

*When Greg Kelly does his civic duty
he meets the sharp edge of danger!*

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My FRIEND, The FIEND

GREG wasn't sure at first glance. He probably would never have noticed the man at all if it hadn't been for his ear, bent a little at the top and thickened, as if it had been filled in with putty.

Greg Kelly stopped on the subway stairs and gazed after the man who was climbing just ahead of him. The man reached the street level and Greg started after him. The man was walking briskly, looking straight ahead. The gait was the same. The staccato jerk of the arms, the tilt of the head, the angle of the step. That was

the trouble with plastic surgery, Greg thought. You could change your face, but you couldn't do anything about important details—like your ears, or the way you looked from behind.

The man was very cautious about the intersection traffic. His head kept jerking in either direction as he crossed, even though there were no moving cars. A half block down Christopher Street, at a five story brownstone, he climbed the steps and went inside. Greg saw him take out a key and fit it to the inside door and that seemed proof enough to Greg that he lived

there.

Greg stood on the opposite side of the narrow street, staring blankly at the closed door. Gooseflesh started at the base of his spine and funneled up his back to his shoulders. He had felt that same excitement a month ago when he had looked at the glass-enclosed notices in the post office on Tenth Street. That picture of Jack Pendleton on the wanted notice had been taken six years before, when Pendleton was without the mustache and his hair was undyed, but there was no mistaking him. Under a warning that Pendleton was believed armed and considered dangerous, the text had said: "\$2,500 will be paid to any person offering information leading to his apprehension, dead or alive."

Greg Kelly walked slowly toward his own apartment, and a twenty-five hundred dollar thought kept bouncing in his mind. Betty was always saying he was careless with money. She claimed that he squandered it on baseball pools and heavy luncheon tips and that's why they could never save a dollar. But with twenty-five hundred dollars. . . .

HE HURRIED up the spalling stone steps of their building, and his mind was so busy with what he was thinking he didn't even notice the four flight climb to their floor. He could hardly wait to tell Betty.

Betty Kelly was rather small, and could still look pretty when she fixed herself up. But her hair was disheveled now and she had on no makeup. It was Monday, and she had just come back from the laundry.

"Hi, Bet!" He greeted her with a kiss and a wide smile.

"What makes you so gay?" she said.

"I'm gay," Greg said, "because you're not going to have to go to any laundromat

any more to do your clothes. You're going to have a Bendix right in your apartment with completely new furniture from front to back."

Betty looked at him suspiciously. "Greg!" she said, and she stepped closer to smell his breath.

He thrust her playfully back. "It's the truth. You've heard me talk about Jack Pendleton. Well, he's out of prison, and I know where he is, and there's a twenty-five hundred dollar reward out for him. I'm going to make twenty-five hundred dollars."

Greg Kelly watched the color fly out of his wife's face. Even her lips seemed to grow paler, and it made her eyes appear larger.

"Greg, you're kidding?"

"No, why should I?"

"I mean, you can't. Greg, I won't let you."

"You think I'll get in trouble?" He chuckled it away. "I don't have to do a thing but tell the police. They'll take care of everything. There's no risk for me. And Pendleton will be put back in prison. I saw him no more than ten minutes ago, right here on Christopher Street."

"But you'll get in trouble. Greg, you can't do it. It isn't clean, honest money. It's blood money. Suppose Pendleton finds out."

"Pendleton won't ever find out. And it wouldn't do him any good if he did. Blood money!" Greg snorted. "Wouldn't you report a mad dog if you knew where one was running at large? Do you feel sorry for a man who's a killer?"

"That's just it—these men are killers, Greg. And they always find out. There's always a slip-up someplace. And then we'll be sunk."

She buried her face in her hands and began to sob. Greg watched for a moment and then he gave up. He had learned that

when a woman cried, to be logical or rational was of no earthly use.

“Oh, all right,” he said, exaggerating his annoyance. “So I won’t make twenty-five hundred dollars.”

After dinner, Greg went out to buy some cigarettes—at least that was his excuse, for there was still a fresh pack in his coat pocket. He walked hurriedly, so he wouldn’t be gone too long and headed directly for Christopher Street. He walked by Pendleton’s building once to ascertain if anyone was in the foyer, then he went inside.

He could learn nothing from the names under the mailboxes. He had realized Pendleton would surely use an alias, but he had hoped it would be one that might somehow be recognizable.

