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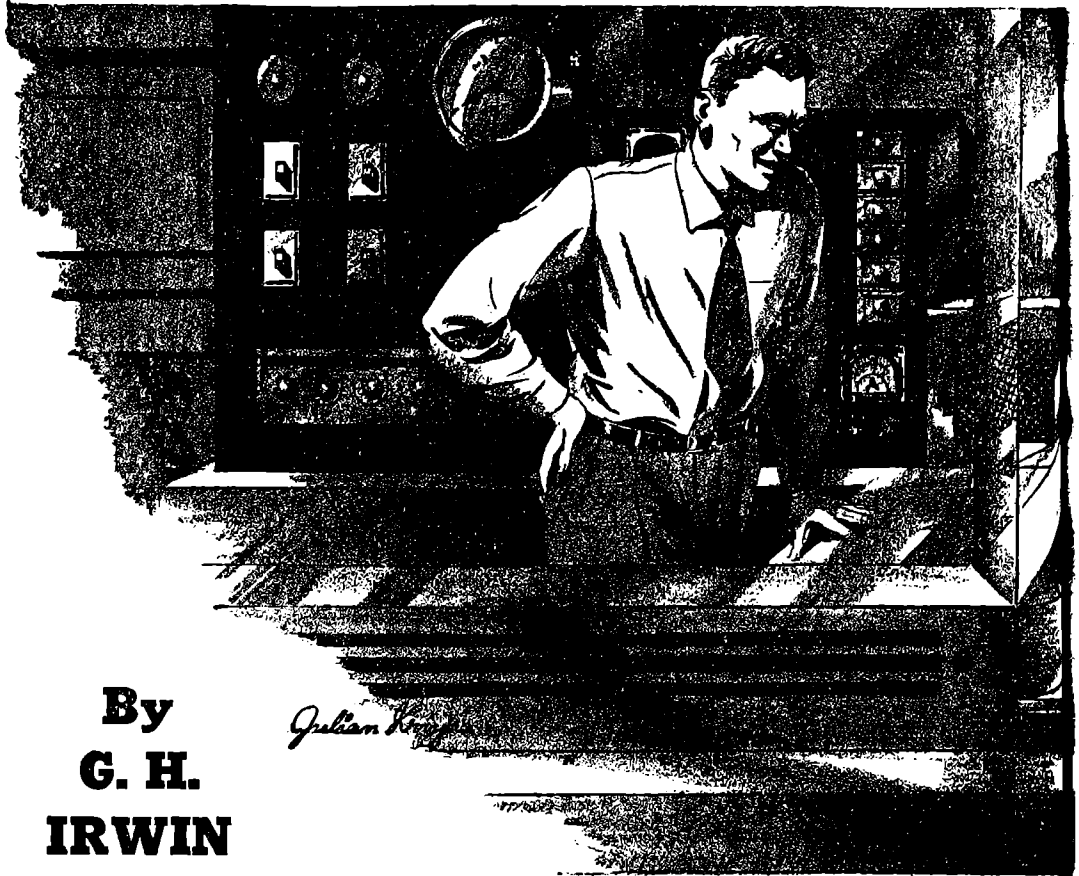
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YOU CAN SAY



By
**G. H.
IRWIN**

Reese went all out for Truth- Then the trouble really started!

BILL REESE, a little uncomfortable in the small booth, leaned forward toward the table mike and pressed down the contact button. A small red light flashed on the panel at his elbow.

He nodded toward Robert Langly, sound man for WZZB, who was comfortably stretched across a leather

chair in the control room. Langly reached over and snapped on the receiver.

Reese started to read in a low, informative voice.

“Good evening! This is Bill Reese speaking to you for Mellow’s Fine Whiskey. Mr. Mellow has a confidential message for all of his radio listen-

THAT AGAIN



Neither Reese nor Langly saw the shadowy figure tampering with the water cooler

ers. This is a time for every man to remain alert and on the job. Mellow's liquors have been carefully aged under the finest conditions. No harshness. No headaches the morning after."

Reese stopped abruptly, tossed the looseleaf away from him and stood up.

"Damn!" he shouted. "Bob, I'm fed up on the lousy commercials. So help me, Mellow doesn't make a drink that's any better than the next guy's. As for the hangover, I'm still groggy from that free stuff he peddled to us last night."

Langly, still motionless in the outer studio, grinned at him through the glass panel.

"So we've got the first real sponsor WZZB has seen in a year. There's a trial show on for tonight. Are you going to land the contract or shall we just fold up the sound equipment and quietly steal away?"

Reese, tall, and topped with a thick mop of red hair, sat down again. He reached for the carefully prepared commercial, put it before him and started to read again.

"Mellow's Whiskey is *better*. Made especially for men who appreciate the finest . . ."

He stopped, snapped off the light and went out to the control room.

