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By RON GOULART

Illustrator SUMMERS

# JUNIOR PARTNER



*Not many businesses run on timeclocks, anymore.*

*People dont like to punch in and out.*

*It's undignified. Much better if somebody just dusts  
you with orange powder and puts you in a desk drawer.*

SOMETIMES the street lights come on at six o'clock and sometimes not until nearly eight. Tonight they've come on at 7:35. Eventually I'll have to leave here. I've never really liked my father's office. I don't like it now that it's mine. I can't leave through the outer offices. I can't do that. And the fire escape is attached to the next office over. There's a ledge but it's four stories to the ground and I have a pretty strong fear of heights. That was one of the fail-

ings of mine that my father never tired of pointing out.

He's been dead nearly a month now. There aren't any pictures of him here. His vanity didn't run to the pictorial. Still, I can feel him all over this big damn room. The lousy spears and masks and all the other crap he acquired on his vacations. His vacation always came in July and August. Two months away and always back in time to send me off to whatever new school he'd picked.

Once when I was fourteen I came across one of his catalogues of military academies and there was a pin hole next to the name of the school I was going to that year. As though he'd just flipped the book open and stuck a pin with his eyes closed and that was why I was going to school in Arizona. But then I figured he'd done that just to get at me. I realized he wouldn't leave something like the directing of my life up to chance. April fool pranks were always in season with him.

My father was five feet six inches tall. He always gave his height in inches, though. Sixty six inches. He'd lost all his hair in his early twenties, during the period when he was bumming around Arabia or someplace and screwing the people out of whatever it was they had to be screwed out of. He and my mother separated when I was only a few months old and he kept me.

My mother died when I was eighteen. I don't remember what she looked like and I've never seen a picture of her. My father never mentioned her. I knew she'd died because there were small stories in all the San Francisco papers here. She died in Connecticut. In Westport. There were four papers here in those days I think. That was before the war. I'm nearly forty now.

**T**HERE'S a birthdate on my records but I've never really been sure it's right. Although my father may have been using some kind of purloined letter psychology on me and let me have the real facts. I know I've never really believed him or trusted him from the time I was four or five. As far back as then I have always tried to check him up and prove him wrong. In Elko, Nevada, where I was supposed to have been born, they had no record of it at the city hall. My father and mother did live there in the early twenties, that I found out from old city directories.

It was probably a good thing he kept me scattered across the country. If I'd been here in San Francisco I would have spent all my time checking in the things he'd told me. I found that by the time I got to college I was an expert in research.

After I got out of the army after the war I wanted to get a teaching position at some small junior college outside of California. But somehow I ended up here. I started off as promotion manager of Arlen Keever Enterprises. That's my father. Arlen Keever, Sr. I, of course, am junior.

Every morning sharp at 8:45 all our employees showed up. Only once, the time Hollis fell off the cable car and broke his leg,

was anyone ever late. Our employees, roughly 150 of them, split their lunches up. Half of them went from 12 to 12:45, the rest from 1 to 1:45. According to my father, only female employees are entitled to a coffee break, under the law. So every morning at 10:05 half the girls went to coffee. At 10:25 they came back. The rest went to coffee at 10:30 and came back at 10:50. A similar schedule held for the afternoon break.

That's how things ran until my father fell down dead right under the Haitian drums on the wall over there. Since I've assumed the running of Keever Enterprises we've been operating in what my father would have called a slipshod and haphazard manner.

As far as I can tell, and I know how to make an impressive variety of charts and graphs to check this sort of thing, our efficiency and production haven't dropped off since my father's methods stopped being used.

**A**BOUT five weeks ago, when he began to realize he was dying, my father explained his system to me in detail. I'd heard his rules and maxims as far back as I can remember. I'm sure he circled my crib and ran off some of his chats on virtue, punctuality, thrift and the rest. But the system was new to me.

Being a junior partner in Keever Enterprises I was allowed a full hour for lunch. When I came back that particular day there was a memo on my desk from my father.

"Junior," it said, "As soon as you straggle back from lunch please come and ask Miss Spaulding if you can see me. I have some urgent business I want to chat with you about. If you have been drinking please take one of the mints I've left on your desk, which could stand a good re-organization by the way."

