

BLUE HEAT



Jimmy's bullets resounded in Jake's dive

Detective Faring Couldn't Take a Joke—But He Was No Slouch When It Came To Action!

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DETEKTIVE Jimmy Faring eased his spine against the corner of the Blue Front Drug Store. He looked furtively down the street. Then, he shied a glance over his shoulder through the drug store window and down the aisle of soda tables.

Jimmy Faring wasn't looking for crooks. This time, he had his eye out for cops. He was trying to avoid them. Having satisfied himself that none of his fellow members of the force were around, he slipped a worn leather case from inside his coat. For the third time in the past hour, he scrutinized a dirty scrap of paper inside the case:

"This is a straight tip, Bottle. Keep your eye on the First National Bank this afternoon between two and three."

Now, if it hadn't been for that name, "Bottle," Jimmy Farring would have talked the matter over with some of the older dicks. But whenever any of the dicks at headquarters wanted to kid Jimmy, they called him Bottle. That was because of his face.

Not that it wasn't a good face. It was too darn good for a dick. The old-timers said that Jimmy looked like a bottle-fed baby. They were always giving him the razz about his face and because he was green. And Jimmy's disposition didn't take jokes.

Fat old Sergeant Garigan would tell people that the only reason the chief had taken Jimmy out of the sticks was because he was so darn handsome he was putting all the icemen out of business. Then Garigan would wink, slap his elephantine thigh and go off in rolling cascades of merriment.

It was because of Garigan's jokes that Jimmy was on the fence about this bank tip-off. If it wasn't a bum steer, why hadn't it been sent to somebody higher up the ladder than Jimmy? If it wasn't one of Garigan's jokes, why had he been addressed as "Bottle"? Now, if it was straight, he'd feel like hell if he didn't take it straight.

Each time he read the note, he took a step towards the chief's office. But then he would take another step—backwards. Lord! He'd rather face a squad of ta-ta guns than be the butt of another joke!

So it was that at two o'clock, Jimmy's spine was holding up the corner of the Blue Front Drug Store. From this position, he could get a diagonal squint at the entrance of the First National.

Two-thirty and a big Cadillac pulled up in front of the First National. Jimmy got on his toes. He got a grip on the butt of his automatic.

A tall, graceful woman gave some orders to the chauffeur and got out.

Jimmy grumbled an oath and relaxed. The woman ankled towards Millings Department Store.

Ten minutes later, and a big Chrysler slid in behind the Cadillac. This time, Jimmy dived from

the curb. The two men who got out of the Chrysler had familiar faces—and their right hands were crammed into bulging coat pockets. One of the men, he knew, was Rocco, the Barber. The other was a hard-looking egg with a sandpaper chin.

At the other side of the street, Jimmy forgot about being laughed at. He put a whistle to his lips and blew hard. Pedestrians turned around and saw Jimmy spinning through the revolving door as if he were on a merry-go-round. When they saw his black automatic in his fist, some took it on the run. Others froze in their shoes with terror.

Just inside the door, Jimmy encountered "Sandpaper." If ever a crook looked surprised, it was Sandpaper, when his buckle collided with the nose of Jimmy's gun. Then, a paying-teller wised up to the scene and lay down on the alarm bell.

In a second, a brand of luke-warm hell broke loose. Guns bristled from behind the marble bank-counters. Bells jangled; sirens screamed. And with all the guns, not one had the slightest idea which way to point.

After Jimmy had herded the submissive Sandpaper over to where Rocco was standing, Rocco exploded by all the saints on the calendar.

About that time, a squad of blues came along to prevent a panic—and to get in a laugh at Jimmy. For try as he might, Jimmy couldn't find a sign of a gun on Rocco. And it was a cinch Rocco wouldn't try to crack a bank without a rod.

It turned that Rocco had a small and apparently honest bank account at the First National. A teller confirmed that. Rocco had confirmed that. Rocco had come in to cash a perfectly honest check, and Sandpaper was a friend who was passing the day with Rocco.

Jimmy felt his face undergo lightning color changes; for who should make a bulky appearance in the doorway but Sergeant Garigan himself. Garigan was off duty and in an especially jovial mood.

"Hi-yah, Bottle, ol' baby!" Garigan bellowed. "Been sunburnin' yer tonsils lookin' at the tall buildings."

Then Rocco bulled in. "You know me, Meester Sarg? Dees dick, heez craze. Heez come in while I casha da check, and he steeck heez gun ina my rib. What you say—eh?"

Garigan hummed softly. "Well, Rocco, yer rep wouldn't get you canonized, but you've been walkin' straight lately. Le's have a look." His fat, skillful fingers frisked the little barber and came away empty. He rolled his eyes at Jimmy. "Did muzzer's 'ittle boy have big bad dream?"