"Guess I'm getting sour." He walked across the room, switched off the speaker and leaned on the recording machine. "Honest to Pete, if it isn't Celia's Chocolates, *so* good they'll melt in your fingers, it's Mellow and his damned rotgut that will kill a man if he soaks up more than a gallon of it."

Langly arose meekly, brushed his hair into a semblance of straightness and went to the watercooler. He filled a paper cup as he talked over his shoulder.

"Reese, you're not meant for this small time stuff. I'm only a half-cracked technician and WZZB is about my style. Ever since the boss hired you, I've thought you ought to have your own show. You got a lot of ideas—good ones. Why don't you break loose?"

Reese chuckled.

"Make a second Walter Winchell of myself?" he said. "Yeah! I know. I've got a file of stuff that would break this town wide open. I've saved up enough dirt to cover every office in the city. So what? Shelton is a weak-kneed sissy. He can't stand having WZZB made a hot spot. He'd rather go broke and fold up than give his listeners something to think about."

Langly finished drinking, turned and stared at his friend.

"There are other outfits."

"Sure, I know." Reese went to the cooler. "There's one other station in town. WZRX gets the network shows and leaves the local stuff for us. Well, Bob, I'm local stuff myself. WZRX doesn't want any part of me. I've been tamed for so long that there isn't any originality left in me. I'll be reading

the comics to the kids pretty soon, and I'll be in just the spot where I belong."

He tossed the paper cup into the basket, opened a fresh pack of cigarettes and lighted one.

ACROSS the hall, Howard Shelton's voice rose to a high pitch from an office marked *Private*.

Shelton was having his weekly argument with the Celia's Chocolates account. Chocolates were selling faster than the factory could make them, but Shelton's accounts were never satisfied. WZZB had a reputation for being small-time and Shelton's customers knew it. There was always that little matter of cutting the cost of broadcasts. The station was fighting a losing battle.

"Nuts!" Reese tossed the cigarette on the floor and ground it with his heel. "I'm going out for coffee. Got that special mike set up in B for the great James Mellow to speak over?"

Langly grinned.

"Studio B is ready for the show," he said. "I'd like to give Mellow a hot-foot when he goes on the air. That's the only way we'll put any pep into the show."

Reese went out. Langly didn't look up. After a while he pushed a wax disc on the turntable and plugged in the speaker. The strains of *St. Louis Woman* filled the room. Langly, staring sadly out the window, shook his head.

"Bill Reese," he said slowly to himself. "One of the best announcers on the air chained to a jerk outfit like this."

WZZB hummed sadly with half-hearted activity. Studio B, a square, twenty-foot box hung with heavy curtains, held a fair audience. James Mellow, fat, fifty, and sporting

a gray suit and beard of like color, sat on the stage. His daughter, Sharon, a bit of fluff, low-cut gown and sweet smile, was beside him. The officers of Mellow's Fine Whiskey, Inc., were ranged carefully in the front row and the studio band waited to open the show.

In the sound booth above the stage, Robert Langly hung listlessly over the controls, receiver adjusted to his ears. Canned music for Celia's Chocolates came in clearly from Studio A. He heard Shelton switch off the last record and read the commercials. Help was hard to get. Shelton made sure that Bill Reese was fresh for the Mellow job.

Langly leaned forward, nodded toward Reese who was standing alone on the side of the stage. He saw Reese lean over the watercooler, fill a glass with water and smack his lips as he drank. Reese took another long gulp, put the cup down silently and walked to the mike.

Langly held up a finger. The red light under the clock went on and the studio's lights dimmed. The orchestra was poised to strike.

The finger went down and Bill's voice came clearly over the receiver.

"Good evening! This is Bill Reese speaking for Mellow's Fine Whiskey . . ."

Why did it flatter people to hear their name on the air? Reese went on, a spark of life in his voice that surprised Langly. Maybe Bill would make the best of it, after all.

Langly found himself admiring Mellow's daughter. Sharon had a lot of character in that small face. Mellow himself leaned forward in his chair, fat paunch rolling over the edge of it.

"This is the time for every man to remain alert . . ."

"Swell," Langly thought. "A nice

job. Now, if the music is good, maybe we'll get out of the red after all."

But something had gone wrong.

He saw Mellow tense suddenly. The girl, Sharon, flushed an unpleasant red. Langly hadn't been listening. His ears were accustomed to sounds and not words. Bill Reese's face had darkened and his lips twitched strangely. Langly listened and horror whitened his face.

Reese was tearing hell out of that commercial.

"There's a war on." His voice was loud and inspired. "Any damned fool that would befuddle his wits with the rot-gut that Mellow sells, is committing sabotage."

Langly heard the rising sounds of protest from below. He knew he should cut Reese off the air but his fingers refused to touch the switch. Reese must know what he was doing. He'd worked out an idea of his own.

"Good for you, boy," Langly's lips moved soundlessly. "Give 'em hell."

Reese droned on.