He went out and across the street to look up at the building. It was impossible to see into any of its windows, for the angle was wrong for all of them except on the first floor and they were curtained. Then a voice spoke behind him.

“Looking for something, Mister?”

GREG turned and he found himself staring directly into the dyed-mustache face of Jack Pendleton.

Within a brief second he had to decide what his reaction should be. It was recognition, surprise, pleasure.

“Why, hello,” he said, not daring to speak Pendleton’s name.

Pendleton reciprocated with none of Greg’s emotions. “When did you get out, Kid?” he said.

It seemed odd to talk about it. It was another part of Greg’s life, a fantastic, unreal chapter that he had shut out of himself. Nearly ten years before, when Greg had been eighteen, he had accepted a job driving an almost new car to California. He had known something was sub-legal in the set-up—the pay was too

high—but it hadn’t seemed like anything very wrong and, as always, he had needed the money. He had got as far as New Jersey. At police headquarters they told him it was a hot car, and when he pleaded patsy, they didn’t go for it.

“I’ve been out a long time,” Greg said. “I had only a year and a day, and there was time off that.”

Jack Pendleton’s mustache twisted. He tilted his head. “I saw you go into that apartment across the way.”

Greg was startled. “It was about that school next door,” he lied. “I wanted to inquire about it for some family I know. I thought maybe I’d ask a few questions of someone in the building. But then I decided it was silly, just pushing someone’s doorbell and barging in that way.”

“Yeah?” Pendleton was scrutinizing Greg’s face. “I got a couple friends I’d like you to meet. Really solid, capable fellows.” He took Greg’s arm.

Greg drew away. His heart was hammering. What Pendleton said was a threat as well as an invitation. “Thanks, but I can’t. Wife’s waiting for me.” He was sorry he’d mentioned his wife the moment it slipped off his tongue.

“Yeah?” Pendleton’s eyes were stripping him again. It was the cold, implacable stare of a man who had killed and who would not be very disturbed if it were necessary again. “I may see more of you,” he said.

Greg walked away. Sweat was on his brow. He half expected a bullet between his shoulders, but none came.

At the intersection of Eighth Street, Greg went over to the drugstore. He put his hand on the swing door. He realized now the true proportion of the danger that would menace him if he gave out the information leading to Pendleton’s capture.

Pendleton had spoken of two pals. By now, those two would know of Greg Kelly. Possibly they had even spotted him before, when he had first trailed Pendleton to Christopher Street, and had in turn shadowed him. In that case, they might know where he lived and might even now be designing a heavenly concrete kimona for him. Otherwise, why had Pendleton dared openly to show himself?

Greg went into a phone booth in the drugstore and dialed the operator.

"I want the police," he said.

His heart was beating so hard it seemed to him the tiny cubicle of the booth must be echoing and magnifying it. He tried to concentrate on relaxing.

"I'd like some information," he said to the voice that answered. "In the post office I saw a reward notice up for a man called Jack Pendleton—"

"Just a minute," said the voice. There was the sound of switches being pulled and plugged and a new voice spoke up.

Greg repeated what he had said and continued. "I'd like to know if there are any confederates wanted along with Pendleton."

"Who is this?" The voice had taken on a suspicious, guarded tone.

"Abner Carter, 231 West 110th Street." Greg almost choked on the lie. He could see the police officer's pencil moving over a pad, jotting the address down.

"Just a second," the voice said then. There was a pause of thirty seconds. Greg could hear papers rustling. "Yeah, there are alarms out for Fred Moon and Piper Dusek for the same job of armed robbery and murder. A reward out of twenty-five hundred dollars for each of them."

"Twenty-five hundred dollars for each of them?" Greg said. "You mean seventy-five hundred dollars for the three?"

"Yeah. You know something about

them?"

The police officer was holding a dead wire.

BETTY put down the magazine she was reading when Greg stepped into the apartment.

"Took you a long time just to get cigarettes," she said.

Greg sat down on the upholstered chair opposite the end of the studio couch. He could feel Betty's eyes studying him.

"Greg," she said. "You're still thinking about that thing."

"I just found out something more about it." He smiled, but his face was pale near his ears, and tense. "There are three of them, and there's twenty-five hundred dollars out for each. Do you know what we could do with money like that?"

She shoved aside her magazine and her eyes knit. "Greg, it's not worth it. It's not worth it for any amount."

