

Like most practical jokers, Jack Kane didn't appreciate a joke played on him—especially when it connected him with a killing.

THE BIG SQUAWK

by THOMAS THURSDAY



JACK KANE, of the *Herald*, got the first reporter's break. He was the second to see the fast-stiffening body of Dan Hammerton, big shot gambler and bolita king, complete with private harem. The first to see the corpse was Dick Tate, ace bellhop and ice-water carrier. Dick had brought up the last mail to Hammerton's room but his knock got no answer. He entered the room with his pass key. Hammerton was on the bedroom floor, of the three-room hotel suite, and he wasn't playing marbles by himself. Fully dressed, hands outstretched almost straight from his body, Hammerton was cured of his insomnia for all time.

Beside the body was a .32 Colt. The bellhop rushed to the elevator and descended to the lobby. There he met Kane, and the two went back to the Hammerton suite.

"Look," said Kane, "how about keeping your big mush shut for awhile? Here's where I scoop the step-ins off Pete Rundell."

Rundell covered Headquarters for the *News*. He was a quiet, efficient reporter—not the phony type you see in the movies, TV, or hear on the radio. He was a six-footer, but had no protruding jaw. Not that his jaw denoted effeminacy; those who got the wrong idea about his gentility, and got out of line, soon found themselves against a Dempsey right and a Marciano left.

Jack Kane was the opposite of Rundell, especially in character. Even among his fellow reporters he was as popular as arsenic on caviar. His idea of a practical joke had once included phoning Rundell, disguising his voice, and telling

him that the mayor had just committed suicide. This would have been pleasant news for most of the citizens, as His Honor was as popular as icebergs along Miami Beach during the tourist season.

Kane, back in the suite, stepped around the body of Hammerton as if it was about to explode. He had sense enough not to touch it or anything in the vicinity. If he had, and Capt. Chester Eldredge, head of the Homicide Bureau, learned about it, Kane would have been tossed through a window.

Evidently Hammerton had been shot through the heart. If the motive was robbery, somebody overlooked the three-carat diamond ring still on his middle finger. Thick, coagulated blood smeared his white shirt and part of the heavy, blue-green carpet.

"Looks like suicide," said the bellhop.

"Nuts," said Kane. "This bum was knocked off. How long has he been stopping at the Lowndes Hotel?"

"About all winter. Went to the Hialeah and Tropical tracks every day. A swell ginzo, if you ask me; his idea of a tip was another guest's idea of a week's rent."

"Did he have a lot of dames come up to his suite?"

"Sure; he had a keen eye for a doll, and he had plenty," said Dick.

"Do you recall the last dame who paid him a visit?"

"Yeah; about 9 last night. Boy, she had more curves than a Coney Island scenic railway. You take Marilyn Monroe, and I'll settle for her."

"Can you describe her?"

"*You* should know."

"What do you mean, *I* should know?"

"I mean," grinned Dick Tate, "that she is the same baby I been seeing you around with for the last two months."

Dick must have meant Mabel McCoy, and Jack Kane knew it—and also her. She was one of the telephone operators at the *Herald*. The fact that Dick knew about this affair—which Kane imagined was positively clandestine—made him wonder how many others knew about it. But not his wife, he hoped. And then another angle supplanted his first worry, viz.—she must have been lying to him when she said she was going to her mother for the night! Why, the two-timing little bum!

Kane forgot to remind himself that he in turn, had told Mabel McCoy that he was going to go home and catch up with some reading. Instead, he went to the *Toy Coy Club*—a strip joint—and got home four sheets in the wind, the breeze being alcoholic.

KANE'S ATTENTION was attracted to the large front window. In the center was a big cage, and in it an aristocratic-looking parrot. "Does that thing say anything?" he asked the bellhop.

"I'll say he can; you should listen to the little rascal some time."

An idea popped into Kane's head. It came from seeing a recent movie, which proves the idea could not have been too hot or original. In the Hollywood hashish, a parrot had squawked the name of the killer, and thus solved the case. If this gag worked in real life, every police department, including the FBI and Scotland Yard, would have a dozen parrots on the staff.

"Listen, Dick," said Kane, "would you be interested in an easy buck? All you have to do is keep your mug shut and go blind."

"For a buck, I ain't even been in the hotel for weeks. What's the lowdown?"

"I want you to sneak this bird down in the hotel cellar, and hide it near the boilers. I'll drop down later and sneak it out the garbage entrance. When the dumb wonders from police headquarters come around, and you can bet they will, you know nothing from zero. Right?"

