself from his chair. He thrust out a hand. "Thanks, Jakan. You sure took a load off my shoulders."

"Did I? Don't forget that I'm doing this *for myself*. If you went up the river for life, I'd never get my eleven hundred. I'm fishing you out of the kettle just to save my own money—and so help me, I'll get it."

"Sure. The minute I get cash. . . ."

"Some debts can be paid *without cash* from the

pocket of the man who owes." There was a twinkle in Jakan's eyes. "That's all. Sneak."

Tony Martini was beside himself with joy. In half an hour he was safe in a tenement house, climbed three flights and rapped softly on a door as he called, "It's me, Faranli. Open up."

A half-frightened gorilla admitted him to a dingy room. "Smokes! I thought the bulls had you for sure."

"Yeah? Well, believe it or not, I'm going to Headquarters in the morning. Jakan's going to handle my case. That means I'm as good as free now."

Faranli whistled. "Jakan? After you gypping him out of that other dough?"

"Sure. And what's more, I'll gyp him again." Martini laughed. "He seems to like it!"

"Easy, Tony! Maybe he's got a card up his sleeve!"

"I know he has! But I'm going to get his cards tonight. You can come along and help me. There's something in that filing cabinet that can do me a lot of damage. I'll get it and Jakan won't know it's gone until I'm acquitted. Then, when he gets me out and slaps the bill on me, I'll laugh in his face and say . . . 'In your hat, Jakan.' If he gets nasty, I'll sock him!"

Faranli was silent. "It's bad to monkey around with Jakan. He's got too much brains. He'll trip you sure as you're born."

Martini swelled with conceit. "You just sit tight and watch me pull this!"

It was midnight when Faranli and Martini went to work. Like two ghosts they went to the rear of the Stanley Building, jimmed a lock and groped up to the third floor. The door of Jakan's office gave them little trouble and soon their eager, painstaking eyes methodically went over disordered heaps of papers, then turned to the filing cabinet.

"Got it!" whispered Martini. His heart was full of gratitude. "Look! Fingerprints and a whole bunch of dope I never thought he knew."

Faranli had no time to speak. Martini too heard that noise somewhere below. It sounded like the scrape of a coal shovel. "The engineer," thought Martini. "But he won't come up out of the basement at this hour."

They tip-toed into the dark hall. It was silent as the grave. Scarcely daring to breathe, they went down the stairs. They were almost at the exit when it happened. A door at Martini's elbow flew open

and the yellow glow of cellar lights threw a rectangle on the wall. Faranli would lose his head. A rod spat twice. The silencer killed the noise. The engineer's expression changed from bewilderment to deathly agony. Without a murmur, he tumbled down the stairs behind him and Martini and his helper dashed for the rear door.

When they reached Faranli's room, Martini chuckled. "Perfect," he said warmly.

"I—I ain't so sure about that. If Jakan looks in the file he'll . . ."

"But he won't! Maybe *after* I tell him to go to hell, and then what can he do? He won't even suspect there's been visitors in his office."

"But that engineer . . ."

"Just another one of those things. Now forget it and let's hit the hay."

Martini was first out of bed in the morning. "Well, I guess I'll follow orders and go down to Headquarters. See you about noon, Faranli. Jakan'll have me out by then."

Within half an hour, Martini faced grim Inspector Kingsley. The Inspector swallowed his surprise. "Since when did you take up penmanship?" he blurted.

Martini looked insulted. "Penmanship? Who? Me?"

"And you've also taken on a side line—*acting*. You can't master too many trades, Martini. Second-story man, stick-up artist, forger, actor . . ."

"What did you want to see me about, Inspector?"

"About a Mr. James J. Vandam!"

"Vandam? Never heard the name before."

"Well *he* heard and *saw* you. He picked your picture out of the Rogues' Gallery and you might as well come clean."

"And what's the rap?"

"Two of them. You helped yourself to his wallet and the next day you forged his name to a check you obtained at the same time."

Martini acted the goof. "You mean I forged a check? Have a heart, Inspector. You know damned well that one reason why I'm always in Dutch is because I ain't fit to earn an honest living. Why—why everybody knows. . . . Damn you, just because I'm ignorant you always ride me. Forged a check, huh? And me a poor guy that never even had a chance to learn to read or write."

"You don't know how to—"

"Read or write!" Martini couldn't help but look

smart. "Now let's see you make this fake rap stick!"