Seventy-five hundred dollars. . . . He could do it and not tell her. He wouldn't have to tell her. And there wouldn't be any danger—not if the cops got all three of them. There wouldn't be anybody left to do anything. Armed robbery and murder would send them up for life at least.

"Okay, Bet," he agreed.

He walked to the buffet and looked through the collection of recent mail that had accumulated there. He found a phone bill for \$6.12. There was also a charge account bill for thirty dollars that had been due a long time and about which they had been receiving tactful letters. The rent bill, too, was still unpaid and it was the fourteenth of the month.

He walked back into the living room. Betty was turning the pages of her magazine again.

"I think I'll go out for some air," he said.

She didn't look up. "But you were just

out.”

“Do you mind?”

Outdoors, he found he could think better. And he did have a decision to make—fast. He walked past the canopied apartment buildings on Fifth Avenue, watching the doormen whistling up taxis. There were objections and unpleasant things about turning a guy in to the law, to be shut up in prison.

Betty had said that reward money really wasn't *clean* and perhaps she was right. But after all, Greg thought, more than pure personal physical risk was involved. A guy had to consider the social aspects of the problem.

Jack Pendleton and the two punks with him were a menace to the laws and order, upon which decent society rested. They had brought death to innocent persons. If I don't peach on them, Greg figured, they're bound to knock over a few more jobs and bump a couple more people before some cop gives them theirs in a gutter gun-battle. The fact of the matter is, Greg mused, I'll be doing everyone concerned a very decent favor.

Greg turned it over in his mind. Eighth Street was just a vague blur about him as he walked down it. There was always a point beyond which you could not think—a point at which you ceased to think and then acted, seemingly without thought. It had been that way when he had started driving that car to California. He had considered all the angles of it, and then when he had undertaken the job, the final step had seemed completely thoughtless and unconsidered.

That was the way it was now. He walked into the drug store and into the phone booth. He dialed the operator.

“I want to talk to the police,” he said.

It seemed he waited less than a minute before the first squad car pulled up to the curb in front of the drugstore. The officer

swung open the door and began to talk to him.

Greg had expected sirens, but there were none. The police emergency truck came thundering down the avenue, loaded with men. It braked to a halt, and disgorged, while pedestrians gathered to see what it was all about. An officer with a gold badge directed the squad and Greg heard him called Captain Hofritz.

POLICE cars and men took off in different directions, deploying for the purpose of throwing a cordon around the block, sewing it up tight. At Sixth Avenue and at Seventh, traffic was diverted from the street and pedestrians halted.

Men went in the front of Pendleton's building. Greg saw other men appear on the roof of the garage next door and still others suddenly looking over the parapet of the school. It gave him a fleeting sense of security and assurance, convinced him momentarily that he had been foolish even to imagine the police might allow a slip-up or mischance. Now, standing with two burly policemen guards he realized how efficient a law-machine the New York Police Department was.

Searchlights flashed on, crisscrossing and bathing Pendleton's brownstone in light. One beam moved from window to window. Then gunfire broke out on the roof.

“There they go!” someone in the street yelled, and the police searchlight pinned two figures, heading from the roof down the front fire escape.

Policemen swarmed out of windows onto the fire escape. The two figures stopped, trapped between men both above and below them. There was another sporadic burst of guns. Then the two figures were overwhelmed.

Shortly, they were brought down, hustled into a waiting van. One of the

police officers was clutching a blood-soaked shoulder. His young face was pale and twisted with pain.

"Those dirty rats might have killed me," he swore. "And they got off without a scratch!"

One of the squad cars took the officer to the hospital for treatment. Watching, Greg could not help remembering what he had said about criminals at large being like mad dogs on the loose. Five minutes passed and Captain Hofritz came out of the building. He spoke to the driver of the van, and it pulled away. Then he crossed the street to Greg.

"We're making a thorough search of the building." His gold badge was glinting like a brooch. "We've taken Fred Moon and Piper Dusek, but no one else." His blue eyes sharpened on Greg. "You sure you saw Pendleton go into this building?"

"Yes," Greg said weakly, as realization seeped through him. No, the police hadn't made any slip-up, but he had! He had sent the police storming in after the wanted men without really knowing that Pendleton, or any of them, were actually there at the moment. It was simply a very lucky break that two of them had been caught in the raid. But Pendleton would learn of the trap. He would never return to this building. In fact, that cordon which was around the block might very well be scaring him off right now.

