

Finish the Job

FRANK KANE

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Finish the Job

Liddell had caught the murderer, but the job wasn't over yet. Now he had to get the men who'd ordered murder done . . .

A Johnny Liddell Story

By FRANK KANE



JOHNNY LIDDELL pushed open the ground-glass door that bore the legend, "Johnny Liddell, Private Investigations" and slammed it after him. His red-headed secretary sat in a railing enclosed space, stabbing listlessly at the keys of a desk typewriter, taking excessive care not to fracture the finish on her carefully shellacked nails.

"Hello, Pinky," he greeted her. "Anybody to see me?"

The redhead stopped jabbing at the typewriter, turned a pair of sea green eyes toward him. "Some character named Marty Sommers. I put him in the inside office. I was afraid some of our respectable clients might see him."

She looked him over, sniffed. “From what the papers said I expected to see you in bits.”

“Don’t believe what you read in the papers. I read Buck Rogers every night but I don’t believe it.”

The redhead pulled over a pile of papers, extracted a clipping from the morning paper. “I saved the blow-by-blow description for your scrapbook.”

Liddell grunted, waved the clipping aside. “I don’t have to read about it. I was there.” He pushed through the railing gate, headed for the inside office.

“How about Seaway Indemnity? Do we bill them for the job?”

Liddell stopped with his hand on the knob. “Isn’t it customary to wait until a job’s finished before we bill?”

The redhead’s eyes widened. “You mean it isn’t finished? Seaway hired you to find out who killed Barney Shields. The killer is on a slab in the morgue and the gal that fingered Barney for the kill is in the ladies’ section of the same. What more do you want?”

“I want the big boys who let out the kill contract. Don’t forget that the pineapple that blew Lois Turner loose from her falsies was meant for me. Things like that hurt my feelings.”

“I’d rather get my feelings hurt than get my head blown off,” Pinky retorted. “Those boys play for keeps. Next time, you might not find a stand-in.”

“Very encouraging,” Liddell nodded. “Just the same, I intend to finish the job Barney Shields started out to do.”

“It’s your skin, if you like to wear it with holes in it.” The redhead sniffed audibly, went back to stabbing at the typewriter keys. Then, as Liddell closed his office door after him, she tore the half-finished page from the typewriter, crushed it irritably and threw it at the waste basket.

Inside the private office, a man sat in the clients’ chair, puffing nervously on a butt. He looked up as Liddell walked in, grinned feebly. He was tall, gangling. His arms hung out of the sleeves of his jacket, his neck was long, heavily corded. He was deeply tanned and, as he grinned, muscles cut deep furrows in the mahogany of his skin.

Liddell walked over, jabbed a hand at him, got a firm handshake in return. “You’re Marty Sommers?”

The thin man nodded. “I got word from friends you wanted to see me.” He dug into his pocket, brought out a fresh cigarette, chain-lit it from the butt he held cupped in his hand. “My friends said I could trust you.”

“Thanks.” Liddell walked around the desk, dropped into his chair. “You read about Barney Shields being killed?”

Sommers took a deep drag on his cigarette, blew a stream of smoke at the glowing end. “He was a fink planted on the docks?”

“An insurance investigator. Worked for Seaway Indemnity. He was murdered because he knew too much. I’m taking on where he left off.”

“That’s a big job.” The thin man returned the butt to the corner of his mouth, looked up at Liddell. “What made you send for me?”

“I thought you might help.”

“Why should I?”

Liddell shrugged, opened his bottom drawer, dug out a fifth of bourbon and two paper glasses. “Because you always fought for a decent break for the men on the docks. We’re fighting the same men—the racketeers that have moved in and taken over.” He poured some bourbon into each of the cups, handed one to the thin man.

“Sure. I always fought the meatballs and the goons. And what’d it get me?” He leaned forward. “You know what I got to do to make a living? I got to sell papers, hustle packages, do anything but the thing I know how to do—work the docks.” He sank back in his chair. “I’m blacklisted on the docks. I could turn out to a shape-up from now to Hell freezes over, but I couldn’t get a day’s work. Now or ever.”

