

Snatch Bait

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Sergeant Brunt used human bait to hook the snatch mobsters. Then Brunt got caught on his own line, and it looked as though both he and the bait would go under with hot-lead sinkers.

SAMMY LUFF was in the middle of things. Much to his discomfort, "things" consisted of five high-power sweat lamps that burned holes in his eyes, and three dicks who pounded questions on his ear drums.

Captain Dunlope let his voice drop until it reached that stage of low-pitched seriousness that was even more foreboding than his usual bellow.

"There's one more chance for you, Sammy," Dunlope said. "Come across before we really turn on the heat—get me?"

Sammy showed not the slightest sign of having got the captain. He looked very much the part of a tough egg who could take it.

"Now," said Dunlope, still with his calm, foreboding voice, "what did you have to do with the Lowery kidnapping?"

Sammy Luff's lips suddenly broke open and an oath spilled out. He glanced around at the faces of the detectives nearly hidden behind the glare from the lamps. He passed a shaky hand over his damp brow. He repeated his well-worn answer. "I don't know a thing about it." Then he added: "If I did, do

you think I'd tell you? I've been on the grill before. I know just how far you can go. You can drive me nuts, maybe; but that's nothin' as to what would happen to me if that mob got wise. Have you lousy dicks got that? Now, what you goin' to do?"

And that was a good question. Dunlope didn't know the answer. He drew his colleagues into one corner of the little cubbyhole that serves as a sweat box down at the ninth precinct station.

"Well," Dunlope whispered, "what's the answer?"

If Gary Brunt hadn't walked into the sweat box at that moment, the captain's question would have gone unanswered. Sergeant Brunt often had unusual ideas. He had one now.

"Has Sammy opened up yet?" he asked.

Three weary dicks shook their heads.

"Nope," said Dunlope, "and that's only the first chapter. He's scared of somebody and that somebody isn't on the police force. He's scared of his boss!"

Brunt nodded. "Just as I expected." He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the latest edition

of the *Star*. His finger tapped at black headlines. "See that?"

Dunlope read:

LUFF SAYS HE WILL TELL ALL

There followed beneath the headlines a graphic account of how Sammy Luff had broken down under terrific grilling and had promised to spill the names of the lads who held Curt Lowery for ransom.

Dunlope's jaw sagged. He looked at Brunt. "Of all the—"

Sergeant Brunt held up a warning hand. "Don't say it, cap. It's the smartest trick I ever pulled."

"You ever pulled!"

"Since when have you been working on a rag?" another dick asked.

Brunt smiled complacently. "What do you think of my plan?"

Dunlope wiped his brow. "I don't see any plan. All I see is that some reporter's got a better imagination than that guy who wrote them Grimm's Fairy Tales. We haven't had a cheep out of Sammy—" Dunlope stopped suddenly, rubbed his chin and looked shrewdly at his sergeant. "So you told that tale to the reporters?"

"Sure," Brunt replied. "You're gettin' the idea. All we got to do is turn Sammy loose—"

"Yeah!" Dunlope scoffed. "Then what'd we have? Still a kidnapping—plus a murder. Oh, you're a big help. Of all the nuts in the cake, you're the biggest!"

"No, sir," one of the other dicks broke in, "that isn't so dumb. Brunt means some one of us can follow Sammy. If his boss is so tough, he'll be out gunnin' for Sammy after he sees this paper. Sammy'll be the come-on for the big shot."

"Right!" said Brunt. "That's why I fixed this up. Damn cute, if I do say so."

Captain Dunlope scowled at his sergeant. "Young man," he said as if about to mete out some terrible punishment, "you've signed a man's death warrant!"

BRUNT paled perceptibly. The captain went on: "And you're going to be fully responsible. Yes, we'll turn Sammy loose. You're going to fish for big fish—and you're using men for bait." He turned sharply around and strode over to Sammy Luff.

"But, captain—" Brunt objected.

"You've got your orders. And bring the bait back—alive!" The captain spoke quietly with Sammy. He said: "You're free—and I hope to heaven you'll come back!"

And Sammy could see nothing charitable in Dunlope's prayer. But of course, Sammy didn't know why he was going free.

Sammy Luff left the station with a tune whistling from puckered lips. And behind him, Gary Brunt kept thinking that Sammy was whistling for lead. Twice in one block, Brunt felt his right hand jerk towards his shoulder holster. That was because of two big sedans that pulled near the curb and ran slowly past Sam Luff. One of the cars carried a collector from a milk company; the other car contained five tourists hunting for Cousin Letty's.