"Mellow makes fire water that will take the lining out of a boiler. Any man who drinks more than a small glass will curl up his toes and nourish the daisies inside of a year. I assure you . . ."

The door opened quickly behind Langly. He turned to see Howard Shelton, the station owner, come in. Shelton's face was brick-red. His fists were clenched.

"Cut that fool off the air," Shelton shouted. "Cut him off before I smash the panel with my bare hands."

He ran across the sound room. Langly pushed out one foot, caught him neatly on the shin and sent him sprawling full length on the floor.

"And now, Mellow's lousy whiskey presents a half hour of music by the worst band this side of the Rockies,"

Reese was saying. "How anyone can stay tuned to this show after the first number, I don't know. Bill Reese, folks, signing off for all time. It was nice knowing you."

Shelton was on his feet again. With one savage lunge he knocked Langly from his chair and snapped the main switch. Langly, sitting cross-legged on the floor, heard James Mellow utter a shrill cry of anger.

"Nice going, Bill," Langly whispered. "Now we're both looking for a new job."

BILL REESE stared moodily along the bar, reached for the third glass of beer and tossed it down.

"Bob," he said a trifle unsteadily. "Bob, ol' man, I'm the one who got you into this mess. What are we gonna do about it?"

Langly, both elbows on the bar, head bent forward over his own glass, allowed a groan to escape his lips.

"I oughta take it out of your hide," he said. "But damned if Shelton didn't have it coming to him. That was the nicest one-man war I've ever seen. How you ever got the courage . . ."

Reese looked at him gravely.

"I didn't," he said. "I fully meant to give the best in me to land that account. Something inside me went haywire. I didn't have any control over myself. It was as though someone else was doing the talking."

Langly smiled sadly.

"The mistake we always make," he said, "is trying to figure out these things when we're drunk. My mind's not too steady either."

Reese swallowed his drink and climbed wearily off the stool.

"I'm telling the truth," he said. "Everything was all right until I got in front of that mike. Then suddenly I felt as though I had to tell the truth.

I meant to lie as usual and give the product a build-up. Something inside me went wrong. I said just what I thought and I couldn't change a word of it."

Langly shrugged.

"Okay, if that's your story. Anyhow, we might as well get out of town. There's nothing here for us now. WZRX must be laughing their fool heads off. We tossed old man Mellow and his millions right into their lap." Reese was suddenly solemn.

"Honest to God, Bob," he said. "I didn't want to hurt you. I don't understand why you didn't cut me off the air before I made a fool of us."

"Maybe I thought it was about time someone told Shelton off. I thought you had something up your sleeve and I figured it wouldn't do any harm to play along with you."

"It did," Reese said. "It put us both out in the cold."

Langly stared moodily ahead.

"You can say that again," he said.

SHARON MELLOW was angry. Her father had always been a fat, over-important fool but tonight he was worse than ever. Sharon, perhaps because her father had been ready to murder the announcer at WZZB, found herself strangely attracted to Bill Reese. There was a reason for that, also. To begin with, Reese, as she saw him before the mike, had been tall, good-looking and had a mind of his own. Sharon enjoyed the beating her father had taken. It was good for him, good for all of them to have their self-importance knocked out from under them once in a while.

Sharon did not like Curt Randon of Station WZRX. Randon was one of those slick-haired kids with a smooth tongue and eyes that were either narrow and averted or drinking her in with

an unwholesome stare.

The Shadow Grill was crowded. James Mellow was still in a sour mood and Curt Randon practically wagged with a friendliness that he hoped would end in a long-term contract for his WZRX.

Randon smiled at Sharon across the table.

"It was unfortunate that your father attempted the WZZB arrangement," he said. "Reese is a hot-headed fool. The station has no access to a network. I believe that my own outfit will be able to handle the show with the dignity it deserves."

Mellow grunted pleasantly, but Sharon's eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

"Perhaps Mr. Reese didn't do so badly after all," she said. "I've heard a number of your shows. They are all about the same. It might surprise you to know that we've had a hundred calls today commenting on Mr. Reese's remarks. The listeners thought it was a great joke. They are paying more attention to the product than they ever did after previous shows."

Randon brought out his flashiest smile.

"But surely, Miss Mellow," he protested. "Crackpots are always looking for this sort of thing. WZRX will offer a steady, well-balanced program. We've been in the business for . . ."

Sharon stood up.

"Dad," she said. "I'm tired of this whole thing. Frankly, I think you should give Mr. Reese another try. He wasn't a bad sort. After all, phone orders have come in by the dozen today. It can't *all* be a mistake."

Mellow looked angrily up at her.

"I think you're interested in Reese," he said. "So far as I'm concerned, Shelton, Reese and WZZB are out of the question. I'm signing a contract tomorrow with Randon for a three-year

network show. Good night, Sharon."

Sharon Mellow flashed a savage look at Randon, caught his open stare and turned away quickly.

"You're running the business, Dad," she said. "It's been losing money for six months. I guess you can keep on losing as easily as I can. Good night."