Liddell took a sip of his bourbon. “They can stop you from working just like that. They take the bread out of your family’s mouth, and you won’t fight back?”

“Maybe I’m tired of fighting, mister. Maybe you can’t buck the system. Maybe I should have been like the other boys—stuck a toothpick behind my ear to let the shape-up boss know I was willing to kick back half my pay to get a day’s work.” He drained his glass, crushed it into a ball, threw it at the wastebasket. “It’s a lot of maybes.”

“But you came up here just the same.”

“I guess I was just curious, Liddell.” He shrugged. “I wouldn’t be any use to anybody in a fight. They ground it out of me. They ground it out of all

of us. Some of us ended up in the river, others ended up like me. The rest got the idea.”

“Who’s the big man behind the boys on the piers?”

“You kidding?”

Liddell shook his head. “I’m starting on this job from scratch, Sommers. The two men who could have helped me are dead.” He finished his drink, set the cup back on the desk. “What do you know about an icepick artist named Denver?”

“He was sergeant at arms in the pier local,” the thin man told him in a tight voice. “He used that sticker of his to make a guy think twice before asking questions. Lou Panzer asked too many questions one night and ended up on Staten Island with more holes in his chest than a pin cushion.”

“Who did Denver work for?”

Sommers wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. “Tony Marko. He’s head of the pier local. They call him the business agent.” He watched while Liddell dug another cup out of the drawer, spilled some bourbon into it. “I want to help, Liddell, but I got a family I got to think of.”

“I’ll cover you,” Liddell promised. “Help me, and maybe that family of yours can start living again.” He handed over the bourbon. “Somebody’s got to go up against these boys, but I can’t do it blind.”

Sommers bit at his lower lip, nodded. “I’ll tell you anything you want to know.”

“Good.” Liddell added some bourbon to his cup, leaned back. “This business agent—what’s his graft?”

“Short ganging. Hiring sixteen men and turning in a payroll for twenty-two. Making every man who does a day’s work kick back fifteen percent out of his day’s pay. Every dirty little racket you can think of.”

Liddell swirled the liquor around in his cup, shook his head. “That’s not what Shields stumbled on. It was something bigger. Much bigger.” He sipped at his drink. “Something affecting his company, something to do with looting cargo. How about that?”

Sommers shook his head. “That’s big stuff. The local wouldn’t be behind that, Liddell. That would come from the big guys, not the meatballs.”

“Much of it go on?”

The thin man laughed grimly. “Plenty. I’ve heard of whole shipments disappearing. Trucks back up and cart the stuff away. That’s the big guys’ personal graft.”

“Barney Shields stumbled on something so big they had to kill him to shut him up. Got any idea of what it might be?”

Sommers considered it, shook his head. “It could be anything.” He stared at Liddell for a minute. “I read in the papers it was Denver that killed your friend. To me, that means the local. Denver did the dirty work for the local, not for the big guys.”

“This business agent for the local. This Tony Marko. Where would I be likely to find him?”

The thin man consulted his wristwatch. “He’ll be down at the pier for the shape-up, pointing out the men who’ll work. After that, he usually drops by the Harbor Cafe with one of his meatballs and waits for his kickbacks from them.”

Liddell drained his cup, dropped it in the wastebasket. “I think maybe I ought to have a talk with this Tony Marko. He sounds interesting.”

“Maybe I ought to go along with you and point him out.”

Liddell grinned at him. “I thought you wanted to keep out of this.”

“That’s what I thought too, Liddell. But I just realized this is my fight more than it is yours, and for the first time it looks as though I’ve got a chance of winning it.”

The Harbor Cafe was a grimy, brick fronted two story building set in the shadows of the Brooklyn Bridge, within smelling distance of the Fulton Fish Market. Across the slip, South Street was lined with ships of all nations tied up at docks that ran as far as the eye could see. The interior was dim and cool.

Johnny Liddell sat at a table in the rear with Sommers, signalled to the bartender for two drinks, settled back to wait. He was on his second drink and fourth cigarette when the bartender began to whistle a popular tune.