"Right." He unhooked the cage from the stand.

"*What's hot for today?*" squawked the bird.

"What did he say?" asked Kane.

"You mean you didn't get it?" demanded Dick. "Hell, he speaks as good as we do!"

"*Play 'em across the board!*" went on the parrot.

"Looks like a flock of racetrack guys hung around here," figured Kane. "O.K., take him down to the cellar, and don't forget you are deaf, dumb and blind."

"Yeah," grinned Dick, "make like I'm a reporter for the *News*; hey?"

"Look, buster," snorted Kane, "don't confuse the *News* with the *Herald*. On the *Herald*, we all have to know how to read, and spell a little."

Kane dialed Miami P.D. "Gimme Homicide," he told the City of Miami operator.

"Homicide, Eldredge speaking," said a cultivated voice, belonging to Det. Chester Eldredge.

"Jack Kane. Would you be interested in a dead gambler in a hotel room?"

"If it's a police reporter, named Kane," said the captain, "I'd be delighted."

"He looks like a dumb cop," said Kane, "only his feet ain't quite big enough. I'm calling from Suite B, Hotel Lowndes. The late departed is resting quietly less than a foot from where I am."

"If you dare touch anything, you mullethead, I'll toss you headfirst into the can. How come you got there first?"

"Intuition," laughed Kane. "Something all cops need, but don't have."

WHILE KANE waited for Captain Eldredge to reach the scene, he phoned Rundell. "How's everything, Rip Van Winkle? And I'm sorry I woke you up."

"What's the purpose of the call, Kane?" asked Rundell.

"Oh, not much; just thought you and your blatter might be interested in a brand new, fresh-off-the-gun murder. For the full and complete details, you can read all about it in the *Herald*."

"Thanks," said Rundell. "May I ask where you are phoning from?"

"Hotel Lowndes, Suite B. As to the scene, the deceased is staring at me out of his right eye. He's kind of a nosy stiff; don't you think?"

"I'll drop around," said Rundell.

Shortly after, Pete Rundell entered the gaudy lobby of the hotel. Externally, everything appeared quiet and normal—at least for a hotel that catered

to the racetrack tourist trade. Any guy, standing or sitting, who did not have a tip sheet or one of the racing rags in his hand, was considered a strange character.

Rundell asked the desk clerk, a bizo named Calbert Front—appropriate name for a hotel clerk—informed the *News* man that he would rather not discuss the unpleasantness in Suite B. It was Mr. Front's experience, long and painful, that the closer he kept his mouth the wider open would be his job. He recalled, only last season, when a high-flyer named Blinky Dinky—known to police as Roscoe Timms—was bounced off with a .38 in Room 13, which was not his lucky number. He had told the police and reporters all he knew about the matter, while the manager was out of town; and when the manager read the juicy details in the papers, Mr. Calbert Front had to keep cotton in his ears for a week.

The Hotel Lowndes was beginning to get a rather sour reputation, and it yearned for a sweet one. Could the management help it if a flock of floopies used his joint to add dividends to the undertaker's business? Did people expect them to mug and fingerprint all guests before they permitted them to register? Hell—if they ever passed such a law, at least half of the Miami Beach hotels would be empty.

Pete Rundell took the elevator to Suite B. Captain Eldredge, head of Homicide, along with his aides, Det. Irv Whitman and Det. George Spell, were checking the scene. Jack Kane was telling the officers all he wanted them to know, which was none too much. He also was good enough to give them advice on how to work on the case—which information he got directly from movies, TV and radio murder plays. Eldredge, however, did not care for any knowledge Kane may have in the detectival line, since his department had led the entire nation in 1954 in the solution of murders, i.e. 26 out of 26.

"I have no doubt that this mug was wiped out," Kane was saying, mostly to himself, as no one was listening if they could help it.

"Then we might as well go home and let this news eagle take care of things," said Irv Whitman.

"Mr. Kane should know," said Captain Eldredge. "He knows everything else."

JUST THEN, Frank Mullady, of the ID Bureau, raised himself from the body of Hammerton,

and said, "Good marksmanship. Straight through the heart. Davy Crockett couldn't have done better, even with Walt Disney making the picture."

"See if you can get the maid who takes care of the apartment," said the captain to Whitman. "She might know something."

"If she knew anything," cracked Kane, "why in hell should she be a maid?"

