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Be My Guest

Quite a card, that Calligy. Always joking about murder — and about other guys making time with Rocky's wife.

BY ROBERT TURNER

THINGS have been real nice since I got out of the Fights. Retired, Janie calls it. Just like I'd been a big business man or something. That's one thing I like about Janie, her sense of humor. Lot of guys might think she was too quiet. Not me. I like Janie. She's a swell wife. It was her idea we come way up here to Maine and buy this place, miles from nowhere, where we don't even get mail or see anybody maybe weeks on end, and I go the thirty miles into town for supplies about once a month. It's kind of primitive, no electricity, no phone, getting water from a well and all. But it's fun. It's nice.



We don't get lonesome. Except right after Mr. Calligy was here.

That was a funny one, him coming here. I never did really find out why he came. Of course he gave me a silly reason, kidding around the way Mr. Calligy and all those guys from the rackets do. You never hardly get a straight answer out of guys like him. I remember the first thing I said, when he drove up and stepped out of that big car of his:

"Well, Mr. Calligy," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you say, Rocky?" he answered. "I'm hidin' from the cops. No kiddin', Rocky, what do you think of that? I'm wanted for murder, for killing that big schnook of a manager of yours, Leo Mace. Remember Leo? Well, say a prayer for him, Rocky. He's dead. I knocked him off."

I looked at him. He didn't look so good. His expensive suit was all ruffled and he needed a shave. Those heavy-hooded eyes of his were all bloodshot and tired, too. I said: "You kiddin', Mr. Calligy?" As soon as I asked, I knew it was a foolish question. Guys like Mr. Calligy, in the rackets, don't go around knocking people off. They're like business men, not like the old gangster movies. Mr. Calligy maybe mixes in the numbers business, fixes a few fights like that last one of mine. But none of this strong-arm stuff.

"I wouldn't kid you, Rocky," Mr. Calligy said. "I——"

He stopped cold, looking past me. I turned and saw that Janie had come out of the house. She was wearing shorts and a halter and she looked nice. I was real proud of Janie. Her legs were long and curved real pretty, like a chorus girl's legs and they were smoothly tanned. And that halter — well, Janie would have looked good in a burlap bag, but that halter was the end. The real end. And with her reddish hair pulled tight over her forehead and balled up in the back, with the sun shining on it like on liquid copper, Janie looked beautiful that moment. Mr. Calligy thought so, too. He said:

"Well, maybe this country life can be real invigorating, after all." He made a whistling sound. "Who's that, Rock?"

"Janie," I called. "Come meet Mr. Calligy."

She walked toward us. Her eyes never left Mr. Calligy's and her lips looked a little pursed, as though she was frightened or maybe sore about something. I couldn't figure that out. I heard her say: "I've already met Mr. Calligy, long, long ago."

"Why, sure," he said. "I remember you now, Baby. You're the little chick with the mousy look and the big horn rimmed glasses used to work for Farnsworth, the promoter."

"She just wears glasses when she reads or types or close work like that," I explained.

"Sure," Mr. Calligy said. "With or without glasses, she can do some close work for me, anytime. How about that, Janie? Like to put your glasses on and do a little close work for me some time?"

I laughed. He's a great kidder, that Mr. Calligy. All these bigshot racket guys are. But Janie was a little white around the lips. She didn't seem to get it. She said:

"How did you find us? Nobody's supposed to know where we are. Only Leo Mace knew and he wouldn't have told anybody — especially you."

"You got it figured," he told her. "Mace let me in on the little secret. Just before he died. I sort of sweated it out of him. And you know what I was going to do when I got here, honey? I was going to shoot some holes in a punching bag. You know what I mean?"

I didn't. What was he talking about? Since I quit the Fights, I don't do any training. We ain't got any punching bags, no gloves or nothing, up here in the country.

Janie said: "You can't do that. He doesn't know. He doesn't remember what happened. You can't blame him. Please!"

Now I didn't understand Janie, either. It was like they were talking double talk and it was setting my head to aching. It does that sometimes, since that last fight with Barney Phelan, when I took a dive like Mr. Calligy paid me to, especially. Sometimes I don't seem to

see too good, either. Sometimes I don't even hear right and yet at the same time I sometimes hear sounds and noises that ain't even real, Janie says. I guess she was right and I was in the Fights too long. But it paid off. Janie and I got enough money to live on, way out here in the country, the rest of our lives.

"Don't worry, kid," Mr. Calligy said to Janie. He was looking her over and over and I felt kind of proud that a bigshot like Mr. Calligy admired my wife so much. He rubbed his hands together. "Since I got here, I got other plans. Much better plans."

He looked at me. "You got a car?"

"No," I told him. "A jeep. I can drive it, too."