Greg held on to the wall of the building beside him. The ground had seemed to drop away from beneath him. Perhaps it was only that his feet were suddenly numb and cold, with fine needles jabbing at them.

Several officers conferred soberly, but Greg could not hear what they were saying. He was too busy thinking that Betty's prediction had come true. Two of the men had been taken, but one man was still free—to exact vengeance on the one

who had informed against them.

"We'll keep working on it," Captain Hofritz said. "We won't ease up on it for a minute."

An hour later a squad car left Greg Kelly at his apartment. Betty seemed to have been standing there in the foyer waiting for him, for she was there when he opened the door. He guessed maybe she had heard his footsteps climbing the stairs.

"Where in the world have you been?" she asked. "I've been half scared to death wondering what became of you."

"Oh, I just met Al Victor and I couldn't get away." Al Victor was a clerk who worked with Greg. Victor had been to the house once.

Greg took off his coat and loosened his tie. He slumped down in the over-stuffed chair. He wondered how soon Jack Pendleton would be coming after him, how long it would take for Pendleton to find out where he lived—if he didn't already know.

"What did he have to say?"

Greg jerked. "Who?"

"Why, Al Victor, of course."

Greg was sure then that Betty knew something was afoot, but he realized she could scarcely guess what he had done. He could not afford to tell her—not yet.

THEY turned in, and he lay awake, thinking of it. Finally, assured that Betty was sleeping soundly, he sneaked out of bed. He found the Nambu in the bottom drawer of the chest. He had brought it home from the Pacific and he had some shells for it.

He took it in the bathroom and carefully and noiselessly closing the door, he switched on the light. In privacy there, he inspected and then tried to load the weapon. The clip of 8mm. Japanese shells which he had acquired separately, did not fit the gun. Large daggers of sweat ran

down his body. He felt helpless and terribly alone.

The next day nothing happened. The following night passed and the second day as well. Betty seemed to have forgotten all about the incident of the previous evening. And then it happened. . . .

The evening of the second day, Betty was reading a magazine and Greg was at the window looking down at the street when the doorbell rang. Betty promptly went to answer.

Greg heard the door swinging open, the pause, then her muffled exclamation. The sound of her shoes sliding on the floor sent him into action. He reached the foyer just as she lost her effort to keep whoever was outside from forcing open the door. Jack Pendleton's huge bulk lunged inside.

His eyes caught Greg. The fine line of his mustache snarled. "Okay, squealer," he said.

His hand went inside his coat, but what he took out was not a gun. It looked like a short club, until he squeezed it. Then a five-inch knife blade, honed to razor sharpness, sprang into position. He didn't hold it like an icepick. He held it like a fencer holds a foil and his feet leaped into the ready position, his weight balancing on the balls of his feet. He was no amateur, Greg realized.

Greg had forgotten momentarily about Betty, and she was behind him. But he knew how quickly Pendleton could swivel to take care of her and he was thankful that she was frozen with fear.

"What are you going to do, Pendleton?" he asked, to stall for time.

Pendleton was edging closer, close enough to bring Greg within easy range of that needle-sharp point.

"First," Pendleton said, "I'm gonna present you with the mark of the squealer. Then I'm gonna cut you open like a hog."

The mark of the squealer.

It took Greg back to prison. In stir, men didn't have guns, but they could improvise knives, and they did, ingenious ones—out of old pieces of scrap iron, out of cutlery stolen from the kitchen, out of files stolen from the shop—and with them they became expert. More than once Greg had seen inflicted on an informer with inadequate defense, the long, brutal slash that lay the face open from one end of the mouth to the ear, marking him forever as a man who had talked.

Greg's eyes were on Pendleton's, and the killer telegraphed his move. He stepped in and Greg lunged in to counter at the same moment. The edge of his rigid hand chopped against Pendleton's wrist, and the knife went flying from suddenly nerveless fingers. It hit the floor beyond the carpet, skittered out of sight under the buffet.

Greg ran for the bedroom. He heard Pendleton following. But he had the Nambu out of the drawer and up before the killer could reach him. He thrust it menacingly forward. Pendleton brought up short. His hands slowly rose, warily, to the level of his shoulders.

His eyes glittered and his mustache twisted into a cocky grin.

"There's someone behind you," he barked.