Her name was Mary McCracken, and she was toil-worn and wrinkles creased her forehead and hands.

"Did you see Mr. Hammerton often?" asked Eldredge.

"Yes, sir. Yes, indeed, I did. Practically all the time he was a guest here; and I must say he was one fine gentleman."

"Did you happen to hear a shot, or any extraordinary noise?" asked Whitman.

"No, sir; not a sound. Poor Mr. Hammerton, and him tipping every time he looked at me."

"Imagine what Marilyn Monroe would get!" snorted Kane.

"Shut up," said the captain, and he meant it.

Pete Rundell never said a word, and so the boys liked Pete. While the quiz was going on, Rundell looked around the suite, without getting in the way of the officers. There were three rooms, sitting or living room, bedroom, and kitchenette. Pete went to the bedroom clothes closet, unobserved by Kane, and found ten suits, expensive suits, and one fancy vest hanging on the crossbar. The vest belonged to the suit that Hammerton was now wearing.

Sticking out of one of the vest pockets Rundell saw a small slip of paper. He removed it, read it, and smiled briefly. Then he put it in his pants pockets and rejoined the group in the sitting room.

"How's it look, Captain Eldredge?" he asked the homicide chief.

"This lipstick," said Whitman to no one in particular, "indicates that a woman was mixed up in this some place.

"Nice deduction," laughed Kane. "How about looking in my BVD's and seeing if you can find her name? By the way, where did you find the lipstick?"

"Where the hell do you think I found it—down the lavatory drain? You get in my hair."

"Which one?" grinned Spell.

Kane was wondering how he had missed the lipstick. He had sniffed around everything else—which is strictly against police rules and

regulations, regardless of what you read, hear, or see on TV and radio. So when you see it done in the movies, demand your money back.

Pete Rundell started to leave, as quietly as he had entered.

"Where you headed, scoop boy?" demanded Kane.

"Maybe out for some fresh air," said Pete.

AS PETE was half through the entrance, Mabel McCoy, breathless and excited, brushed past him and into the apartment. Mabel was not what the tabloids call "attractive" or "beautiful." Such blatters have those two words always handy in standing type, and just toss them in when any old bag gets in the news.

"Oh, Jack," said Mabel. "I need your help!"

For a long moment, Kane was silent. Fright, wonderment and anger played across his puffy face. "So *you're* in the middle of this, are you?" he finally said, and sarcasm dripped like Niagara Falls off each word.

"Certainly not!" she shot back. "All I did was to deliver a message to Mr. Hammerton last night."

"Who gave you this message?" asked Captain Eldredge.

"Pete Rundell, of the *News*," said Mabel.

The face of Kane went passed red and began to technicolor. "Well, I'll be double damned! So you're not only a two-timer, you admit you are a three-timer. And what did this guy, Hammerton, mean to you?"

"Absolutely nothing. Not a thing in this world."

"What about giving me a standoff last night, and then meeting Pete Rundell?" roared on Kane. While this exchange of courtesies was going on, the homicide officers looked at each other, with a single expression on their faces, viz., "What are these persons doing here?"

"It was by mere chance that I met Mr. Rundell," said Mabel. "He asked me if I would care to do him a favor, and I said I would be glad to."

"You dames are all the same," snorted Kane. "You would doublecross anybody, if you could gain something for yourselves."

"I told you I was going right home, and I was—until I met Mr. Rundell. Besides, what right have *you* to question me? I'm not married to you!"

"That's a break for me," sneered Kane. Turning to Captain Eldredge, he said, "How about asking this babe and Rundell what they know about

Hammerton's death?"

"I don't know what the man is talking about," said Rundell, "and I doubt if he does. But if Kane is referring to the note I asked Miss McCoy to deliver to Mr. Hammerton, why, I can explain that easy."

"Explain it," said Kane.

"I had been trying to contact Hammerton on the phone for a day or two without any luck. So I decided to write a note and then send it to his suite by messenger. I chanced to meet Miss McCoy, and since she was going in that direction, she was gracious enough to say she would deliver it for me. Do I have to hide behind the Fifth Amendment for a little innocent thing like that?"

"Was there anything between you and Hammerton?" asked Kane. Captain Eldredge walked over to Kane, and said, "Since when did you join the Homicide Bureau? I'll do the interrogating here, and you can shut up—or get tossed out."

"I'm just trying to help you," said Kane.

"You can help us," sniffed Detective Whitman, "by jumping out the window."