There were two white after-dinner mints sitting next to my In box. The only other thing on the desk top was a file of letters I'd been going through. I put it in a file drawer and, dusting the desk top with my handkerchief, went out to Miss Spaulding's desk.

My father was free and after Miss Spaulding smiled and tilted her head at his door I went up to it and knocked. My knock was two short, three long.

"Enter, enter," called my father.

I did. "You wanted to see me, sir."

"That's right, junior. You figured my memorandum out perfectly. You're getting to be almost efficient. How's your wife?"

I've been divorced for over a year. "I don't hear from her. I

send the alimony checks to her bank and that's it."

"I'm not in very good shape," he said.

I'd suspected something might be wrong with him. He wasn't circling his desk, just sitting back in his swivel chair, his hands folded in his lap. "What is it?" I asked him.

"I've talked to Dr. Weiner and he says it's my old time piece."

My father rarely referred directly to any part of the body. "Your heart?"

"What the heck else would I mean." He pulled a cigar out of the black cigar humidior and screwed the lid back on. "I have a hunch I may be passing along beyond soon, junior."

I felt an odd pain across my chest. "You're not serious?"

"Do I have a reputation for sick humor?" His face wrinkled up. "Yes, I'm serious."

"But you can take it easy. Rest. Go to the desert. People do things like that," I said. "And it adds years to your life."

"Fiddle," he said. "Isn't your real concern over whether or not you can step into my boots and do the job. You don't care if I'm here or over in glory playing in the angel band. Do you?"

"Of course, I care, sir." I began to wonder if this was another one of his games.

"Your grandfather was a professional wrestler before he went

into the cattle business," he said, slowly pushing himself back from his desk. "I've seen your grandmother bulldog a seer unaided. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"They must have had some great family quarrels."

HE gave a strong push and was free of his desk and chair and standing. "Your ancestors were tough, courageous people. Pioneer types. You know that one of our family was a close friend of Robert Burns. And poets weren't pansies in those days."

"I know, sir."

"It's time, junior," said my father, getting his hands locked behind him, "that you start giving a hand to heredity. When I've moved on I want you to run the show here, mind the store while your pop's out on the road."

I had a feeling he might be serious. He never called himself my pop unless he was in a straight mood. I said, "You don't have to talk like this, sir. I'm sure you'll live a long time."

"With a bum ticker? Like heck I will." He was at one of the wall safes. The one behind the African mask on the far wall. "You'll have to memorize the combinations to the safes. It's time for you to know them." He swung the safe open and took out

an old book, bound in some kind of soft pale yellow leather. "I picked this up in Europe some thirty years ago." He came slowly back to his desk and dropped the book on it. "Now for the other safe." He stood still for almost three minutes, breathing softly through his mouth. Then he crossed slowly to the big stand up safe next to the bookcases. "Whatever you do, butterfingers, don't drop the tray. I keep these things activated all the time. It saves work and trouble."

He smiled to himself, opened the safe and took out a cafeteria sized tray and brought it back to his desk. There seemed to be a set of chess pieces, or more likely, two sets on the tray. I glanced down at the figures. They weren't chessmen, but toy soldiers of some kind. I'm near-sighted and I had to get my glasses out to take a good look at the little figures.

By that time my father was standing in front of his desk, looking at the tray. "The staff," he said.

"What are they, sir? From a doll house."

"Take a good look," he said.

I bent down. The figures were dressed in business suits and dresses and skirts. "Very fine workmanship."

"Thank you. I made them myself. You'll find the directions and the recipes in that book."

"You want me to make dolls?"  
"The faces," said my father.  
"Squint, junior. See the faces."

I GUESS I'd been avoiding that. Hey. There's Beckman. And Tom Hockford and Larry O'Brien. And Nancy Ferrier and . . ." I stopped. There was a four inch high doll replica of about half the people who worked for us. I looked up at my father. "You have them for everyone on the floor?"

He nodded. "Our entire staff, yes."

"It's certainly an interesting hobby, sir," I said. "I didn't know you went in for this sort of thing."

"Hobby my knee," he said, looking at the big wall clock. The clock is just like a school room clock, all our clocks are. The hands jumped to 1:40 and my father went around behind his desk. "Time for them to start coming back." He twisted the humidor lid the wrong way and a small drawer clicked out. There was a packet of orange powder in it. "The set of Conrad on the shelf over there is fake. You'll find more of this stuff," he jiggled the packet, "in there. About a year's supply left. Recipe's in this book when you run out. I find making up a two year supply each time is a good idea. It stays effective about that long."