That was the last oat for Jimmy. His right doubled short and fast. His fist connected with Garigan's nose and came away red.

Garigan stiffened under the shock. His face went purple. Blood pumped from his nose and trickled down the corners of his mouth. But he kept his head. He spun on his heel, and the next thing Jimmy knew, was a sinking feeling of shame in his stomach.

Then Jimmy went on the carpet, and his badge went home.

Jimmy hung around the outer office while Garigan went into the chief's office for his share of bitter medicine. Garigan wasn't such a bad sort, in spite of his jokes. Maybe he'd put in a good word for Jimmy.

But if Garigan had anything to say, he didn't get a chance to say it. About the time he marched in, the chief's phone rang. He buried his beak in the transmitter and when it came out again, his whole face had gone sour. He sprang to his feet and yanked open the door.

"Where's that fool, Jim Farring?"

Jimmy turned and saluted in spite of himself.

"Get in here!" the chief kicked towards the door.

Jimmy wandered in.

"Why in hell didn't you turn in that tip-off about the First National Bank?" He wheeled to Garigan. "Why didn't God give you a brain? Do you know what's happened? First National's been held and stripped! Two fellows faking as street cleaners mozzied up to the bank, pulled machine-guns out of their dump-carts, and blew into the bank. They gutted the place, and ran out. Climbed into a black Cadillac with a colored chauffeur and lammed."

"Then it wasn't a joke—the tip-off, I mean?"

The chief withered Jimmy. "Joke! Joke? Hell! If you were ridin' in Patrolman Casey's place, ridin' to the hospital with your guts burned out, you wouldn't ask such fool questions!"

Both Jimmy and Garigan had mouths open like subways for a minute. Then the chief

snapped. "Get over there, Garigan, and don't forget your brains this time. You might at least lock the stable after the horse is gone."

Garigan saluted. Jimmy's face brightened hopefully. Maybe he'd get his chance.

But the chief knocked hope out of his head. "You, Farring, you can trot along—clear to hell!"

Jimmy hadn't any idea how near to hell he was trotting when he started out of the chief's office.

First of all, Jimmy wasn't all clear as to what part Rocco the Barber had played in robbing the First National. Certainly, there wasn't a shred of evidence against the man. Still, coincidence didn't play much of a part in crime.

Was it a coincidence that Rocco had gone into the bank just before the robbery and the shooting of Patrolman Casey? Jimmy thought not. He had heard the story about the boy and the wolf—

He took a quick taxi to Rocco's shop.

Rocco wasn't in, said the hair-oiled assistant.

"No?" said Jimmy with a rising inflection. He wandered towards the back room.

Then the hair-oiled assistant made a big mistake. He tried to get in Jimmy's way. The fist that had made raw beef of Garigan's nose landed on the barber's chin. The greasy Italian hit the back wall and slid down on his knees.

Jimmy dived towards the door. But the Italian hadn't thought of quitting. His legs snapped like coiled springs. His flying shoulders caught Jimmy below the belt.

Jimmy gulped for air that wasn't there. He flopped to the floor. The Italian kicked out and landed on Jimmy's chest. His left hand clawed at Jimmy's throat; his right brandished a razor.

Jimmy doubled his knees and heaved the barber over. He ducked his head, but the razor, like a streak of lightning, gashed Jimmy from ear to chin.

Jimmy staggered to his feet. He lurched towards the Italian, his arms going twin windmills. The barber ducked a second too late. One of Farring's fists pounded in behind the barber's ear. The man crumpled like paper. He was on the floor. He stayed there.

Jimmy spat hot, flat-tasting blood. He wavered around like a hot-dog looking for a bun.

"Nize job for da dumb dee."

It was Rocco—sleek, olive-faced Rocco, with a cigarette that dangled and a black automatic that had no intention of dangling. At his side, was the tall, slender woman that Jimmy had watched getting out of the Cadillac that afternoon.

Jimmy had a lot to say to Rocco, but just then, he didn't have the wind. Rocco did the talking.

"Lorenza, you lak to drive my frien' anda me to da dock? You getta da car. I talk with a Meester Bottle Farring."

Without a word, the woman obeyed. Rocco stepped into the shop and glued his gun into Jimmy's belly. "Maybe you not so dumb what you don't figure what happen to you now—eh?"

Jimmy had found his breath. "I'm not so dumb that I don't see just how you pulled that bank business. Real cute, for a wop. I used to know a story about a kid that watched a flock of sheep. He was supposed to yell whenever a wolf would come around huntin' for roast lamb and mint sauce.