The Inspector frowned. His nose for crime smelled Julius Jakan. He touched a button and an officer came in quickly. "Lock this bird up," ordered Kingsley. "To save him the trouble, *you* call up that shyster lawyer Jakan and tell him to spring his *habeas corpus*. You can expect Martini to walk out in less than an hour—if you know Jakan."

Behind the bars, Tony Martini laughed, yawned, and made himself comfortable. Soon a lusty, protesting voice rang through the corridor and made Martini laugh again.

"An outrage! A damned outrage!" Jakan was shrilling.

In an hour Martini was out on bail. He was delighted—and Jakan was highly amused.

"Now don't spoil everything by getting into another mess," warned Jakan. "Stay within the jurisdiction of the Court and keep your nose clean. I'm going to push things and we ought to get a trial in a week or ten days."

Ten days later the courtroom was jammed. Martini was enjoying the show. A dozen times Martini looked at his attorney.

Jakan was completely engrossed in getting an acquittal. "Why, gentlemen of the jury," he bellowed, "think of it! Just think of it. Mr. Vandam admits he was thoroughly intoxicated the previous night; admits he awoke just five minutes before the arrival of this mysterious letter. Perhaps some of you gentlemen—previous to the enactment of a certain amendment, of course—have suffered the after-effects of a big night? Can any of you honestly say that early the following morning your head was so clear that you could meet a perfect stranger and within a few hours pick that stranger's photo out of thousands of other criminals? Why it's preposterous!"

Jakan paused. Then he lapsed into a eulogy of his client and topped a sterling argument with tearful words. The accused was guilty of one thing—ignorance.

"Look at him, gentlemen! The poor man doesn't know his fate is in your capable hands. Look at his honest face; look at those toil-worn hands. Just look at him and say whether a man who can *neither read nor write* can forge a check!"

Twelve men deliberated less than ten minutes. They filed into court again.

Through the room hushed with expectancy rang two words—"Not Guilty!"

Martini wrung Jakan's hand. "Gee, that was swell! Come on, let's get out of here before I bust out laughing."

Jakan's face was grim. "And now," he drawled when they were on the street again, "I have a bill all made out for you."

"Have you! Eight on the dot, huh? Well, this is one case Italy's not interested in; one case where you can't try me a second time. And I've decided that just because you got tough with me, I won't pay you a dime. Not a lousy dime!"

Jakan laughed hollowly. "I knew you wouldn't. I had *proof* the morning after I accepted your promise."

"How the—"

"You poor fool, I told you about stuff in the filing cabinet. It *was* there. I told you about it because I wanted to see if you'd break in and steal it. You did, and I knew you meant to cheat me again."

"Right! I ain't ever going to pay you."

"Yes, you are! This is one debt that will be paid without money—*out of your pocket*. You'll pay this debt with the thing I saved five years ago—your miserable life. Here. Take the bill. It's marked paid *already*."

"Why—"

"Shut up! As soon as I knew your game I cabled to Italy. I had a reply saying Inspector Quinado of the Italian Police was in New York on business. Before night he was in touch with me."

"Bluffing this time for sure, ain't you?" Martini was not so sure.

A heavy hand on his shoulder cut Martini's smirk. His face turned white. He whirled to gaze

into the snapping eyes of the famous Italian detective and Inspector Kingsley. Martini's knees began to knock with terror.

"You—you can't touch me," he said to the cold Italian. "I'm an American citizen," screamed Martini.

"No, Signor, you are not! You are a native of Florence."

"Y-yes. I—I am. But I have citizen papers. I have witnesses to prove—"

"*Nothing*, Signor. Under oath you have just testified that you can neither read nor write. If you have citizen papers they were secured through fraud and so automatically became worthless, for surely you know that to enter this country legally, you *must* be able to read and write, and if you entered illegally, then no power on earth can make you a citizen. In the ten days you awaited trial, the necessary papers were drawn. I think we can start for your native land—and prison for life—NOW."

Martini's blood turned to ice. "Jakan! For God's sake—" But Jakan laughed. "No one cheats me twice! You have a receipted bill. I am amply paid—or will be when I reach Florence and earn the reward Quinado informs me is still offered for your arrest and conviction. I will sail on the same ship with you. In Florence I am not an attorney whom the law does not permit to testify against a former client and what I can't tell them about that murder, doesn't have to be told. Bon Voyage, Mr. Martini. I saved you from spending the rest of your natural life in an American prison. But need I remind you that in Italy they have no moving pictures for convicts on Sunday?"

THE END