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CROUCHED DOWN in one corner of the empty freight car, John shivered violently in his cheap, flimsy summer suit. Cold wind slashed through the half open box-car door and flakes of snow gathering on the floor turned to icy slush. John was hungry, his stomach had been growling all morning. Maybe, he thought, he would have been better off if he had stayed jungled up with the 'boes back in Louisville. At least, he might not have been so hungry.

He lit one of his two remaining cigarettes, hoping it would ease the nervous ache in his empty stomach, and pulled the collar of his jacket tighter around his neck.

It had been warm when they had turned John Kelly loose from the Southern State Prison after a seven and a half year bit, less several months good time. The ten dollars they had given him was just about gone; freight trains and hitchhiking don't offer as good a schedule as first-class traveling, and it cost



BY JOACHIM H. WOOS

DESPERATION

John Kelly drew the revolver and pointed it at the old man behind the counter. The reaction was one that he could never have anticipated and John stood rooted to the floor, speechless, dumbfounded.

him to eat and sleep since leaving the gray-walled city.

Funny thing, his hand discovering the snub-nosed .38 at the rear of the box-car when he crawled into it on the outskirts of Louisville. Although the gun was empty it seemed to be in good working condition and, above all, was not rusted. John wondered who had left it and what it had been used for.

Day was breaking as the freight train slowed to a crawl at the edge of the Michigan Central yards. John eased himself through the door and swung down from the car, hit the ground and moved quickly away to a nearby street—off railroad property. He used part of the measley sixty cents he had left riding a bus uptown. A stack of cakes, coffee, and a sack of roll-your-owns left him with three cents.

Walking down Woodward Avenue to Larnard, John felt miserable and cold, the icy wind blowing off of the Detroit River whipping through his thin state-issues as though they were made out of gauze.

It was late afternoon when John made up his mind that he was going to use the .38 hidden under his jacket. He had walked dozens of blocks and he was getting colder and more miserable by the minute. If he could find a small store, take enough money to carry him over for a few days, and then forget about crime forever.

He started walking back towards the business area. He kept his eyes peeled for the right place.

John Kelly was not a professional thief. The business down South, a filling station burglary, was the first time in his life that he had ever broken the law. Now, at 25, he had no ingrained criminal tendencies and, in fact, he had every intention of going straight, working, and staying out of trouble. But chilled to the bone, desperate with hunger and the desire to get inside where it would be warm for the night, he could find only one solution.

Corktown, along Detroit's Michigan Avenue, is the street of hock shops, penny arcades, cheap bars and beaneries. John traversed the avenue several times, stopping only once to look at a menu stuck in the front window of a greasy spoon. The same sounds and smells as a hundred other skid-rows from coast to coast met him at every step of the way.

Finally, he spotted the sort of place he had been looking for, and his heart beat a little faster. He stopped, walked back and casually looked into the show window of the small hock shop. The window was cluttered with so-called bargains in unredeemed pledges inevitable to the sign of the three balls hanging over the entrance.

John tried to keep his hands from shaking despite the icy wind which was sending shivers up his

spine and rattling the partly closed old weather awning overhead. He could see the pawn broker at the rear counter, and the only customer in the shop had just turned toward the door. It was almost closing time; the street lights were on, and the dismal December sky was rapidly turning from gray to black.

The customer left the shop and moved on down the street without so much as a glance at John standing in front of the window. A moment later, John pulled the zipper all the way down on his jacket, and entered the shop.

He moved quickly toward the old man in the back of the place, who had merely glanced up for a moment, as the tinkling door-bell

heralded John's entrance.

Like an automaton, John walked the few remaining steps, his right hand slowly removing the revolver from beneath his jacket. It was warm inside and already some of the chill of his body was leaving, quickly replaced by a tenseness as if subconsciously his mind rebelled at what was coming.

He stopped at the counter, pulled out the snub-nosed revolver, and pointed it at the old man. Then, before he could say more than "Give me . . ." the old man reached across the counter, plucked the .38 from John's nerveless fingers, looked the gun over with a practiced eye and said:

"I'll let you have six bucks on it!"