Sommers got up. “It’s Marko coming. I’d better not be sitting with you when he comes in.” He scuttled to the bar with his drink, crouched over it. After a moment, two men entered, looked around.

One of them, fat, coatless, with dark halfmoons of sweat under his armpits, jabbed a thick finger at Sommers. “I told you to stay off the waterfront, didn’t I?” His voice was deep, coarse. “This is your last warning. Get out.”

Sommers nodded, circled around them, disappeared through the open door. The fat man’s eyes roamed around the bar, stopped at Liddell. “Who’s he?” he asked the bartender.

The man behind the bar shrugged. “Dropped in for a drink.”

“Get him out. We got some business to do in here.”

Liddell swung around in his chair, stared at the big man. Layers of fat had piled on what had once been a mass of muscle. Damp, wet hair was pasted down over his forehead. His eyes were little black discs set behind discolored mounds of flesh.

“I’ll have another bourbon, bartender,” Liddell said.

The fat man blew bubbles in the center of his mouth. “Throw him out, Condon,” he told the man with him.

Condon was red-headed, about twenty-seven. His shoulders sloped and his arms dangled like an ape’s. The scar tissue over his right eye almost closed it. It didn’t strain Liddell’s deductive powers to place him as a professional slugger. He swaggered over to where the private detective sat. “You heard the man. He don’t want you around.” His lips pulled back from the stubs of his teeth. “Do you get out or do I throw you out?”

Liddell looked up at him, calmly raised his glass to his lips, took a swallow.

The redhead knocked the glass from Liddell’s hand with a swipe of his meaty hand, caught him by the shoulder, dragged him to his feet. “You want it the hard way, sucker?” He threw a ham-like fist at Liddell’s head, grunted when it went over the private detective’s shoulder.

Liddell brought a stiff right up from his ankle. The redhead fielded it with the pit of his stomach, went to his knees, his eyes rolling back in his head. Liddell brought his knee up, caught the redhead under the chin, snapped his head back. Condon toppled over on his back and didn’t move.

“That meatball was all soft inside. How about you, fat boy?” Liddell asked softly.

The pier boss snarled at him, started toward him. His hand disappeared under his coat, came out with a knife. He held it low, blade slanting upward in the manner of an experienced knife fighter. “Let’s see what you look like inside.”

Suddenly, he froze in his tracks when he saw the .45 that had appeared in Liddell’s hand. The little black eyes receded behind their discolored buttnesses, he licked at his lips. The eyes fell to the muzzle of the .45. “Who are you, anyway?” he growled.

“My name’s Liddell. Ever hear of me?”

The little eyes snapped up to the private detective’s face. “I heard a lot about you. I know a lot of guys who’d like to meet you.”

“You met me. It didn’t do you much good.” Liddell walked over to where the fat man stood, brought the barrel of the .45 down on his knife hand with shattering force.

Marko roared his pain, dropped the knife to the floor. He started to spew curses at Liddell, bubbles forming and bursting between his lips. Liddell brought the barrel of the gun back, slammed it across the fat man’s mouth. It drove him back, knocking over a table and chair. He lay there breathing heavily, his pig-like eyes rimmed with fear. “What do you want?” The bubbles were pink-tinged now.

“A little conversation.” Liddell reached down, pulled him to his feet. “We’re walking out of here together. Be smart and you might get where we’re going.” He jabbed the muzzle of the .45 almost to the trigger guard in the fat man’s belly. “Get any ideas and I’ll splash you onto the slab next to your boy Denver.”

The fat man wiped his lips with the back of his hand, stared at the red smear. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll find out when we get there—if you get there.” Liddell nodded toward the door. “Let’s go, Marko.”

South Street was deserted when they walked out into the blinding sunshine. Liddell walked to the left of the fat man, almost a step behind, his right hand buried to the wrist in his pocket. “There’s a blue Buick parked down the street. We’re using that. You’ll drive.”

The fat man looked around, his shoulders drooped as the fight seeped out of him. He walked down the street to where the Buick was parked, slid

in behind the wheel, Liddell beside him. The .45 bored into the fat man's side.