"Was Hammerton a personal friend of yours, Rundell?" asked Eldredge.

"I never met the man in my life, although I had heard about him. As you all know, he was quite a character in sporting and gambling circles. The truth is, I do a little magazine writing aside from my newspaper work; I wanted to contact him to see if I could get his life story, and make an article from it. And that is all my note was about."

"Sounds reasonable and logical to me," said Detective George Spell, his big black-brown eyes giving Kane a sniffy look.

"You and Rundell sleep together?" demanded Kane.

Spell walked over in front of Kane, doubled his right fist, and said, "Look, clunkhead, you can get away with this butting-in via fiction on the radio, movies and TV, but in real life, it doesn't work. If Captain Eldredge wasn't a gentleman, he'd have you thrown out of the place."

"Oh, let the half-ape alone," laughed the captain. "In this homicide racket I like a little comedy relief, and Kane can always be depended on to supply it." Then, turning toward the maid and the rest, he added, "I must ask all of you to be in my office, third floor at Headquarters, tomorrow morning at 9:30 A.M. Meantime, you are all released on your own honor until that time."

PETE RUNDRELL was the first to leave the suite. He caught an elevator just as it was leaving the floor, and beat the others down. He ran into Dick Tate in the lobby. The little bellhop liked Pete, and the quiet reporter respected Dick.

"Boy, have I got some hot stuff for you!" whispered Dick, leading Rundell to one side of the lobby. Pete followed the bellhop behind a set of artificial palm trees, which looked better than the real ones.

"Listen," began Dick, "for the first time in my life I am going to be a doublecrosser. I figure this way—when you are dealing with a wrongo guy, you gotta beat the bum to the punch."

"So?" asked Rundell.

"So Jack Kane gives me a whole buck—which may be counterfeit for all I know, like him. Anyway, he pays me to take a parrot that was in Hammerton's suite down to the basement. and not tell anybody, specially the police."

"You should know better than to fool with police evidence," warned Pete.

"Yeah, I know; but I had you in mind, see; and I know you will make everything come out okay."

"Let's get down to business," said Rundell. "For two bucks, you will forget the one buck; right?"

Dick Tate looked pained, hurt and altogether offended.

"Is that all you think of me, Pete?" he demanded. "Why, you know I wouldn't take a C-note from you. Besides, can't a guy do a favor once in awhile, without getting cash for it? If you ask me, *that's* what the hell is the trouble with this commercialized world. If I was Eisenhower—"

"Okay, Dick," grinned the reporter. "I apologize. Now, what's it all about?"

"Just sneak down in the basement," said Dick, "and look around the boiler room. You will see a parrot. The rest is up to you."

Less than a hour later, Pete Rundell was noseying around the apartment where Jack Kane lived with his wife. She was out, being employed as a night telephone operator. The door was unlocked, one of Kane's major habits; moonlight flooded through the living-room windows.

Pete wanted that parrot, and badly. When he had failed to find it in the hotel basement, he put two and two together and made Jack Kane. But if the parrot was not there, then Pete's somewhat screwy idea was down the wet drain. The bright moonlight gave him good sight in every part of the apartment.

He began to think his search was fruitless, when a welcome sound came from under the bed.

"*Play Marie Antoinette to win!*" squawked the bird. Pete, startled at the sudden sound breaking the stillness, recovered and yanked the cage and bird out from under the bed. Next, he got a small white cloth from the table and covered the cage. Obviously the parrot did not care for the restricted view; it began to recite sailor-and-marine words, with a touch of the army for a chaser.

"*Oh, I'm a son-of-a-witch and I got the itch!*" remarked the bird. Putting the cage under his arm, Pete hoped the little bum would keep quiet, at least until he got out of the house. The parrot, for reasons only known to himself, kept super-mum until he got halfway down the block.

RUNDRELL REACHED the corner, found a taxi driver who was not only awake, but also half-sober, and gave directions to drive to the Tropic Pet Shop, which stayed open until midnight. "Okay, pal," said the driver.

"*Just another dog!*" remarked the parrot, from under the cover. The driver, feeling assured that he was being insulted by a fresh passenger, was about to work his temper into high gear, when Pete pacified him.

"Pay no attention to my little friend," laughed Rundell. "He was owned by a racetrack man, and he's just reciting some track jargon he's heard. I have named him Silent Sam, because he's always belching about something."

Pete raised the white covering and gave the driver a peek.