Though it was yet early in the evening, the sidewalks were not crowded. In the street was an occasional ripple of traffic. A blind beggar with a tapping cane stopped a man ahead of Sammy, held his hat in his hand, and asked for money. The man dug into his pocket, slipped something to the beggar and walked on. Brunt watched the blind man tap with uncanny accuracy up to Sammy. Like most hard eggs, Sammy had his soft sides. Blind beggars seemed to be one of them. He fished in his pocket while the beggar stood there, hat in his left hand.

Then it was one of Gary Brunt's unusual ideas bumped on his brain. He yelled at the top of his lungs: "Sammy Luff!"

Luff jumped around like he had been jerked by a string. And at the instant he jumped, the beggar's hat was lanced with gun flame. The bullet meant for Sammy spanked a steel lamp-post and, ricocheting, mashed itself against the stone side of a building. The beggar, by some miracle suddenly acquired sight—and most deadly sight. He saw Gary Brunt legging towards him frantically grabbing for his underarm gun.

The beggar let a shot rip out. It fanned Brunt's earlobe and dug splinters out of the telephone post. Then the "blind" man legged for the alley with Brunt's wild, hot lead singing music about his head.

Brunt shouted something at Sammy that might have been an order to stay put. He swooped up the beggar's hat in one hand as he rounded the corner of the alley. His whistle went to his mouth and its

shrill, blasting signal slashed the air. The blind man who could see over gun sights disappeared up the back stairs of the brick tenement.

Gun gripped in his right hand, and still holding the beggar's hat in the other, Brunt skipped two steps at a stride after the beggar. At the top of the flight, Brunt found himself surrounded by doors all alike except for numbers dully painted above. A woman with her hair curlers popped out of one door and stood there, fists on hips and eyes gleaming Old Erin in national revolt.

"Where'd he go?" Brunt shouted.

"Sure and I don't know what you're talking about! And I don't see what right you got coming into a respectable house like this—"

Brunt decided that in dealing with this Irish landlady chivalry was definitely out. He'd have to get tough. "Listen here, lady—see this?" He flashed his badge. "Now, you're shielding a potential murderer. If you don't want to go for a ride in a sedan that opens up behind, you'd better tell me where he is. He came up here and I saw him. Here's his hat. Ever see it?"

Brunt had found one woman who wasn't awed by the sight of a badge. Her tongue was keen, double-edged and wagged at both ends. Her finger wagged, too.

She painted vividly her tenants, each with a halo sagging down behind his or her ears. And in the middle of this lecture on the high moral standard of her house, Brunt saw a natty blue uniform bobbing up the stairs. He passed the buck.

"Riley," he called to the cop, "you and Terry Durgan tear this place apart. A man just broke in here after trying to bump Sam Luff. Here's his hat. He was wearing old clothes—ragged blue serge suit, gray flannel shirt. Carries a gun and can use it. Apt to pretend he's blind if he gets in a tight place. Go get him!" And Brunt beat a hasty retreat down the stairs. After all, his first duty was towards Sammy. If Sammy had strayed off by himself—

He rounded the corner of the alley, looked both ways. Where Sammy had been standing was a ragged newsboy.

Brunt had seen a blind man undergo a remarkable transformation on that corner, but no miracle would extend to the making of a news urchin out of Sammy Luff. Brunt swore loudly and with such amazing proficiency that the newsboy stood by with gaping mouth until the recital drew to its damning close. The kid ventured a timid:

"Mister."

Brunt pivoted. His hard heels ground on the pavement. "Huh?" he grunted.

"That guy, with the funny face like a bulldog that was in the shootin', he got a lift."

"**Y**EH?" Brunt put a dime in the kid's fist, slapped him on the back, and told him he'd make a great copper some day. Then he ran for the taxi-stand on the corner. He nearly pulled the door off the yellow getting in. He barked an address—1650 Court Street. "And a tip if you do it on the double," he added.

The taxi jerked, snorted, and roared. The driver was hot after the tip. Sliding tires shrieked on the corners. Brunt held on, leaning forward as if to urge the cab to greater speed. Seven more blocks. Then brakes yowled, and Brunt was thrown down on his knees on the floor. He hung on the latch, swung open the door, and scrambled to his feet on the sidewalk.