She walked swiftly toward the check room.

Curt Randon stared after her with admiration in his black eyes.

"You're daughter has spirit, Mr. Mellow," he said.

"A damned hot temper, you mean. For once she's not getting her way and it hurts like hell."

WITH no goal to speak of, Bill Reese hit most of the night spots before twelve. Langly, his ever-present shadow, followed him into the Shadow Grill soon after midnight. They weaved unsteadily across the room, found a booth and flopped. Langly leaned forward on the table. There was an unsteady sob in his voice.

"Ish an injustish," he moaned. "The more I think about it, the more injustish it ish."

Reese motioned for the waiter and ordered more drinks. They sat silently for a long time, drinking themselves into a deeper state of misery as the minutes rolled by.

Gradually Reese became aware of a familiar voice coming from the booth behind him. Not quite sure of himself, he squinted savagely, concentrating on that voice.

He shook his head suddenly in complete agreement with himself. It was Curt, all right. Curt Randon of WZRX and his friend Walter Phillips. Reese hated Randon and his goose-grease hair. He hated WZRX and right now, he hated himself.

He tried to ignore Randon's voice but

there was a note of triumph in it that he couldn't push aside.

"Fixed for all time," Randon's voice was low. "Mellow is ready to sign with us tomorrow. It's in the bag."

"Mellow," Bill Reese thought. "So they're gloating over our downfall. Their drinking to their damned, lousy victory."

He nodded slightly to Langly and Langly shook his head in understanding. They both were silent, waiting for Randon to go on.

"What I can't figure out—" It was Phillips' high-pitched voice. "—is the way Reese fell into it. The stuff worked like a charm."

Stuff worked like a charm?

Reese stiffened. What the devil were those two up to? Randon chuckled.

"Wish I could get more of it," he said "The druggist said the little guy only sold him a quart. I still got a pint left."

It didn't make sense. A pint of what? What little guy?

There was a sudden scraping of feet in the other booth. One of them had stood up.

"Truth serum!" Phillips was speaking in an awed tone. "You put it in the water cooler, Reese drinks it and talks himself out of a job. You're smart, Randon, plenty smart."

Truth serum?

The glass in Bill Reese's hand fell to the table. His face turned a dull red. He *had* been drinking from that cooler. He took a glass of water just before he went on the show. He hadn't wanted to wreck the Mellow account, but he had said a lot of things he didn't mean to.

Then this was the explanation!

Reese stood up quickly. His fists were clenched. Langly, all the alcohol in him suddenly turned to fighting blood, rose opposite him.

"Curt Randon has a couple of broken bones overdue," Reese said simply.

"Think you'd like some exercise?"

Langly nodded.

"Lead on, my boy," he said.

REESE stepped out of the booth. The two WZRX men were just leaving. Reese confronted Randon and had the pleasure of seeing Randon's face turn an ugly white.

"Hello, Curt," Reese said. "Hear you got the Mellow account?"

Langly sidled closer. Walter Phillips, his small face pinched and strained, stood behind Randon.

"Glad to see you, Reese." Randon's lips curled into an unpleasant grin. "Yes, Mr. Mellow saw the light. I understand you pulled a boner for his benefit."

Reese stepped close to him.

"You understand?" His fists clenched. "You were around the corner listening in on every word. You've been talking too much, Curt."

Randon realized, now, that his conversation had been overheard.

He tried to bluff.

"You're a hot-headed fool, Reese," he said. "I've offered you a job before and you had the bad nature to tell me where I could get off. Now you're all washed up. Don't blame me . . ."

He stopped suddenly, backing away. Reese's eyes narrowed. With slow, deliberate pleasure he aimed a right at Randon's straight nose and put his shoulder behind the blow. Fist and nose met with a dull crunching sound.

Randon tottered backward, caught his balance, and wiped his hand across the bleeding, slightly off-center target of Reese's blow.

"You—you dirty . . ."

His left swung out but Reese was under it, 'way under. Reese balanced himself on his toes, and came up from underneath with an uppercut. With a groan of pain, Randon went down. He

turned over on his stomach, tried to stand up, then sank back to the carpet. He'd had enough.

The headwaiter and a couple of bouncers were on their way. Langly had been busy. His collar was ripped away and his left eye was swelling slowly. Walter Phillips was flat on his back, head against the wall, a silly expression on his face. WZZB had triumphed.

Langly saw the headwaiter.

"Maybe we oughta move along before the riot squad comes," he said. "I'm not quite up to a mass battle, tonight."

Reese didn't hear him. His eyes were glued on a half-filled bottle that stuck from Randon's back pocket. An idea was forming rapidly in his mind. WZRX had to expect retaliation.

He leaned over and drew the bottle from Randon's pocket. He pushed it into his own and turned to the crew of huskies who had finally reached the scene.

Reese faced them, a slow grin forming on his lips.