"Where are we going?" he breathed noisily.

"Your place."

The fat man's face gleamed wetly. "My place?"

"It'll be the last place they'll think of looking when the meatball comes to life and finds out you've been snatched. I wouldn't want us to be interrupted."

"I don't live alone. I got a shack-up deal."

"I'm broadminded." He jabbed the gun deeper into the fat man's side, brought a gasp from the pouting lips. "I'll bet you're a real devil with the ladies. She'll leave us alone. Get the heap moving."

Marko kicked the motor to life, the big car rolled out into a thin stream of traffic, U-turned and headed for the East Side Drive. They left the drive at 63rd Street, headed east, pulled up in front of an apartment house on 65th Street.

"This is it," the fat man growled.

"What apartment?"

"Three C."

Liddell nodded. "We're going up. Remember what I told you about ending up alongside Denver. One phony move and I'll spill you all over the place."

The fat man nodded. He led the way through a revolving door, across a small lobby to an automatic elevator. They rode to the third floor, walked down a carpeted hallway to a door marked 3C.

"Knock," Liddell told him.

The fat man pounded his knuckles against the door.

Inside, they could hear the tapping of high heels crossing the floor.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice wanted to know.

"Open up," Marko growled. "It's me. Marko."

The door swung open. A tall brunette in a thin negligee that left nothing to the imagination stood framed in the doorway. Her hazel eyes jumped from Marko to Liddell. "What is it, Marko?"

The fat man put the flat of his hand against the girl's shoulder, sent her reeling into the room. "You talk too much."

Liddell followed them into the living room, kicked the door shut behind him. He pulled the .45 from his pocket, let the girl see it. "Any body else in the place?"

The girl made an ineffectual attempt to pull the negligee around her, shook her head. The blood had drained from her face, leaving it a transparent ivory, her make-up standing out like blotches on her skin. Her fist was clenched at her throat as though she were stilling a scream that was rising there.

"No noise, baby," Liddell told her. "Nobody's going to get hurt. The fat boy and I have some business. He's going to tie you up in the bedroom until we're finished."

A faint flush of color returned to the girl's face. "You going to let him push you around like that, Marko? You're always telling me how tough you are—"

The fat man lashed out, caught her across the cheek with the flat of his hand, knocked her backwards. For a moment, Liddell's eyes left the fat man. Marko moved with surprising speed for a man his size, pulled the girl between himself and Liddell's gun and threw her forward. The girl's body hit Liddell, knocking him momentarily off balance.

Marko was on top of him before he could get set, lashed out with his toe at Liddell's groin, missed by inches. The private detective chopped at the fat man's shin with the barrel of the .45, drew a yelp of pain. By the time the fat man got set again, the muzzle of the gun was staring at his midsection.

"You're pushing your luck, fat boy," Liddell grinned humorlessly.

The fat man hopped on one foot, clasped his shin between his hands. "Okay. I know when I'm licked."

The girl stared at him with unconcealed contempt, her full lips drawn back from her teeth. "You won't have to tie me, mister," she told Liddell. "That fat slob didn't care if you shot me when he threw me at you. I hope you split his head open."

"I hope you get your hope, baby," Liddell told her. "Because if he doesn't open up, I'm going to open him up."

The brunette turned the full power of her eyes on Liddell, studied the heavy shoulders, the thick hair flecked with grey approvingly. The negligee

had fallen open, and firm, tip-tilted breasts poked out. “I’ll be in the bedroom,” she told him. She turned, walked toward the bedroom door, her full, round hips working smoothly against the fragile fabric of the gown. She didn’t look back as she shut the door behind her.

“Okay, tough guy. Now for the conversation.” Liddell motioned the fat man to a chair, reached up, loosened his tie, opened his collar. “I want some answers. How I get them depends on you. Make it easy on yourself.”

The fat man dropped into a chair, glared up at Liddell. “You’re wasting your time.”