"I see."

**O**PENING a side drawer of his desk he pulled it out completely. He set the drawer on his desk next to the tray, sprinkled some powder over the figures on the tray and muttered something I couldn't catch. "Now when you do this, thumbs, be very careful. Don't squeeze." He picked a doll off the tray. It was Carl Kieffer, in accounting. He put the doll into the drawer and took another off the tray. When he'd finished all our employees were back in the drawer and the tray was empty. "Lunch is over."

Dimly through the thick door of his office I could hear the shufflings people make when they return to their desks after lunch.

I knew he wanted me to ask questions. I didn't want to give in, but finally I said, "What is all this exactly, sir?"

"About half voodoo and half European witchcraft. Have you got the system clear in your mind?"

"Voodoo?"

"Look," said my father, "when they're in the drawer they have to work. Except for going to the bathroom and such, that's allowed in the basic spell." He lifted the drawer gingerly and fitted it back into his desk. "When they're on the tray they're at lunch or coffee. I have a special auxiliary spell for doctor's appointments, family troubles, funerals. You'll find it all explained

in the book. My marginal notes will show you how the spells can be updated to fit contemporary business needs." He sat back in his chair. "At five sharp you transfer them out of the drawer and back onto the tray. That means they can go home and be on their own until the next morning. If you should want overtime just leave them in the drawer. If you want one of them to come back use a little powder and take him off the tray and put him back in the drawer. That'll fetch him back here in a hurry." He tapped his forefinger on the edge of his desk. "Remember, junior. There's no room for clumsiness. Anything that happens to the dolls while they're activated happens to the person, too. And I keep them activated all the time. You see, to put the doll in sympathy with the person you have to apply an individual spell. It's too much trouble to activate each one every day. So I leave them on." He rocked slightly in his chair. "I was only clumsy once. That's how Hollis broke his leg." He rocked forward and stayed there. "The working and staying on the job spells you can apply to the whole batch. That kind of spell has to be worked everyday. Are you absorbing this?"

I watched my father for a moment. "I'm not sure I understand all you're saying, sir."

"Well," he said, "I don't see

why not. It's certainly simple enough. Even you should be able to understand it. You'll have to learn to handle it, because when I pass on you, unfortunately, will be running things." He turned away from me and looked out the window.

"Running what?"

HE spun back, frowning. "Isn't it obvious enough? You should know by now that you can't trust the average office worker, nor expect him to give a damn. Do you think if you leave them on their own they'll do anything but loaf around and complain about salaries? With these dolls I can control them. I can keep them at their desks, regulate their lunch hours and make certain that I get the maximum of work and efficiency that I am paying them for. He smiled, but not quite at me. "I picked up the book in Provence nearly thirty years ago. The work of a monk who lived in the late 1400's. He was burned as a result of his researches, but a few copies of his book survived. By putting his findings together with my knowledge of the way things are done in Haiti and few other places I came up with these dolls."

"You're saying that all the years I've been working here the people who work for us have been controlled by some kind of magic?"

"Some of this may not seem ethical to you," said my father. "But it isn't always a question of right and wrong. The problem centers around what's best for most people. I've kept a lot of people working with this system, even during Roosevelt's depression."

"You're serious?"

"You bet your life," he said, pushing himself to a standing position. "You're going to learn how to use the dolls. Keever Enterprises will keep going as it has been after I'm gone. You're the only son I have and so you're going to do this and you're not going to let me down."

"All right, father. All right." I shook my head several times. "I'm not feeling well. I'd like to take the afternoon off."

"You might like to," he said, "but you won't. At a quarter to five you'll be right back in here and I'll show you how to send them all home." He sank into his chair like a slowly deflating balloon. "Here. I'll give you the safe combinations." He eased a sheet of paper off the memo pad, wrote some numbers on it and held it out.

I reached down and took it. "Very well, sir. I'll try to start learning them."

"You'll know the combinations before you leave right now. Come on. Get them memorized and then destroy that paper."



He had me read off the numbers. And then recite them without looking. After about fifteen minutes he was satisfied. "Be back in here at 4:45, junior."

I nodded and started for the door. I stopped, my chest tightening again. "Father," I said.