"There's been bloodshed here," he said slowly. "I'm gonna go peacefully if I can, but if you guys insist I'm still good for a few rounds."

The headwaiter, a stout, cautious man, considered the situation carefully. His customers didn't pay to see a prize-fight. Reese was a big man and plenty handy with his fists. Aside from that, the waiter didn't particularly like Curt Randon. The big shot from WZRX wasn't so hot on tips.

"Get the hell out of here, you two," he said. "You oughta' know better than mess up my place."

Reese pocketed his fists.

"You're a wise man," he said solemnly. "If there are any broken bones, tell Randon to try and collect for the doctor's fees!"

SHARON Mellow cruised slowly along 56th Street in the low-slung coupe. She had tried to find Reese at WZZB but Shelton wasn't in a gay mood. She remembered his exact words and tried not to be shocked by them.

"What, those two ungrateful saps?" Howard Shelton had moaned. "They put me on the spot, lose my cash for me and take a run-out powder. I don't know where they went but, by the gods, they better not come back!"

After that, Sharon's search was a long one, leading to various unpleasant places. From bar to bar, guided by the memory of barkeepers who had watched Reese stagger in and out again, she finally reached the Shadow Grill. Here the trail was hot. So hot that she met Curt Randon, a bloody handkerchief held to his nose, just leaving the club. She learned from the headwaiter that Reese had taken a cab. The doorman remembered Reese.

"Heard him tell the cabby that he and his pal wanted to go over to WZRX," he said. "That's on 40th Street, I think."

Sharon murmured a polite thank you, and headed for WZRX. Had Reese signed up with the rival station? It didn't sound like it, not with Curt Randon suffering from the effects of his recent battle. Sharon liked Reese better all the time. Since she had taken a good look at the battered Randon, she almost loved Reese. The boy had something.

The car purred smoothly as she guided it toward the darkened building at the far end of 40th. WZRX was a big, square affair, with block glass windows and a neon sign announcing to the world that "This is WZRX—The Biggest Little Station On The Air."

Sharon drove into the parking-lane behind the building, turned off the ignition and climbed out. There was no

one in sight, but the side door was open slightly and a light burned on the second floor. Sharon was suddenly conscious of the flimsy, silvery gown and the small silver sandals that did little to protect her from the wind. She wondered what she would say when she found Reese. So far as she knew, he didn't even know her.

Wishing that she hadn't started after him in the first place, she realized it was too late to back out now.

She walked quickly across the concrete drive, pushed the door open and hesitated. The halls were deserted and filled with the echo of her own small pumps. She found the stairs, shrugged in that "Oh well, might as well" manner and went toward the second floor.

LANGLY was hunched over the controls. The studio was deserted. This was only the local studio of WZRX. Tonight the network shows were being pushed directly through the power station ten miles from town and the city studios were closed.

Langly found the switches he was looking for, then glanced at his watch. He turned to smile at Reese.

"They'll change shows in five minutes," he said. "We'll plug in then, cut off the network program and give you the air."

Reese was stone sober. Anger glinted in his eyes.

"Air," he said, "is going to be the name for it. I'm going to air everything I know about this town and the people in it. Langly, my boy, they gave me a shot of truth serum, didn't they?"

Langly nodded gravely.

"They did that."

Reese pulled the bottle from his pocket and put it on the table before him.

"Then I suppose this pint of amber fluid is what's left of the stuff?"

Langly shook his head again.

"I would say so," he admitted. "Although I still don't understand just what it is."

Reese chuckled.

"I do," he said. "If a little of it mixed in water will crack me as wide open as I was tonight, a pint ought to be enough to finish off our stay in this fair city in fine style. Brother, when I get started, don't be surprised at anything. I'll probably tell a lot of stuff I haven't even dared tell Grandma."

Langly began to look worried. He glanced at the studio clock. Three minutes to nine.

"Look, Bill," he said uncertainly. "You still think we ought to go through with this?"

Reese, sitting comfortably behind the small table, miked before him, scowled.

"We lost a job because of Randon," he said. "Now we're getting our revenge. When I get done talking over my best enemy's station there'll be a representative from every city office ready to sue WZRX for everything it's got. We're gonna' make Randon sweat as he made us sweat. Then we'll catch the first train out of town and keep going until we cool off. Are you still game?"

Langly turned quickly at a slight sound in the hall outside. He listened, waiting for it to come again, but all was silent.

"I'm game," he said. "Wind up, brother, here comes the ball!"

Nine o'clock.

He pulled a lever down quickly, pressed a small row of buttons and watched with satisfaction as the red lights started to glow above them. Under the clock, a warning light flashed, then glowed steadily.

REESE picked up the bottle and gulped the contents hurriedly. He

made a wry face, wiped his lips and put the bottle aside. Leaning close to the mike, he felt new confidence surge into his brain.

"This is Bill Reese speaking to you through the courtesy of himself, Almighty God and a knack for getting into places he's not wanted."