"Wait!" he barked at the driver.

1650 Court Street was a bright spot in a rather dingy portion of the city. It was something like a modern miniature of the Court of Miracles in Old Paris. Here, members of the clan of periodically lame, halt and blind beggars came regularly for their transformations. The front of the shop was placarded by Isaac Sacs—Costumer. But it was the back entrance that the professional mendicants used.

Brunt went in the front door. One of the numerous nephews of Uncle Isaac approached the detective with an overly polite query upon his lips.

"Where's Isaac?" Brunt growled.

"He is very busy just now. Maybe I can help?"

Brunt flashed his badge. "Go get Isaac," he commanded.

The man bowed and turned down the lane of clown, Pierrette, and Harlequin costumes to the curtained door at the rear. He stayed longer than was necessary to find anybody's uncle. When he returned he was alone.

"I made some mistake, sir, for which I apologize. Mr. Sacs is not in."

Brunt's voice slid up the scale when he said, "Oh, no?" Uncle Isaac's nephew got a sharp elbow thrust where it made him grunt the loudest. Brunt was running down the room and through the curtained doorway.

Beyond was a room littered with greasepaint

boxes, filthy mops of hair intended for wigs, straps for “amputating” legs, and other litter for which Brunt had no name. But there was no other sign of Uncle Isaac than gray-blue smoke which had probably coiled from an unkempt pipe.

Brunt shoved through the back door and looked down the alley. A small round taillight and the unmistakable chattering of a Model T as it rounded the corner was the only trail that Uncle Isaac had left.

As Brunt hurried back through the shop to Court Street, the clowns and Pierrettes did a little dance on the clothes racks to the rhythm of his tread. He reached the curb, tumbled gracelessly into his cab and snapped an order.

“Straight ahead. Did you see an old Ford turn up this street from the corner?”

The driver, of course, hadn’t noticed.

“Then, get to the intersection and stop in the middle of it.”

The taxi driver had always wanted to do just that. He obeyed implicitly.

“Left!” snapped Brunt. “See that car struggling along up there? Well, speed up beside it and crowd him into the curb. You ought to be able to do that,” he added, thinking of his own fender-crushed car.

As the cab drew alongside, Brunt glimpsed the mangy white hair of Isaac Sacs. Isaac coaxed more speed out of his car. The cab began to nose in. Sacs yelled some sort of warning as the taxi swerved threateningly. Isaac crammed his wheels and crashed against curb and telephone post.

Isaac was standing on the walk shoving a dirty finger at his crumpled fenders and yelling something about damages. Brunt got out, grabbed the man by a fistful of coat front and shook him until he yelled “Police!” at the top of his lungs.

Brunt saw a blue-coat coming across the street on the double. “That’s just fine,” he said to himself.

“Isaac!” Brunt snapped. “Who was the blind man you fixed up tonight?”

“Blind man?”—Sac’s shoulders hunched. “Am I a doctor that I fix blind men?”

The patrolman came up roaring, but was pacified by a glimpse of the detective’s badge.

“Now,” said Brunt, “either you tell who the last blind beggar was whom you fixed up in your shop or you toddle to jail as an accomplice in an attempt at murder!”

“Murder!” yapped the cop.

Isaac smiled knowingly. “How much is it worth

to you?”

“Not a damned thing! But not telling me is worth a punch on the schnozzle.”

“Come on, spill it!” The cop threatened with his nightstick.

“It was Danny Moore. Vy he vonted it, I don’t know.”

“Maybe he was goin’ to a fancy dress party,” sneered the cop.

“S’all I need to know,” said Brunt. “You take Isaac to the jug. We may need him as a witness.”

“But you’re not going to tackle the Moore mob alone?” the cop gasped.

“SURE. I’ve got a chance of roundin’ ‘em up while they’ve got dirt on their hands. Send a squad over there and you wouldn’t get a thing. They’d be all washed up. Make Uncle Isaac behave,” he added as he jumped for his cab.

“You know a dive up the street called the Rainbow Hotel?” he asked the driver. “You ought to. It’s a hot spot—and it’s Danny’s place.”

The driver did know. He shifted gears and stepped on it.

“Don’t stop in front of the joint. Right here on the corner is okay.”

The cab stopped and Brunt got out. He crushed a five-dollar bill into the driver’s hand. “Wait here for thirty minutes. In case I don’t come out, get a squad of cops over here.”