“That’s what makes horse-racing, Marko—a difference of opinion. Me, I think you’re going to give singing lessons.” When the fat man dropped his eyes to his lap, Liddell reached over, grabbed a hand full of his hair, yanked his head up. “What did Barney Shields find that made it necessary to kill him?”

The fat man managed a smile, but his eyes were shadowed with apprehension. “You ask him. I don’t know how to work an ouija board.”

Liddell brought his hand back, smashed the knuckles against the fat man’s mouth, spilled a stream of blood down his chin. “Keep up the funny answers, Fatso, and I’ll leave you as toothless as the day you were born.”

The fat man squeezed back against the cushions. “I don’t know anything about Shields.”

“You’re a liar. It was your boy that icepicked him. Why?”

The beady little eyes glared from behind their pouches. The fat man wiped his mouth on his sleeve, refused to answer.

Liddell’s hand described a short arc, knocked the fat man’s head sideways. “Be as stubborn as you like, Fatso. I’ve got all day.” He slapped the head back into position. “You’ll either talk to me, or never again.”

“You scare me to death,” the fat man blustered.

“I didn’t scare Denver to death, but it’s a cinch the .45 slugs I pumped into him didn’t lengthen his life.” He pointed the .45 at Marko’s bulging waistline. “Maybe you’d like to try one for size?”

The fat man studied Liddell’s face for signs of a bluff, failed to detect any. He licked his lips, squeezed back against the cushions.

“What do you want to know?” he whined.

Liddell relaxed his pressure on the trigger. “Why was Shields killed? What did he know?”

Beads of perspiration glistened on the fat man’s forehead. “He knew about the olive oil shipment due tomorrow.” He swabbed at his forehead. “That fink Monti tipped him off and he was getting ready to sic the Feds on us. Nick Cardell ordered a hit.”

Liddell stared at the fat man. “Nick Cardell? Where’s he fit into this? He’s a night club operator, a racket boy, everything else—but not a waterfront boss.”

The fat man nodded his head. “He’s in the Syndicate. He handles the white stuff—women and powder. He brings the powder in through our pier.” He was desperately anxious to talk now; the words dribbled from his lips.

“What’s that got to do with olive oil?”

The fat man shrugged. “That’s how the syndicate ships the stuff in. It’s in waterproof pouches in the oil drums. They’re marked so we know the right ones and we forward them up to Cardell. He handles from there.” He wiped the perspiration from his quivering jowls. “Monti told the dick—I mean Shields—about twenty casks of oil disappearing every shipment. He started snooping around, started getting ideas. When that broad of his telephoned and offered to sell us his report, we bought. Cardell ordered the hit, and we set Shields up for it. That’s straight.”

“You yellow rat,” the brunette stood in the doorway to the bedroom. She had stripped off the negligee, stood naked, her black hair cascading down over her shoulders. She was long-legged, her hips round and firm. Her breasts strained upward, pink tipped. “I’ve waited a long time to see someone work that meatball over, mister, but it was worth waiting to see it done right.”

She walked toward him, came close. “He always bragged that no one could take me away from him.” She stood in front of the fat man, stroked the palms of her hands up over her thighs, up to cup her breasts. “I’ve never met a man who had the nerve—before.”

The fat man jumped out of his chair, glared at her. “Sell me out, and I’ll ___”

“You think you have an exclusive on selling out?” She looked over to Liddell. “I’ve waited a long time for a real man.” She held her hand out. “He thinks it’s the gun that makes the difference, mister. I don’t.”

Liddell looked at her, grinned. “I don’t either.” He handed her the .45. “Besides, I promised I’d pay off for a couple of people this meatball burned down.”

The fat man roared, lunged at him. Liddell sidestepped, brought his right up in a looping uppercut that split the fat man’s eyebrow, knocked him back. Marko, howling with pain, lowered his head, charged again. Liddell chopped at the back of the fat neck with the side of his hand. Marko hit the floor first, lay there moaning.

Liddell stood over the quivering hulk on the floor, looked over to where the brunette stood, her finger on the trigger of the .45. As he watched, she let the gun drop to her side. “You took an awful chance, Liddell,” she told him softly. “I might have been on his side all the time.”