Greg allowed his glance to falter for the briefest second. In that moment Pendleton's one hand grabbed the gun, the other clamped Greg's gun-wrist. A quick twist and the weapon was no longer Greg's. Pendleton was the master once again.

"I been missin' a rod," he said. "I had to go and leave mine behind on Christopher Street, and when you're hot it ain't easy to pick up a new one."

A wag of the gun barrel motioned Greg back to the living room where Betty was still paralyzed with terror. Pendleton

moved toward the small ivory radio on the bookcase and turned it on, waiting.

At the bedroom door was a straight-backed chair. Greg stopped beside it. The radio began to moan. Pendleton twisted the dial, groping for music.

Greg chose that moment.

GRABBING up the chair, he swung it high, brought it crashing down as he lunged in toward the killer. Pendleton, squeezing trigger, scarcely moved an inch.

The chair shattered on his head, dropped him to his knees. Two more blows with the wrecked remnant laid him flat.

Greg turned to look at Betty. He saw three policemen swarming in, Captain Hofritz in the lead.

"You timed it nicely," Greg said bitterly.

Hofritz did not catch the sarcasm. "Yeah," he said. "We been watchin' this place. Like we promised yuh. We been protectin' yuh every moment."

"Greg," Betty sobbed. She was at his side, clutching him. She knew now that he had told the police.

Hofritz snapped manacles on Pendleton. He roused slightly as the other officers dragged him to his feet, but he was a sadly beaten fighter. Hofritz turned wonderingly to Greg.

"What happened?"

Greg retrieved the knife from under the buffet. He displayed it along with the Nambu. He told how he had knocked the knife from the killer's grasp.

"Then this Japanese gun I brought back from the Pacific," he finished. "It wouldn't work. But I figured if I let Pendleton get his hands on it, it would give him enough confidence so he wouldn't be expecting anything else out of me. He was relying on it completely when I swung that chair."

Hofritz looked at the snap-bladed weapon. He nodded his head grinning thoughtfully. "Lucky they taught you knife-fighting against the Japs," he said. "It really came in handy."

Greg started a little. He hadn't been in the service. Not with a felony against him. He'd been in the Merchant Marine. But you couldn't very well tell a cop that you'd learned your defensive tactics against a knife in a penitentiary.

"Yeah," Greg said. "It sure did come in handy."

When the police left finally, Greg sank down on the overstuffed chair. Betty was on the studio couch. She was ominously silent, brooding as she did when she was hurt or angry. Greg knew the size of the thing that was between them. .

"I didn't want to tell you," Greg said. "I knew you'd worry. But I did call the police the other night. I thought they'd clear them all up then and that would be the end of it. But when they pulled their raid, they nabbed only two of them. Pendleton wasn't caught."

Betty was still silent.

"You were right, Betty," Greg said. "My telling the cops did lead to some trouble. But I wasn't going to do it, Betty. In spite of the risk it meant, and the reward money that was to repay us for it, I couldn't help thinking it wasn't a square thing to do. I kept thinking that way until I realized it was a big problem. The reward money became suddenly unimportant. I remembered that corny thing they called social duty."

Greg jerked a laugh. "Pendleton and his pals were a menace to society, I decided then. They couldn't be allowed to go free. So I figured that maybe if I just reported them, and refused to take any reward for it, my conscience would be completely clear."

Betty seemed to have come alive

again. "What did you say?"

"That's right," Greg said. "I figured that if I didn't take any money for turning them in, it would sort of be all right. Then there could be no question of my motives."

"Greg! You didn't!" Betty was off the couch.

Greg allowed a slow smile. He rose from his chair. He strolled the four steps to the couch as he reached in his pocket. He brought out a fat roll of green, tied with a rubber band.

"So let there be a question about my motives," he said. "I got the check yesterday—five thousand dollars for the first two. There'll be another twenty-five hundred for tonight. I don't think you'll say I didn't earn it."

"Darling!"

He ignored her arms about his neck. "Four thousand in the bank. I kept out a thousand here, so you can get some new clothes and make a down payment on some furniture for that new apartment."

He took off the roll's rubber band and began to drop the twenty dollar bills, one at a time, over the top of the couch.

"I'd have done it without the money," he said.

"Of course you would, darling." But she was no longer hugging him. She was on her knees in front of the couch, counting the bills as he dropped them, smoothing the money into a neat flat pile with a gentle hand.