The driver nodded grimly, and Brunt started towards the Rainbow. He entered the gray lobby and crossed to the bar where beer was strong enough to slap a man down.

Bill Krantz was behind the mahogany, but he did not press the warning button beneath the counter. He had known Brunt to stop in often to chew the fat and take a glass of something on the side. He grinned good-naturedly.

“Huntin’ for something, sergeant?” he asked.

“Yeah. Something pretty wet,” replied Brunt with a raise of his brows.

Krantz winked. “I got you—and I got it.” He started towards the back of the bar where in another room he kept his private stock.

Brunt followed him with seeming nonchalance. Once the door had closed behind them, his gun bristled in his hand.

“Krantz!” he barked.

The barkeeper turned around to stare at the gun in amazement. Then he laughed. “What’s the

matter? We haven't fallen out after all these years!"

"And we aren't fallin' out now, if you're nice!"

"Sure, sarge. Ain't I always nice?"

"Then get me upstairs to Danny Moore's place. If you don't I'll sure as hell paint red spots all over your apron!"

Krantz paled. "I-I—if I do, Danny'll—"

"He won't do anything if I get him," interrupted Brunt. "And if I don't, he won't know you put me wise, anyway. Now, on your way. My gun goes into my pocket and I don't mind spoilin' this coat!"

Krantz shrugged fat shoulders resignedly. He led the way to a flight of enclosed stairs at the back of the room. They climbed to the second floor.

"Straight down the hall to that room," Krantz pointed. "The boys got a few games back there, and you won't be noticed because all kinds of guys go there—even stiff shirts. Go to the door on the right side of the game room and knock—three longs and a short. Got it?"

"Got it," replied Brunt. He pulled the badge from his vest and stuck it in his pocket. He tugged his hat over his eyes and gripped the automatic hidden in his pocket. Then he entered the gaming room and walked as if he were going somewhere and knew how to get there. He knocked at the side door in the prescribed manner. The door opened. He sauntered in. There, his easy going manner traded for taut muscles and tensed nerves.

"It's a stickup!" he snapped.

Three pairs of hands hesitatingly reached for the ceiling. One hand unhesitatingly reached for a gun. Brunt's gat spat. The man doubled, clawing at his left shoulder.

"There're slugs for all!" Brunt chopped at the words with his teeth. "Where's Danny?"

Brunt sensed a movement behind him. He turned, half-ducked, as something crashed down on him. The duck saved his skull. The blow, timed poorly, only brushed the side of his head and slashed at his shoulder.

It wasn't enough to put Brunt to sleep; but he wobbled, forced his eyes to roll back, and slumped to the floor. A 'possum wasn't the only smart animal, he thought.

"Frisk him!" said a voice with Irish accent.

Fingers prodded and poked at his pockets. Brunt felt his automatic and handcuffs being removed. Then thin, hard fingers caught his ankles and hands went under his arms. He heard a door creak open and felt himself being carried in the direction of the

sound. Then he was allowed to flop on the floor and again the voice spoke.

"We'll let him sleep it off. Watch him, Pete, and when he comes to, we'll find out what he knows."

"Okay, Danny," a voice rasped.

Shoes tapped and the door creaked closed. A lock clicked. Brunt lay there and sniffed cautiously. Tobacco smoke—lots of it.

"This is goin' to make it tough for you, Sammy," rasped the voice.

"**Y**EAH?" This from Sam Luff.

"Sure. Danny knows you musta squealed. How'd this dick find this hideout? You musta told him!"

"But I didn't, damn it!" said Sammy.

"You can't talk out of it," growled the other. "And if you're hopin' for the cops to come, you're out of luck. Danny's got this place fixed up cop-proof. Soon as the bulls come, Bill Krantz pushes the button. That locks a steel door across the game room. We shy across that covered runway to the next building. Danny's got smoke bombs all fixed up to hide us till we make the getaway."

"This guy got in, didn't he?"

"Sure, but one cop might get through where a squad couldn't. I guess—"

A grunt, coming from the other side of the room, interrupted the rasping voice.

"That's Lowery," said Sammy. "He's gettin' thirsty again."

"Yeah, damn him! All I done for the past three days is give that guy water. He's worse than an elephant."

Brunt's eyelids opened a slit. Sammy was sitting tied down in a chair. A bound and gagged man lying on the bed looked like Lowery. The other fellow was running water out of the tap for Lowery's drink. Sammy had his head turned watching his jailer.