Liddell looked down at the fat man, shook his head. “It didn’t figure. The only way a slob like that could hold onto a dream like you would be through fear. The minute we walked in tonight you knew he was through.”

The girl stepped across the man on the floor, pressed close against Liddell. “That’s why I didn’t use the phone in the bedroom to get help for him.” She slid her arms around Liddell’s neck, melted against him. “You promised to say goodbye before you left.”

Liddell grinned. “In the bedroom,” he reminded her.

The girl stood on her toes, covered his mouth with hers. He could feel the gentle tremors that shook her body as she strained against him. Her skin was warm and soft; he could smell the perfume of her body. Her lips became agitated, moved against his mouth as she moaned softly. After a moment, she stepped back, licked at her lips with the tip of her tongue.

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

The man on the floor started moaning his way back to consciousness. Painfully, he raised his head, glared up at them. The girl brought up the barrel of the .45, smashed it against the side of his head, knocked him back to the floor. Without looking back, she walked to the bedroom, left the door open behind her.

Liddell caught the fat man by the collar, dragged him to a chair, dumped him into it. Then he stripped off the fat man’s tie, tied his wrists to the back legs of the chair.

“In case you get wanderlust, you can carry the chair with you,” Liddell growled at him. He looked at the fat man for a moment, then turned,

followed the girl.

Inspector Herlehy sat behind his oversized, unpainted desk in headquarters, stared at Johnny Liddell with no sign of enthusiasm. Lee Devon of Seaway Indemnity stood at the window, stared down on the street below.

“You’ve got something up your sleeve, Liddell,” Herlehy snorted. “You want me to keep this meatball on ice and not book him until tomorrow. It smells.”

Liddell fished a cigarette from his pocket, stuck it in the corner of his mouth, touched a match to it. “I didn’t have to bring Marko in, Inspector. After all, he’s the guy that set me up for a kill. I could have burned him down and nobody would have blamed me for it. Instead I deliver him to you and you accuse me of pulling a fast one.”

The man at the window turned, walked over to where a water-cooler was humming to itself in the corner, poured himself a drink. “I think Liddell is right, Inspector. If we announce the arrest of Marko, the Syndicate may divert that shipment of oil and we’ll lack the evidence to smash the ring.” He drained the cup, dropped it into the basket. “What harm can come of keeping Marko on ice until after the ship has docked and the Federal men have a chance to raid the pier?”

Herlehy raked his clenched fingers through his hair, growled. “I don’t know. That’s what worries me.” He glared at Liddell. “It doesn’t sound like this character to turn a killer in and just call it a day. He’s more likely to square accounts first.”

“Maybe I’ve turned over a new leaf,” Liddell shrugged. “Anyway, I’ve already turned him over to you and if you bury him in some precinct out in the sticks I can’t get at him.”

The inspector punished his perpetual wad of gum, shook his head. “It just doesn’t seem natural.” He looked over to Devon. “Your company got the dope it needs?”

Devon nodded. “We may not be able to make a case stick against some of them, but we’ve got enough on them to start a general clean-up down there.” He looked to Liddell. “That was the job Barney Shields started out to do. Liddell finished it up for him.”

Liddell pulled himself out of the chair, crushed his cigarette out in the ashtray on the inspector's desk. "I don't know if you can make a murder rap stick on Marko, Inspector. He gave the contract for the kill to Denver, but there's not much chance that he'll admit it." He rubbed his knuckles. "As a matter of fact, I had a little difficulty making him talk myself. And without corroboration, I don't think it would stand up."

"We'll take care of Marko," Herlehy assured him. He watched Liddell walk to the door, shook his head. "It still doesn't smell kosher, knowing that we can't pin a murder rap on him, knowing he did the killing and you still bringing him in." He fished a fresh piece of gum from his drawer, denuded it of its wrapper. "Maybe you have turned over a new leaf, at that. Maybe we ought to buy him dinner tonight, Devon."

Liddell shook his head. "I've got a date. And she's prettier than you. We're going out to Nick Cardell's place and celebrate."