"Cute little louse, ain't he?" said the driver. "He kin speak real English, can't he?"

The cab came in front of the pet shop. Just as Pete was paying the taxi trooper, a shapely brunette—a Marilyn Monroe in reverse—came wiggling down the street.

"*Just a dime-a-dozen filly!*" said the parrot, much to Rundell's embarrassment. The young lady, belonging to the Miss America class, stopped as if hit with a club, and glared at Pete. He did not pause to hear her forthcoming lecture but dashed into the shop.

"I wonder if you have a parrot in stock that will match my little pal, here," he asked the slick-haired clerk. The clerk gazed at the bird in the manner of Henry the Eighth looking down on a peasant.

"Naturally," said the pet patootie, with his best

snooty-snotty eyebrow raise. "It is the most common variety extant. In fact, I might say they are a drug on the market. Right now we must have at least ten in stock."

"*Boy, what a bum!*" squawked the parrot.

"Is it possible that this common bird is referring to *me*?" demanded the clerk.

"Oh, no," said Pete. "He belonged to a racetrack fellow, and just picked up the racing terms."

"You can see that his owner was highly cultured and genteel," sniffed the clerk.

"I would like to board him here for a few days," said Pete, "and in his place, I'd like to rent one for the same period. I am fully aware that it sounds a bit strange—perhaps silly—but I have good personal reasons."

"I—er think it can be arranged," said the clerk.

"*What a dog!*" remarked the bird, as Rundell paid the clerk.

"More horse talk," grinned Pete.

"I'm *sure* he was not referring to me," sniffed the clerk.

"*Don't bet on it!*" yoooped the parrot.

The clerk decided he was in bad company, went to the rear of the store and returned to Rundell with a twin to the Hammerton squawker.

Pete gave the taxi trooper his home address and, after arrival, spent half the night teaching the parrot to squawk tasty words. The words were potent and important. When he finally heard the bird repeat them, he grinned impishly.

So far, his luck was good; but he wondered if it would hold up. He knew he had to get the substitute bird into Jack Kane's apartment, and back under the bed. He figured that Kane would not be at home, knowing that Jack would stay away from the apartment two and three days at a time, depending on the blonde or brunette dish he had intrigued.

The Kane apartment was as dark as the inside of an eight-ball. Taking no risks, Pete listened at the door, wondering if Kane was out or maybe asleep, drunk or sober. No sounds of snoring came from the bedroom. Rundell rubber-soled in and placed the bird under the bed. His luck going out was good, and he took a bus home.

NEXT MORNING, all appeared in the interrogation room of Captain Eldredge. The captain ordered Detective Spell to take them down to the ID Bureau, where Frank Mullady and Alex

Russak took their prints. This was done to check against the prints raised in the Hammerton suite. The mugging and printing gave Jack Kane a kick; he had a sense of humor like a starved tomcat at a convention of mice.

After checking the prints against the gun, Frank Mullady turned to Eldredge and stated, "There are three classifications of prints on this gun. None of them match anyone now present."

"Did you ever touch this gun?" asked Captain Eldredge, to Kane.

"You kidding?" demanded the hotshot reporter. "You know I would never touch anything like that."

(If no one was looking, he'd touch the gold horde in Fort Knox.)

"He only touches bottles, marked 100 proof," said Detective Whitman.

Kane ignored Whitman's *bon mot*, and said to Eldredge, "Isn't somebody going to ask Mabel McCoy what she was doing in Hammerton's apartment, or would that be too personal?"

"I have told the truth," said Miss McCoy, "but the mind of some persons is so muddy that they can't tell when the clear truth flows in."

"How do the officers know that you and Pete Rundell have not been working some kind of smoocher with Hammerton?" asked Kane.

"Gentlemen," said Rundell, quietly, "I think this rudeness to Miss McCoy has gone far enough."

"Continue," sniffed Kane. "Your knight-in-armor act is beginning to make me ill. Was Sir Walter Raleigh an ancestor of yours?"

"I think now is the time for someone to confess," said Whitman.

"Don't tell me that you are about to confess that you killed Hammerton over Miss McCoy!" said Kane.

"If I should ever be stupid enough to kill *any* one," replied Whitman, "I imagine you will be Public Victim No. 1."

"I've had enough of this Jackie Gleason and Burns and Allen liverwurst, ladies and gentlemen," said Eldredge. "I want facts, minus the fancies."