"The kid thought it would be a good joke to fool the men by yelling 'wolf' when there wasn't any wolf. He tried it several times and it worked. Then when the wolf really came, nobody paid any attention to his yellin'.

"That's how you worked this. You and your friends send me a tip-off and put on a show. You sure know how to act suspicious—you and Sandpaper-chin."

Rocco chuckled. "Gooda joke. When you poleese geta steamed up about nothing, my boys, like what you call da white-wings, sweepa da street. I go, you go, and da crowd go. Tip-off false alarm. But everything clear for the real thing—clear as shaved head—eh?" His eyes laughed at Jimmy's bleeding cheek. "My barber geeve you da shave, too."

"Well, what next, Rocco?" Jimmy asked.

Rocco prodded with his gun. "Lorenza, she have da car ready. We go places."

And Jimmy was pushed through the back room into the alley.

Lorenza was at the wheel of the blue Chrysler when they reached the alley. Sandpaper was also there. He acted as footman by helping Jimmy into the car—with a kick.

Staked up between the guns of Rocco and Sandpaper, Jimmy jounced along in the back seat.

The woman at the wheel seemed to know her stuff. She steered through traffic lanes with the accelerator way down.

Though his brain was still in a good bit of muddle, Jimmy sensed that they were traveling east, probably with the waterfront as their goal. Sandpaper had two heavy leather bags which he fondled with motherly tenderness. That would be the swag, Jimmy thought.

The car jounced over tracks and rolled on to a rattling board floor. The door of a large warehouse opened and Lorenza drove straight in.

So that was Rocco's business—running a warehouse. Inside were barrels, and more barrels. The pungent odor of denatured alcohol filled the air. Jimmy was hurried out and placed in the custody of two tough-looking men with murder-for-a-nickel eyes. Then Rocco talked.

"Lorenza, she eez safe. She will go back wit' da car. We all stay here. Gilly"—indicating Sandpaper—"will geta da boat. In da dark we cross da river. Thees dick, go in da dark for da long time—see? He know da whole treeck."

When Gilly and the woman had left, Jimmy began taking mental note of his surroundings. It was a kill-trap for sure. The alcohol warehouse was at the end of a pier, for out of the windows, he could see only water. He was forced to sit on one end of a pine box shared by one of Rocco's hoodlums.

The fragrant odor of tobacco reached Jimmy's nose—and Rocco's nose. The Italian spun around and spat out at one of the men:

"What da fool! You see da sign 'no smoking'?" He approached the man with clenched fists. "You want da whole place to blow?"

The gunman grumbled, opened a window and tossed out his cigar.

"Whata da fool!" Rocco went on. "I bet da works, you don't get rid of those white-wings' clothes—eh?"

The other man spoke up in a scratching voice.

"What cha 'spect us to do—send 'em to the laundry? They're still over there in that corner. You can't hang out wash like that in public."

Rocco cursed. "What da water for? Whata happen eff poleeze finda da clothes in my warehouse? I am—pft!" He gestured with every muscle in his body. "I put them in da water, where

they tell nothing—like Meester Bottle Farring won't tell nothing." He leered at Jimmy, and disappeared behind some barrels.

So that was it? Jimmy had a one-way boat ticket. He listened to hear Rocco go out the door. The man at the other end of the room listened too; for when Rocco went out, he dug out another cigar.

"Better lay off the weed, Jake," the other man warned. "Rocco's been white for a wop."

"Hell, he's got the jumps. This stuff is all barreled up," replied Jake. He gesticulated towards the barrels with a string of smoke. "Rocco expects me to do his killin' and then kicks in with a lousy tenth of the swag. He gets plenty that we ain't gettin', don't worry."

Jimmy noticed that there had been considerable judgment behind Rocco's order of no smoking. Some of the barrels showed signs of leaking, and the old warehouse would go like a matchbox if somebody gave it a start. And why not—?

He stood up.

The man at the other end of the box stiffened. "Where to, Dick?"

"Stretching my legs." Jimmy started to yawn. The dried blood on his face cracked and checked the yawn.

"Never mind that," said the man called Jake. "You'll get plenty of stretchin' when you get in the water." He laughed harshly. "Sit down, mug."

"Don't think so," said Jimmy. "Think I'm sort of a bird? Swell chance I got of gettin' out of here."

"Swell," Jake conceded. He got out his gun. "But I said sit down. You like stoppin' lead?"

Jimmy sauntered towards Jake. "I'm not particular. Not as particular as you'd be about shootin' out here. I understand there's such a thing as a watchman on these piers."