He stopped, wiped sweat from his face and continued.

"For some time this announcer has felt an ever-growing disgust for the stuff pawned off on you poor, unsuspecting saps, under the name of legitimate advertising. You are told to wash your hair with *Drainish* that will get rid of dandruff, grow a new wig for the old, and help Grandma get rid of her gallstones. You have been told that toothpaste can grow new teeth and land a husband for the poor girl who has lost hers—the teeth I mean. In short, you've been told that the ills of mankind can be cured by one short trip to the nearest soda fountain, drug store or grocery chain.

"Folks, this will hurt, but the whole thing is a vast lie. Barnum has nothing on us poor boobs who read commercials for a living. We sit chained to our table, reciting with feverish voices, the many wonders of the junk we sell."

He paused, moistened his lips and winked at Langly. Thus far there had been no interruption. All was well and Random was headed for—Oh, well!

"Only today I was approached, to go on the air for a whiskey account. I'm not holding up names this time. I'm not holding my punches. Mellow Whiskies stink. Mellow himself filled me up with his rotgut last evening and I haven't felt the same since. Last year Mellow gave His Honor the Mayor a case of his best stuff. There was a little private party down at the city hall that night."

Here Reese mentioned a few names and told a few stories about politicians he hated cordially.

"When the party broke up, the Mayor was so soused that he signed a lot of papers he's still sorry about. It was Mellow's Fine Whiskey that put through that lousy traction scheme we've been paying for ever since.

"I can't say the same about the history of our tooth paste accounts, because tooth paste cleanses. Randon, of this station, handles a network show for the Free Foam Tooth Paste Company. Last week a woman committed suicide by eating a tube of the stuff. Her name was in the papers, in a love-nest item. Front page stuff made out that her lover was a strong, silent number with name unmentioned. Uncle Sam says he's not strong and silent at all. In fact, he's on his way to Washington now with a couple of G-men. He was the city's foremost gambler, Ed Waters. Waters has stopped being strong and silent. He's babbling his head off all because a tube of tooth paste ended a woman's career and started the G-men looking in his direction. Free Foam, guaranteed to take the enamel off a kettle, or your teeth."

Reese was going great guns now. One by one he tore down every advertiser and public official that he had the goods on. Tore them apart coolly and in a voice that, Langly said afterward, "held the ring of judgment in it."

FIFTEEN minutes—twenty. Then from uptown a police siren sounded faintly. Reese winked, and Langly stood up and started to stride up and down the studio.

Reese said: "There's no bitterness in what I've been telling you. I've been on the air for a good many years and the gripes piled up until I decided to get them all off my chest at once.

This city is swell. Most of the people in it are swell. Right now a perfectly fine police chief is burning up the pavement to get over here and cut me off the air.

"I imagine His Honor the Mayor told him to catch me or drop out of public life. A police chief's life is hard, like a radio announcer's. He has to say and do as he's told. If they tell him to make an arrest, he has to make it stick.

"But don't worry. I've an idea that a cab will get me away from here before he can catch up with me. I'm planning a nice winter in California, so for now, this is a vastly more contented Bill Reese, wishing your kiddies pleasant dreams, and yourselves a pleasant retreat in Heaven, where all radio commercials fail to reach you. WZRX gratefully signing off."

Reese jumped to his feet.

"You think the police heard that last part?" he asked quickly.

Langly grimaced.

"They couldn't afford to miss it," he said.

The sirens were close now. Reese switched the light out quickly. He ran to the front window and looked down at the cab parked at the curb. Leaning out of the window he saw the police enter the street about two blocks north. He leaned out and waved his arm.

The taxi driver waved back and his grinning face was visible under the street lamp. The motor started with a roar and the empty cab rolled away in the opposite direction from which the police approached. Reese stepped back into the darkness and waited. They had fallen neatly for the trick. The police car never hesitated. It whirled past doing sixty and went out of sight. The cab had a nice start.

"Come on," Langly said. "They'll

catch him a mile or so away. They'll head back pronto."

He led the way along the hall. Reese was aware of a shadow that darted into the room ahead of him.

He skidded to a stop.

"Wait a minute," he shouted. Langly was at the head of the stairs. He stopped.

Reese jerked the door open quickly. Sharon Mellow, lovely and very frightened, stood in the darkened room. Reese's jaw dropped.

"What the . . ."

"I'm sorry," she said quickly. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

Reese was bewildered. He'd seen the girl only once before, and then from a distance.

"Looking for me?"

She came to him quickly, putting her small hand on his arm.

"You're in an awful spot," she said. "We'd better get out of here. I'll explain later."

"You'd better," he said, then he stopped short and smiled down at her. That damned truth serum, he thought quickly. It's still working.

"You're beautiful," he said. "You're the prettiest thing I've ever seen."

The girl blushed.

"Can I believe that?" she asked. "I've been wondering when you'd notice me."