Mr. Calligy winced and looked at Janie. He said: "How do you stand it? What do you do, day in, day out, sit around here, listening to the sound of the bells in his crazy cranium? Hell, honey, I'll bet you're glad to see a human being, huh?"

You see what an education this Mr. Calligy had, the words he used. I laughed as though I knew what he was talking about. Janie said: "Lay off of that. Leave him alone, you hear?"

Her eyes got blazing mad. I was surprised. I said: "Aw, Janie, Mr. Calligy was just kiddin' around."

"So you got a jeep," he said. "Then when I get ready to go, I can get into town with that. Swell. I'll be back in a minute. Got to get rid

of the car, just in case anyone does come snooping around, looking for me. I passed a nice deep-looking creek, up the road about half a mile. You follow me in the jeep, Rocky.”

I watched him get back into the Caddy. I looked at Janie. “What’s he doing?” I saw Mr. Calligy drive off, back the way he had come, down the narrow, rutted dirt road that led out to the main highway, ten miles back.

Janie came over and threw herself into my arms. She put her head against my chest. Her fingers dug into my arm muscles. “Rocky, I’m scared,” she said. She was, too. I could tell by her voice. “What are we going to do? We’ve got to *do* something. He’ll kill you, too. Maybe not right away, but after a while.”

I grinned. I liked to have her cuddle up to me like this. She was so small and soft and warm against me. “Mr. Calligy kill me?” I said. “That’s silly. Why would he want to do that?”

She leaned back away from me, turned her face up toward me. I’d never seen her eyes so full and pretty, the long lashes all stuck together. “Listen, Rocky. I’ve got to tell you something, try to make you understand. Think hard, darling. Try to understand this.”

I frowned and looked down at her and concentrated. My head hurt but I kept it up because Janie wanted me to. She said, slowly, spacing the words: “That last fight,

with Barney Phelan, remember? You got orders to take a dive. In the sixth round. But you were to let him hit you, make it look good, maybe even knock you out for real, because you were the heavy favorite and it had to look good. Remember?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said.

“And in the sixth, you gave him some openings just like you were supposed to. And he really teed off on you. You went down, twice, remember?”

“Sure. The second time, I stayed down. I was really out, cold. He — he hit me too hard. I didn’t remember nothing for three days after the fight and then I was up here with you and I don’t remember how we even got here.”

“That’s right, Rocky,” she said. She nodded her head, approvingly. “Now, try to understand this. I never told you. I didn’t want to worry you. Something went wrong in that sixth round after you went down the second time. You got up again, looking kind of dizzy. Phelan came at you, but he was careless, wide open. You threw a wild, heavy punch. It caught him flush and he went down. He stayed down. *You won that fight, Rocky, and you shouldn’t have.* Calligy lost fifty thousand dollars. He didn’t understand, either. He thought it was a double-cross you and Leo Mace pulled on him. Do you understand, Rocky? That’s why he’s up here. He’s killed Leo and he’ll kill you, too.”

I stared down at her and my eyes went blurry and I couldn't see her for a moment. There was a sound like millions of grasshoppers in my ears. My head began to hurt worse and worse, so bad I could hardly stand it. Then it stopped and I said: "You're kidding me, Janie. For some reason. That *couldn't* have happened. How could it?"

She seemed to go crazy and tried to shake me, like she would a little kid. But when you're a hundred eighty pounds, a little dame like Janie has trouble shaking you. Then Mr. Calligy backed up to our driveway in his Caddy, called out the window: "What the hell are you waitin' for, bellhead? You expect me to walk all the way back from that creek?"

"He's got some crazy idea," I told Janie. "I'd better go with him."

She just stood there and watched me go, as I got into the jeep and went after Mr. Calligy in his Caddy. I kept thinking about what Janie had said. It didn't make sense. Why would I double-cross Mr. Calligy? I'd been in the business too long to think I could get away with something like that. And I'd have remembered. Unless Phelan *had* knocked me cold that second time I went down, I would have remembered, wouldn't I? Janie was a little mixed up, upset about something.

When we got to the creek, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Mr. Calligy drive the car off the little wooden bridge and into the

creek, where it quickly sunk out of sight. I shook my head. I didn't know. Everybody seemed to be acting crazy, today. I said: "What did you do that for? A nice car like that?"

"Rocky, m'boy," he said. "I can always get another car. This way, if any cops *do* come, you can hide me and there won't be any car to give things away."

He got into the jeep with me and we drove back to our place. "You mean you really are in trouble with the cops, Mr. Calligy?"

"Ha-ha," he said. "Joke."

Then I asked him about that fight with Phelan. I told him what Janie had told me. I wasn't afraid of him. When I finished, he pulled way over onto the other side of the seat and looked at me from under those hooded lids of his and twisted his thin, pink little mouth all up, as though he was trying to figure something out. "I'll be damned," he said, finally. "Leo Mace wasn't giving me any bull, then. Because you couldn't have been acting, just now. It was too perfect. I'm really beginning to think it happened like Leo said and you really didn't know what you were doing."