Brunt saw that he was lying at the side of a small table. Looking upwards, he could see the stem of a pipe sticking over the edge. He glanced toward the door. The key was on the inside.

He of the gravel voice was removing Lowery's gag in order to give him water. Sammy was still looking on. Brunt's right hand snaked up. Fingers closed over the pipe. He smuggled it into his pocket. Lord, that bowl was hot! Then he inched his legs close to his body. The mobster had one hand under Lowery's head and the other holding

the glass of water. It was his chance. He wriggled over on his side and snapped to his feet. The stem of the pipe punched out of his pocket like the muzzle of a gun.

“Hands up, you!” he growled.

The mobster dropped the glass of water. He let go of Lowery’s head. He spun around, deceived by the detective’s bulging pocket. Then his right hand jabbed towards his gun.

Brunt leaped. Left hand locked on the man’s gun wrist. Right hand smashed the side of his jaw. The man staggered, clawed for his gun but caught Brunt’s wrist instead, just as the detective’s fingers found the man’s pocket. Brunt grabbed the gun, inadvertently pulled the trigger before he could get it out. The bullet ate harmlessly into the floor, but the report gave the mobster a case of jitters. He released the hold on Brunt’s wrist and the detective pulled the gun free.

Heavy fists pounded on the door. “What’s goin’ on in there, Pete?” Moore called.

THE snout of Brunt’s newly acquired gun muzzled into the man’s back. “Tell ‘em you had to shoot me!” he hissed.

The man hesitated. A prod from Brunt’s gun promised trouble.

“Aw, I had to plug this damned dick,” he said. His growl wasn’t very formidable now.

“What the hell!” yelled Moore. “Open up, sap!”

“Go ahead and open the door,” Brunt whispered. But as the gunman started to obey, Brunt clubbed the gun and let him have full weight of the butt on the top of the head. Pete melted.

“Hey, Danny—” Sammy Luff started to squeak a warning.

Brunt’s eyes blazed. “Damned ungrateful!” he grunted. Gun nosing, he crossed to the chair in which Sammy was tied. He raised his gun to put Sammy out of the picture. Sammy’s squeal ended in a groan. His head nodded forward.

The pounding on the door increased. The unconscious Pete was called by more endearing names.

Brunt husked his voice until it approached Pete’s growl. “Keep yer pants on, Danny.”

Then he went over and frisked Pete. Another gun in the shoulder holster. Well heeled, that guy!

Then he reached up and snapped off the lights. He approached the door on tiptoe and cautiously turned the key. Danny and his pals were stamping and pounding on the door with such vigor that they did not hear the lock click back. Then Brunt walked to the back of the room and crouched in the corner opposite the bed containing the kidnapped Mr. Lowery.

Again he imitated Pete’s voice. “Well, come in, why don’t cha? Turn the knob. That’s what it’s for!”

The door opened. Three men tried to push through at once.

“Stick ‘em up!” Brunt snapped. Danny had no intention of doing anything of the kind. “Take it, then!”

Danny took it on the chest and sank forward on his knees. Gun flame jumped from the doorway. The bullet dashed plaster dust from the wall back of Brunt. The detective let go with both guns. Somebody yelped.

“When you guys get enough, let me know,” Brunt growled.

A gun snaked around the door frame to shoot at sound. Brunt got the hand that held it. Another yell and the gun plumped to the floor. Then silence. Brunt cat-footed toward the door. He stuck his head out. Danny Moore was gasping out breath from lungs that crackled. Another man nursed a shattered wrist. Still another was hanging on to the calf of his leg. Blood seeped through his fingers.

Brunt chuckled. Covering the two men who still clung to consciousness, he picked up their guns from the floor. Then he returned to where Lowery was tied. He snapped on the light and began to untie the captive oil magnate. He was halted by the buzzing of an electric signal. He hurried to the door and looked out.

Downstairs, came the sound of hurrying feet.

“Guess that’s the squad raiding this joint. Why don’t you guys run?” he jibed.

The man with the shattered wrist groaned.

When Captain Dunlope and his squad burst into the room, Brunt pocketed his guns and grinned. “It’s the Moore mob, cap. Guess they’re pretty well washed up. Lowery’s safe and sound. And the bait I fished with is still alive—but kind of sleepy right now!”