He drew her into the hall quickly.

"You're in a bad spot here," he said. "I guess we'd all better scram. Besides, I'm not good at telling the truth. I might be sorry for it when I'm my own sour, lying self again."

She smiled, then slipped past him into the hall.

"Heard your broadcast," she said as she went down the steps. "It was wonderful. Dad will kill you when he finds you."

Langly was waiting for them by the

door downstairs.

Reese chuckled.

"You mean the broadcast was wonderful, or the fact that Pop Mellow will do away with me?"

Sharon opened the door. She leaned against him slightly.

"You tell the truth and so I think you're nice. I wouldn't have you get hurt for the world. My car. It's across the drive. You'll let me drive you somewhere?"

Reese could hear the siren that had died out a moment ago, rise again, coming from the south.

"By all means," he said and pushed her gently toward the car. "Drive us to California if you want, but fast."

"I wanted to tell you something," she said.

"It will wait."

Langly opened the door and crawled in. Reese pushed Sharon in beside Langly and ran around to the driver's seat. He found the key, turned it and started the motor. It purred softly as he eased the big job into the street.

A car was coming toward them, red light flashing back and forth on the front of it.

Reese groaned.

"Here goes a new speed record," he said, and climbed hard on the gas pedal. They shot ahead like a small rocket ship, cutting corners in a direct route toward Union Station.

"I CAN'T figure that girl out," Langly said. "First she lets you call her old man seven kinds of a fool, then she helps us escape. I had a feeling she wanted to tell you something if you'd only given her time."

Reese leaned back comfortably in the soft chair. The coach wasn't crowded. They found room in the smoking-car and already through the frosted windows, he could see the flash

of passing poles and hear the click of rails below. They were well away from town, with the first stop a hundred miles from trouble. Reese had time to think now and his thoughts followed various, and not entirely pleasant, channels.

To begin with, he wished he hadn't ditched Sharon Mellow at the station. She must have had something important to tell him. Something that prompted her to follow him and Langly all over town.

The girl was the sweetest thing that had ever happened to him. Even with that damned truth serum wearing off, Reese knew he'd enjoy telling her a lot of things.

She hadn't tried to hold him back at the station. It would hardly have been right for her to follow him farther. He knew she wanted a moment, but the train hadn't waited and they had pulled out with Sharon standing on the platform, her shoulders drooping a trifle.

"Now that it's over, what good did it do?"

Reese's question had no answer. Langly also was beginning to experience a let-down feeling. They both liked the old home town. It wasn't easy to leave it.

"If Randon hadn't started all this we'd be all right," Langly said bitterly. "It's like a drunk. We blow our tops off and then sober up. In the full light of day it doesn't seem half as much fun, does it?"

Daylight came soon, giving them time to stare across bleak farms and down the back alleys of small towns through which the train sped. At eight o'clock they found the diner and had breakfast. Reese had developed a strange ache in the pit of his stomach. A swell case of homesickness. How he could go on letting that vision of Shar-

on Mellow trouble him was beyond Bill Reese's reasoning power.

She seemed so much at home with him. Seemed to understand just what made him tick. Yet, he wasn't like the run-of-the-mill radio ham. They were satisfied to go along each day, reading the junk that was passed to them.

Couldn't men like Howard Shelton, the owner of WZZB, understand why Reese *had* to use originality? Shelton saw nothing beyond the safe, weekly income of a few small accounts. Randon was no better. Old man Mellow himself couldn't visualize anything new in advertising.

Sharon? Somehow she was different. She had heard the broadcast. She heard him tear her own father to pieces, and still she didn't want to pull out his hair.

The train pulled into Oxford at noon. The town was a little larger than most, supporting a fine station and a row of cabs that seemed busy enough to indicate a large city somewhere beyond the walls of the station. Reese stepped down from the car and found a lunch-room in the station. Langly came in as soon as he could check leaving time, and they had lunch.

FIFTEEN minutes passed. They approached the train to find an excited little group of people standing near their car.

Reese walked into the trap before he knew what was happening. As they approached, the circle of men opened and Sharon Mellow stepped toward him. Reese stopped, the blood draining from his face, and recognized Ward Williams, Chief of Police, and James Mellow. The others, evidently plain-clothes men, he didn't recognize.

He made no attempt to run for it. His eyes were on Sharon. Williams came forward.

"Langly and Reese, the G-men of the air!" His voice was heavy with sarcasm. "We made a plane trip over here to greet you birds. Will you fly back as doves of peace or do we get tough?"

Langly's mouth dropped open but he remained silent. Reese stared at the girl. She smiled uncertainly.

"I had to tell them," she said. "You see, I didn't have a chance to tell you . . ."

"Keep it to yourself," Reese said angrily. "I thought you were a pal. Now you turn stool-pigeon. We're in a nice little spot, thanks to your help."

The girl bit her lips, her cheeks turned pink.

"If you don't care to hear . . ."