"What do you mean what I was doing?"

"Skip it," he said. "We'll see. In the next few days I'll be able to tell for sure."

It was kind of nice having Mr. Calligy there for company. We hadn't had any before. That night

at the supper table there was a lot of funny talk, though. Like I said, Mr. Calligy was a great kidder. You know what he kept saying? He'd say:

"Rock, old brain, what would you do if your wife ever told you some other guy tried to make her? You know, that he was fooling around with her. What would you do?"

He caught me by surprise. I had to think for a minute. I thought about Janie, and some other guy bothering her, putting his hands on her, trying to kiss her and stuff like that. Seeing that picture in my head made me a little crazy. I slammed the table with my fist so hard I broke a dish. "I'd kill him," I said. My eyes got blurry and I could almost feel myself punching this guy who'd tried to make my wife, like Mr. Calligy said, punching him until he was dead.

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "But, Rocky, they'd electrocute you for that. That would be murder."

"I wouldn't care," I said. "I wouldn't be able to help myself. I love Janie. Nobody was ever so good to me. She's the only girl never wanted me to spend my money, who's never kidded me about bein' punchy and ugly. I'd have to kill anybody who bothered Janie, no matter what happened."

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "He *isn't* kidding. He'd do that. And surer'n hell they'd elec-

trocute him. No more Rocky. Remember that!"

Then he'd say to me: "This is nice up here, Rocky, keed. Up here in the wilds, with a beautiful dame. Do you ever go anywhere, Rocky? I mean do you ever go into town or take any trips, leave this dump at all?"

"No, he doesn't," Janie butted in before I could answer. "When he does, I go with him."

I looked at her, wondering what she said that for. "No, you don't, Janie," I said. "You never go with me. I always go alone. You told me, even, you don't mind being here alone, that there's nothing to be afraid of, way out here."

Mr. Calligy roared with laughter. I thought he'd never stop. Soon I began to laugh with him. I knew I must've said something funny. Janie got up from the table and went out into the kitchen. When Mr. Calligy was through laughing, he hollered out there after her: "Hey, Janie, is that true you aren't afraid of anything here, without Rocky around? The wolves don't bother you or anything?"

I wanted to tell Mr. Calligy we didn't have any wolves around here, only foxes once in a while and sometimes a skunk or two, but I didn't get the chance. He was laughing too hard again.

So Mr. Calligy stayed with us a couple days and he began to look different than when he came. He got some rest and his eyes cleared

and he got some color in his face. He had a lot of expensive sport clothes out of the suitcase he'd taken from the big car. He was real sharp, a good-looking guy and I could see why he was a bigshot in the Rackets. He was real nice to me, too. I liked Mr. Calligy. Even Janie seemed to take to him a little more after a couple of days. Sometimes when I was out chopping wood or drawing water from the well and would come in again, I'd find them talking together, real quiet. Every once in awhile I'd catch her looking at Mr. Calligy with a funny look, too. I could tell she was thinking how it was funny an ex-pug like me would have bigshot friends, handsome and polished like Mr. Calligy.

He was an interesting talker, too. He was always telling us about trips he was going to take when he left here. He'd say: "I may go to Mexico. It's beautiful there, this time of year. With the kind of dough I got stashed away, I could live like a king down there. A big mansion, plenty of servants and a cute little chick to keep me company. She'd have the best of everything, plenty of clothes, a car of her own, never have to do a lick of work. Every night we'd tour the night clubs in Mexico City. Days we'd loll around the beaches, or take in some of that deep sea fishing. Boy, that's the life."

Or else maybe he'd talk about taking a boat trip around the world, or about Monte Carlo, where all the

rich people hang out in Europe, on that there, now, Riviera place, or Rio De Janeiro. And always about all the money he'd spend and the little doll who'd be with him, how she'd enjoy all that, too. Whoever his girl was, she was sure lucky.

Of course, when he'd talk like this, Mr. Calligy hardly looked at me. He sort of just talked to Janie. I guess maybe he thought I wouldn't understand, wouldn't know anything about those places, but, hell, I studied Geography when I was a kid. Most of the time, though, Janie didn't hardly seem to be listening to him. She'd just stare down at her plate. One time, she was listening, though. Mr. Calligy must've said something that reminded her of something sad because her eyes brimmed up. She said: "Will you stop it, stop it!" And she jumped up from the table and ran out into the kitchen.

Toward the end of the week, Mr. Calligy became a bit of a pest. He was always after me to go into town for him. He was out of cigarettes or he wanted some magazines, or something. But Janie wouldn't let me go. She said it wasn't fime for my regular trip, yet. The funny thing was that later Mr. Calligy would find that he had some cigarettes, didn't need any after all, or whatever it was. I guess he was just bored.