"Yes, junior?"

"Is there a doll for me?"

"I don't need one for you," he said.

**O**UTSIDE I tried not to look at anyone. I didn't have a door on my office but I sat facing away from everyone.

I got out the file of letters I'd been checking through and opened it. Gradually, as I went over what he had said in my mind, I came to feel that this was probably another of his tricks. Some elaborate prank he spent months working out.

But as I went back to his office just before quitting time I found I still couldn't bring myself to look directly at anyone. If someone called a greeting I waved without turning my head.

I couldn't even face Miss Spaulding squarely when I asked to see my father.

When I was back inside with him he said, "Let's hear the combinations, junior."

I had a feeling I was going to stammer, but I got hold of myself and, even though he was saying, "Come on, come on", I took my

time and recited the numbers correctly.

"Well," said my father, putting the drawer up on his desk again. "You did very well. Now stand by. I'll get the tray and you can help me put them away for today."

Getting my glasses on I looked into the drawer. Each doll had its own private pigeon hole.

My father got the empty tray from the safe and brought it back, putting it next to the drawer. At exactly five he started taking the dolls out of the drawer and putting them back on the tray. "You can lift a few, junior. Do it gently, not too much thumb."

From the outer office, filtered by the thick door, came faint sounds of people leaving.

When the dolls were all back on the tray my father said, "They're on their own until tomorrow. You'll be here at 7:30 sharp to start them on their way to work."

**F**OR the next two days we went through the same ritual. I wasn't able to get much sleep. Naturally enough I kept dreaming about dolls and tiny offices filled with very small employees.

Then on a Friday, nearly a month ago, my father died. We had put the dolls all on their tray and he had locked them away in the safe, on their own for the

weekend. The offices were empty and I had gone back to my desk to pick up a batch of work I was taking home. The walls of my father's office are so substantial that I never heard him fall. But when I went back and knocked my knock nothing happened. I tried the knock twice and then went in, prepared to apologize. He was on the floor, quite still.

It flashed through my mind that this might be some joke of his. That if I cried out he would jump up and smile at me. Still I knew he was dead. And, quietly and efficiently, in a very business like manner, I took care of all the details.

Work at Kever Enterprises resumed on the following Wednesday. When I arrived that morning, a little after nine, I found all our employees there. Apparently they didn't need the dolls to make them come in. As I began to fall into the routine of managing the business I came to feel that the dolls had been simply another of my father's elaborate tests.

I did look through the monk's book. I studied it and my father's penciled in instructions and additions. I could find no formula for de-activating the dolls. There were a great many erasures and corrections and I may have missed it. Then, too, there was quite a lot of it I just didn't understand.

The dolls themselves I left locked away. The people in the office came and went more casually, but I figured that was simply because my father was gone and I was known to be unlike him. I didn't want to believe it was because I wasn't sprinkling orange powder on the dolls every morning.

As I sat here, trying to keep my mind on the running of Kever Enterprises, I kept looking at the safe that held the dolls. I made up my mind I didn't want them here. The thing to do was move them. I'd store them in the family home on Pacific Heights, where I was now living again. Put them up in the attic, wrapped in cotton. That was the answer. Put them away and forget them.

I knew my father wanted me to be bothered by the dolls. He'd expected me to fool around with them, experiment. Even do research on the theories behind them. No more. Now that he was dead I wasn't going to spend one more day of my life checking his stories and testing his lies.

AT noon today—and I took two hours for lunch and had two gibsons—I got a large box and lots of tissue paper from the gift wrapping department at I. Magin's. I had to give them ten dollars before they'd give me the box without anything in it.

I came back here and went over to the big safe. It took me three tries but I finally got the combination right and opened it. I carefully got out the tray of dolls.

Just short of the desk I tripped on a dropped pencil and the tray slammed against the desk and then fell toward the floor. I tried to catch the tray but I lost my balance all together and fell forward on top of the tray and the dolls.

I made quite a lot of noise

when I fell. But I'm almost certain I heard shouting and cries of pain from outside, through the heavy door. Every last doll is broken, one way or another. I haven't heard a sound from out there since then.

I don't know what to do. I'm afraid to look outside into the offices. I have the feeling that somehow I've done exactly what my father expected me to do. He's criticized my clumsiness since I was five years old.

**THE END**