"Nothing," Reese snapped. "Nothing you can say will ring pleasantly in my ears."

Williams and his men closed in.

"Back home again," the Chief said. "We need you there. The plane is waiting and a welcoming committee is ready. Let's move."

They moved. A car was waiting. Reese found himself and Langly pushed into it quickly. He looked around to find Sharon and her father getting into another a few yards away.

Wedged firmly between Police Chief Williams and Bob Langly, Reese had ample time for thought as they raced toward the airport.

The half-formed opinion of Sharon Mellow had hit the dust. She was lower than a worm in his estimation. A fit companion for a fat, conceited old ass of a father. He hoped the whole Mellow family would drown in their own liquor.

THE Mayor himself could have had no larger greeting committee than the throng of people who waited at the doors of Station WZZB for Bill

Reese's return. Howard Shelton was there, and with him, Sharon Mellow, her father and every officer of Mellow's Fine Whiskey, Inc. Curt Randon, his nose bandaged, a plaintive look on his dark face, stood by the curb with his partner, Walter Phillips. His Honor the Mayor waited in the hall, several of his personal cronies lined up behind him in order of their importance.

Reese, puzzled because both he and Langly had escaped the city jail for the time being, stepped out of the car hesitantly. The police chief followed him, a broad grin on his face.

Reese took one look at the mob who bore down upon him, then turned hurriedly to the chief.

"We need protection," he said. "I'll admit the crime was bad, but I'm in no condition to fight my way out of this mess. How about a ride downtown and a nice quiet cell?"

Langly sidled close to him. Together, suspicion etched on their tired faces, they faced the crowd.

Curt Randon was the first to reach Reese. His face beamed an "all is forgiven" smile.

"Now look here, Reese," Randon pleaded. "You did that broadcast from my studio. I demand a part of anything you get for it."

Mellow faced Randon, his cheeks puffed, eyes narrowed.

"Reese is my property," he yelled. "He started a program for me. He's got a contract signed, or at least Shelton has. Reese has to go through with it. . . ."

Bill Reese swallowed hard.

"No jail, no punishment?" he asked. "Contracts, obligations. I don't get it."

His Honor the Mayor had tired of waiting inside. He came out, followed by his assemblage, and pushed his way to Reese's side. His fat hand was outstretched.

"William Reese?"

Bill nodded.

"Yes, sir. Guess I took a few cracks at you."

His Honor grasped Reese's hand, pumping it quickly.

"Reese, you did us all good. We're a bunch of softies. Right now I'm offering you a thousand dollars a broadcast to tell this town one night a week that we're improving our system and cleaning up crime. You can do it, Reese, and I want you on my side."

On the edge of the crowd, a flashbulb exploded. The newspapers were getting a good account of His Honor's turning over the new leaf. Reese grinned.

"You'll have to ask Sharon," he said.

His Honor grunted.

"Sharon?" he said impatiently. "Who the hell is Sharon?"

REESE pushed his way past the Mayor, edged between Randon and James Mellow and stood before Sharon Mellow. Her eyes were soft, and he thought he could see a tear on her cheek.

"I guess I've been a sort of damned fool," he said. "Could you—that is . . . ?"

She nodded, not trusting her voice.

Reese went on.

"You were trying to tell me not to run away?"

She leaned close to him.

"I tried to tell you that Dad liked your broadcast, that is, after I made him understand that it was something new. That it was selling more whiskey than we'd ever sold before. I found out when I returned to station WZZB that the fan mail was piling in. Dad was ready to triple your wages to get you back. You—you just wouldn't listen."

Around him, Reese heard the uproar-

(Concluded on page 207)

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN*(Concluded from page 125)*

ious voices. Offers and more offers, double, triple, any amount you'll take.

"Keep our account," Mellow was howling. "I'll give you enough money for a five-year network show."

Shelton, jumping up and down.

"I'm still your boss. A half hour of that Winchell stuff and we'll all be rich."

Randon, fading into the background. Another flash-bulb went off and Reese realized he had been kissing Sharon.

He reached into his pocket and drew out the almost empty bottle that had contained the truth serum. He gulped, found a drop in the bottom and turned to the crowd.

"I'll take all offers," he said. "On the condition that Bob Langly will handle the controls on every broadcast that I make."

He turned to Sharon, speaking to her and the others at the same time.

"And that Sharon Mellow will become one of the long list of truth-telling Reese's."

Sharon's eyes twinkled.

"I had to chase you a long time before you caught me," she said. "But anyone who says the things you did about my father and spreads the truth around so that people take it and like it, ought to make a partner for life."

"And I can keep right on saying what I want to? No prepared commercials? No more screwball advertising?" Reese asked.

A chorus of approval went up.

"Good," he said. "Then it's a deal. I'm going to tear my own grandmother apart if I don't agree with her. I got a hunch we said the right things the other night, Langly."

Langly was grinning happily.

"You can say that again," he said.