I got a little worried about Janie toward the end of that week, though. She got a little snappish and

she looked flushed all the time and at nights she wasn't like a wife should be, at all. I thought maybe she was working too hard trying to make things right for our guest, cooking too much and always cleaning up, scrubbing the floor and washing the windows and all. When I asked her about it, she didn't even answer me. That wasn't like Janie.

Sometimes, too, toward the end of the week, I'd wake up nights and find Janie wasn't there. I'd go out and find her on the front porch or out on the back stoop, looking up at the stars. She'd look real pretty with the moonlight shining on her and her nightgown so thin and all it was like only a mist was covering her. Janie looked swell in a nightgown. But she'd jump when I'd speak to her. When I'd ask her what was the matter, she'd say, quickly:

"Nothing, nothing, Rock, dear. I—I just couldn't sleep, that's all. I thought maybe a little fresh air would help."

Then we'd both be quiet and we'd hear Mr. Calligy snoring, inside, in the guest room. Suddenly Janie would whisper, real fiercely: "When is he going to go? You got to get him out of here, Rocky, before something terrible happens! I don't like him. I can't stand him. I'm afraid of him. Get him to go, please, Rocky."

"Aw, now, Janie," I'd say and take her into my arms and comfort her. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll speak to him, tomorrow. But

you're being silly. Mr. Calligy's a nice guy. What's there to be afraid of? But I'll speak to him."

I did, several times. Mr. Calligy, he only laughed and acted like he thought I was kidding.

Then, the last night of that week, I had this nightmare. It was really bad. It seemed that I woke up and found that Janie wasn't in bed with me again. But I was getting used to that. I started to go back to sleep again. Then I heard a sort of muffled screaming sound from the front porch. I went out there and there was Janie with some guy, I couldn't see who it was, it was so dark and all. The guy had his arms around Janie and was fighting with her and her nightgown was half torn off, and her white skin shining in the dark. I ran toward them and then in the dark and confusion and all, the guy swung his elbow up and around and it caught me flush on the point of the chin. It hurt like crazy for a second and everything in me seemed to burst into fireworks and then something like a blackout came. That was the funny part about this nightmare. It must have ended right in the middle like that. You know how they do. Because I don't remember any more of it. But for the few minutes that wild dream was going on, it was terrible. Just like it was really happening.

I must have slept late the next morning. It was way after sunup when I got up and washed and dressed and went out to the kitchen,

where Janie was moving around, and I could smell bacon frying and coffee boiling. I went out and kissed her, like always. She turned toward me and stared at me. A funny kind of look. Almost as though she was scared. Then it faded.

I said: "You didn't sleep very well last night, either, huh?"

She must have been holding her breath because she let it all out at once. "It's all right, Rocky, then, I guess."

"What is?" I said. "Hey, about the nightmare I had last ——"

She threw herself into my arms. "I know, Rocky, I know," she said. "Please forget about it. Please."

I guess I must have been pretty bad, probably groaning and thrashing around and all and that was how she knew about it.

Then while she was holding onto me real tight like that, she murmured something about I shouldn't ever get angry, I shouldn't ever lose my temper over anything. Not anything. I just laughed and told her: "Me? Why should I get mad at anybody?"

When Janie was all right again and moved away from me, I sat down to breakfast. We were halfway through breakfast before I realized that there was something wrong. Mr. Calligy wasn't there. He never missed breakfast. I said: "Hey, where's the bigshot? Where's Mr. Calligy?"

She kept right on eating, without

looking up. She said after a moment, "He left early this morning, before you got up. He's gone."

"Gone?" I gasped. "What a crazy guy! He didn't even say good-bye to me. He ——" I stopped, remembering something. "Hey, how could he? Without a car or anything?"

"I — I took him in, in the jeep."

"Oh," I said. "You should have waked me, Janie." I was a little sore about it. "You don't drive that jeep very good, like I do."

"Rocky!" She cut me off. She stared across the table at me, her eyes kind of stern and yet soft. She said, very slowly: "Rocky, we're not ever going to discuss Mr. Calligy again. Never, Rocky. That's all."

I didn't get it but I humored her.

It was a little lonesome around there with Mr. Calligy gone. But I got over missing him. A few days after Mr. Calligy left, our well began to stink something awful. Janie told me a skunk fell into it. But when I wanted to climb down and get it out of there, she said, no, she'd never drink that water again, even if we drained the well. She made me dig a new one and fill the old one in. It's a long hard job, digging a well. I cussed that skunk out plenty while I was doing it.

That was almost five years ago. We never heard from Mr. Calligy again. The way he was so fond of me and Janie, I often thought he might come back. He never did, though.

