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Sam

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The poolrooms were closed. The toteboards gathered dust and the sound of the ticker-tape was heard throughout the land no more. Men were thrown out of work. Boys stood around without bets to run or balls to rack and girls no longer knew where to look for their studs. A whole way of life had been destroyed. It was terrible.

The gathering storm clouds had been paid no heed. We had seen reform rear its ugly head before, only to die quickly. We waited for the 'Do-Gooders' to retreat and the retreat never came. The bookies were harried from the streets, the wire services were disconnected and cops defaulted on new cars as all outside sources of income dried up.

On a chilly, drizzly September afternoon we watched Eli padlock the door of the 'Capitol Billiard Emporium'. We watched silently, uncomfortably, like mourners at a funeral. Poor Eli . . . twenty years in the same spot . . . never a day late with the vigorish. What could he possibly work at now? Suddenly Eli looked old. He trudged away.

The onlookers drifted off aimlessly. Soon the sidewalk was deserted except for me and Sam, The Stick. The Stick was none other than Sam Katz, twenty years old, five feet eight inches tall and two hundred fifty pounds heavy. He was not only jobless as a result of this catastrophe, (he made his living off the pooltables) he was practically homeless as well. He turned to me, and in a voice choked with emotion asked, "Now what, Scales?" (I worked in my old man's grocery).

"Whadya mean, now what?"

"Yeah, I forgot. You already got a job. Guess I'll have to get one too." He started to turn away. "Say Scales, how do you go about getting a job?"

"Well, you can look in the paper or better still, you can go down to the U.S. Employment Service."

"No kidding? Where is it?"

"I don't know. You can look it up in the phone book."

"Thanks. Guess I'll do that." He didn't sound too enthusiastic.

I didn't see him for the next two weeks, but when I did, I could see that something was troubling him.

"Hi, Stick. Did you get a job?"

"Yeah, but it almost wasn't worth the sweat."

"Why? What happened to you?"

"Well, when I first go to this employment joint, they ask me for my Social Security Card. Man, I didn't even know there was such an animal. They get a big yak out of this and they send me to another joint to dig up one of those cards. I fill out all the blanks like I'm told and hand it back to 'em. Those birds also think it's pretty funny that I'm twenty years old and never had a job. But by this time, I've lost my sense of humor and I tell them how much I can
make in a good night down at Eli's. This bit of information quiets
them down somewhat."

"What about the bad nights, Stick?"

"We won't mention them. Well like I said, I take this card back
to the employment joint and they ask me what can I do. Naturally,
I tell them that I'm just about the greatest snooker player in Brooklyn.
This clown smiles and puts down "Unskilled" on my application. This
upsets me no end, but I let it pass. He sends me down to a joint in
the garment center, and at last I got me a job, just like all the other
peasants."

"What do you do?"

"Oh, I push one of those carts full of dresses from one shop to
another."

"How's the pay?"

"That's another thing that burns me up. You know they got some-
thing they call withholding tax?"

"Yeah, they got it some time already."

"Well, nobody ever told me nothing about it. I got to work Satur-
days if I wanna make any real dough."

"Too bad. Well, take it easy."

"Yeah, I'll be seeing you."

This time I didn't see him for over a month, but I heard about
him through my mother.

"Guess who I saw today, Julius?"

"Joe Stalin and stop calling me Julius."

"Very funny. You should maybe have a little more respect for
your mother, don't you think? And Julius happens to be a very nice
name."

"Okay Ma, you win. Who'd you see today?"

"Sam Katz and he looks like he lost a lot of weight."

"No kidding? Pushing them carts around can slim a guy down."

"No, I think he's on a diet, I think he's going with a girl."

"How can you tell?"

"He had a shave."

"I think you're wrong, Ma. The only thing Sam ever went steady
with was a pool cue."

"Still, I think Sam is going with a girl."

As usual, my mother was right. It seems that the boss's daughter
used to pick her father up in their car after he locked up the shop. Sam
liked her looks, but the only way he could get near her without her
old man hitting the roof, was to work overtime. Sam put in much
overtime. This course of action had a number of interesting results:
one; he got close to Natalie, (that was her name) two; he convinced
her father that he was a go-getter and three; he made a hell of a
lot of cash.

Pretty soon everybody was chummy as all get out. Sam com-
menced to talk about down payments on homes, Natalie began steer-
ing Sam towards jewelry stores, (just window shopping, of course)
and her old man, since he didn't have any sons, began making noises
about a partnership.
About a month before the wedding, Sam came into the grocery store. I hardly recognized him. He was actually thin. He had a shave and he was wearing about three hundred bucks worth of clothes on his back.


“Please.” His face had pained look “How about calling me Sam?”

“Sure thing. Can’t say I blame you. What’s doing?”

“Besides getting married, not much. Listen, I’ve got a proposition for you.”

His deal was simple, but it just about bowled me over. Sam never had much of a head for business and he was afraid that his father-in-law was going to find that out very quickly. This partnership could prove extremely painful, unless he could rely on someone with some business experience. By someone, he meant me. I was to start off the same way he did, namely pushing a cart. Since I had some brains, I would get ahead quickly. Also, since Natalie was getting married, someone would have to pick up the boss. This someone was Sarah, Natalie’s kid sister by about a year. Sarah, he assured me, was damned good looking and a swell kid to boot.

He told me to think it over, and believe you me, I did just that. I didn’t mind getting a chunk of a business, but picking up a wife at the same time, sort of bothered me. I mentioned the proposition to my parents. My father grumbled at the prospect of my leaving the store, but my mother told me, I’d be a fool to refuse.

I still didn’t know what to do. Three days later Sam dropped in again to see what I had decided. He was driving his wedding present from his father-in-law to be . . . a brand new Mercury convertible.

I start work at the Peerless Dress Manufacturing Company Incorporated this coming Monday.

Jazz . . .

Deep rumble of many voices punctuated by shrill bursts of laughter
Low throaty tones of the clarinet woven through the dim smoke-clouded cellar
Loud peal of horn calling through the dusk
Dull thump of drum—
Quiet

Dim lights glow on the shimmering golden form of the trumpet
It raises then drops quickly as blinding spots hush the throng
The trumpet sounds—the drum answers
The clarinet glides into an obligato
The bass picks out the beat
They blend—

Jazz

. . . Patti Burns