Kane strutted around the Bureau as if he had an ace in the hole. Make it three holes, two of them in his head. "Well, boys," he finally said, "I guess I have kept you in suspense long enough. I now wish to announce that I have Clue No. 1 in my apartment. If you come with me, I will prove it."

"Listen," said Detective George Spell, "who in

hell gave *you* permission to remove clues?”

“I just wanted to assist you guys,” said Kane. “How ungrateful can you get!”

FIFTEEN minutes later two black detective cars pulled up in front of Kane’s residence. The reporter led the men and Miss McCoy into his apartment. His ace in the hole, of course, was the parrot. He had the weird notion that the bird would talk sooner or later, and thus divulge the killer of Hammerton. This is standard plot No. 2346 X in fiction, and if it worked in books, radio and TV, why in hell wouldn’t it work in reality? There are at least 500 reasons why it won’t work, but that’s another story, not this one.

With a grand gesture Kane lifted the bedspread and yanked out the bird.

“Here you see the key to the mystery,” he announced. “Why? Because this parrot was in the room when Hammerton was murdered!”

“For all we know,” said Eldredge, “so was you.”

The bird flipped its clipped wings and tried to make a few squawks, all sound and fury, signifying rage.

“What is this thing supposed to do,” asked Detective Whitman, “give a lecture on Crime and Punishment?”

“If you are playing a joke on me,” warned Eldredge, “it’s going to be a boomerang.” Just then the parrot began to agitate its wings and flap around the cage.

“*Stop. Jack; stop! Don’t kill me, Jack!*”

The parrot’s unexpected words caused all present to mold into waxworks models. The chief statue was Jack Kane.

“*Well,*” said Whitman, “*what are we waiting for?*”

Kane’s fat face changed from deep crimson to shallow technicolor. “Gentlemen; gentlemen!” he said. “This I don’t understand. I’m not the Jack he means. Maybe it’s the name of a horse.”

“With two legs,” said Whitman. “What about it, captain?”

“He’ll do until a better suspect comes along,” agreed Eldredge.

WE NOW TAKE you to the city jail for a view of one Jack Kane. You will note that he is very unhappy, and does not seem to care for his fellow guests—namely, six drunks, five pickpockets, and one alleged pimp. During the first

hour of incarceration Mr. Kane threatened to wire Congress, the Supreme Court of the United States, with a few words tossed off in the direction of President Eisenhower. In short, the reporter was irked, annoyed, enraged and altogether in a state of severe shock. Nothing like this could ever possibly happen to him—and it did.

When his own newspaper published a full report of the affair, he began to sue in millions—especially in his mind. Had the world gone nuts? Jack Kane, star reporter, held in jail on suspicion of murder! He began to wonder if nightmares came in the daytime.

Comes 3 P.M. the next day. Det. Lieut. Tom Lipe went to the cell block and opened the door. “Okay, Jack,” said Lipe, “take a walk—meaning get the hell out of here.”

The item that released him was the story in the *News*, under the byline of Pete Rundell, The headline for the story read: *DAN HAMMERTON WAS NOT MURDERED!*

In the report Rundell, for the first time, printed the note he had found in Hammerton’s vest pocket. Take a peek:

Blame no one for my death but Dan Hammerton. That’s me, public chump for the ages. In a long, wasted life, I have learned a few things the hard way. I have been a gambler all my days. I gambled in women, and I lost; I gambled in horses, and I lost; I gambled in booze, and it was my greatest loss. I have no regrets. I want my body cremated. Goodbye, my friends—if any.

That same night Kane came into Headquarters his same, old cocksure self. At least, he put on a great act of being calm and collected. “Hell,” he said to the boys: “I knew all the time it was a little joke. I just went along with the gag.”

“Sure,” said Detective Whitman, “but I noticed you forgot to laugh.”

Pete Rundell looked up Mabel McCoy early the next morning.

“When time interferes with romance,” smiled Pete, “it hasn’t got a chance. Follow me, lady.”

The marriage license bureau was on the seventh floor of the court house, directly across from Headquarters. Over the main entrance hangs two conflicting signs, viz., *Marriage and Hunting Licenses*.

Two women clerks and a balding male looked up when Pete and Mabel entered.

“Who’s the two that are going to be married?”

asked Mabel. "I don't see anyone here, and you told me to come along and see somebody married, didn't you?"

"Calm down, Sugar Plum," said Pete. "You're a big girl now and you know that, before we get

married, we must get a license."

"Well!" said Mabel, and she decided to sit down before she fell down.

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