"Don't build hope on that, wise dee," said Scratchy-voice. "Rocco's paid 'em all off long ago."

"That so?" Jimmy was steeling himself for a spring—a spring into eternity. For there wasn't much more to hope for more than that. One against three armed men, and one of the three was an avowed killer. But then it was a chance to take his lead fighting. Still further, it was a chance of

watching Rocco's mob frying in a furnace of alcohol. He sidled a little more towards Jake.

"Hey, stay put, you!" Jake's gun bobbed up.

"Sure!"

Jimmy yelled as he sprang. As his hand crushed over Jake's wrist, hot hungry lead ate along his thigh. At the same time, his right knee connected with Jake's middle. There was a grunt. Jimmy felt the gun pull free. Jake's cigar took a spin across the floor.

Another shot furrowed across Jimmy's shoulder. He went down flat, rolling, rolling—But he had Jake's gun.

The other man took two quick shots that burned splinters out of the floor.

Jimmy squirmed behind a pile of barrels just as a third bullet missed him and dug deep into his protecting barrel.

There was a sudden splatter of alcohol. A yell from Jake.

"She's firin' up. Put 'er out!" He forgot Jimmy and made a dive for some rags to smother the flame.

But Jimmy hadn't forgotten Jake. His bullet turned Jake's dive into a rabbit flop. But Scratchy-voice had two guns going now. Jimmy's sheltering barrel was pierced in four places, and his clothing was soaked with inflammable stuff.

Then Rocco burst into the room with a "whata da hell?" on his lips and a thick black gun in his hand. He shied behind a barrel and started shooting. Jimmy's gun-hand went hot with pain, but his gun dropped into his left hand. On his hands and knees, he crawled along the row of barrels.

One end of the room was a solid wall of blue heat. The fumes from the alcohol were choking, and the crackle of wood told Jimmy that the flooring would soon give way. Another danger crowded into his mind. In that heat some of those barrels were bound to explode—

But he didn't have a chance to think of that. From behind, a bullet creased the barrel at the side of his head. He took a quick shot over his shoulder. He saw the man pitch forward into a furnace of blue heat.

That left Rocco. Somewhere on the other side of Jimmy's row of barrels was Rocco. Jimmy tried to get to his feet, but the pain in his thigh pushed a red-blotched curtain before his eyes. He

pushed it back from his mind. He wormed his way along the barrels. He came head-on with Rocco.

Fortunately, Rocco was as surprised as Jimmy. It delayed his shots. And when his bullets did come, they were wild, untamed things that ate into barrels and sprayed Jimmy with alcohol.

Jimmy got in one shot at the Italian that brought forth a yelp. Then, he tried again. Numbly, he had a feeling that his gun wasn't shooting—that it was empty. And Rocco ought to have at least four—five more—Jimmy tried to count.

Suddenly, Rocco yelled something in Italian. He leaped back from his protecting barrel, a blue arm of flame clawing at him. It caught around his legs and flamed up his trousers.

Jimmy clubbed his gun and leaped. The gun crashed into something, but as it did so, sudden heat grabbed Jimmy. Something went off like a cannon in his ears. He seemed to sink, to grab at something, and hold tight—

The next time Jimmy Farring got a chance to remember things, he had a feeling of looking out from a veritable cavern of bandages. He saw three faces—one with pop-eyes behind glasses, another lean face that belonged to the chief, and a round moon face that belonged to Garigan. For a time, Jimmy just looked. Then he asked, "What happened to Rocco?"

The chief said, "He blew out the side of the building with you when the explosion came. You got your man all right. He landed about ten feet

from the police launch. Your hand was welded on that Italian's wrist."

"Is he—still kicking?" Jimmy tried to smile but bandages wouldn't let him.

"Oh he might pull through," said Garigan. "But if he does, we'll pull him into the pen for a long time."

"Jake was the fellow that killed Casey," murmured Jimmy.

"Yeah"—from the chief, "we dragged what was left of him from the lake."

The chief fumbled in his coat pocket and pulled out something that shined enough to blind Jimmy. "Care anything about this old badge of yours, Farring? You'll be out looking for a job in a few months and we'd kind of like to have you around."

Jimmy gurgled his thanks.

"Better make it longer than a few months," chuckled Garigan. "It will take a while for that face of his to get back to normal."

The pop-eyed doctor looked concerned. "I'm afraid I can't promise normality to the face," he said. "There may be a bad scar, and some marks from the burns."

"Y-you mean my face is ruined?" Jimmy gasped.

"It's pretty bad. I'm sorry—"

Jimmy burst out, "Sorry! Hell! Best news I've heard. If I'm a dick, I want a pan like one—not no darned movie actor!"