"Watch out for that place, Johnny," Devon warned. "I hear the wheels out there are rigged. A guy could lose his shirt out there."

"And that ain't all," Liddell grinned.

"Nick's" was an old North Shore estate that had been converted into a deluxe gambling set-up. From the outside, it gave no indication of its character, looked like any country estate that had been kept up. Shrubs, lawn and gardens were in good condition and it was only by the canopied entrance that it could be distinguished from its neighbors.

Johnny Liddell turned the rented Buick over to a uniformed attendant, followed the brunette up the broad stairs to the entrance. A man in a tuxedo stood at the door, greeted the girl, studied Liddell quizzically.

"A friend of mine, Lou," she explained. "Marko couldn't make it tonight. Is Nick around?"

The man in the tuxedo opened a door that led to a large reception hall filled with small groups of formally dressed patrons.

"Business or social?" the man in the tuxedo wanted to know.

"A message from Marko."

The man in the tuxedo nodded, walked to a phone near the door. He pressed a button on its base, waited a moment, then muttered into it. After a

second, he dropped the receiver back on its hook. “He’ll be with you in a few minutes. Want to wait at the bar?”

The girl looked at Liddell. He nodded. She led the way into one of the parlors that had been converted into a lounge. A bar ran the full length of the room. Liddell found a pair of barstools, signalled for the waiter, ordered two bourbons. The man behind the stick made a production out of selecting a bottle from the backbar, pouring two drinks. After he had shuffled out of earshot, the girl turned to Liddell. “You think it’s smart coming out here like this, Johnny?” she asked in a low voice. “By tomorrow they’ll have enough on him to put him away for a long time.”

“That’s just the trouble. They’ll put him where I can’t get at him.”

The girl shuddered a little, pressed against him. “You scare me a little, Johnny. Not the way Marko used to scare me, but in a way that kind of excites me.” She put her hand on his knee, turned her lips up to be kissed. “I guess I like violent men.”

“You’d better stay here when I get in to see Cardell, baby,” Liddell told her. “We may have to leave fast.”

She shook her head. “You can’t get in without me. I’m the one that has the message from Marko. Remember?”

“It might get rough,” he warned.

“That’s why I insist on going with you,” she wrinkled her nose at him. She sipped at her glass, studied him over the rim. “Are you going to kill him?”

“He sent two men out to kill me, baby. I deserve at least one crack at him, don’t I?” He looked around, made sure no one was within earshot. “No matter what the Feds get in the raid tomorrow, Cardell may be able to wiggle out of it. I want to make sure he doesn’t get off completely free.” He took a deep swallow out of his glass, nudged the girl as the man in the tuxedo started across the room to where they sat.

“The boss can see you now,” he told the girl. “He’s out back in his office. Will you follow me?”

The girl finished her drink, slid off the barstool. Her fingers sought Liddell’s hand, gave it a brief squeeze. They followed the man in the tuxedo to a door set at the far end of the bar. He knocked twice, identified himself to the man on the other side. The door slid open and they stepped through into a large room equipped with roulette wheels, a crap table and a wall lined

with slot machines. A low buzz of conversation spiced with the click of roulette balls flowed out at them as they entered. Another tuxedoed floor man nodded to them pleasantly, closed the sliding door behind them.

The brunette picked her way across the floor, circled the roulette layout, headed for a small corridor at the far end. It led to a metal door which carried the warning “Private—Employees Only.” The girl knocked and, after a moment, the electric buzzer clicked.

The room beyond was large and comfortably furnished. Nick Cardell sat in an easy chair, knees crossed, fingertips touching in front of his chest. He was a big man who filled the chair to overflowing. He was conservatively tailored. Wore a red carnation in his buttonhole. His greying hair was thick, wavy. “Come in. I’m sorry to have kept you waiting.” His lips peeled back from a perfect set of teeth in a grin that failed to defrost the icy blue of his eyes.

They stepped in, closed the door behind them. Liddell felt the snout of a gun jabbed into his back, froze.

“That’s the smart thing to do, fellow,” Cardell told him. “Get Condon in here, Al.” One of the men behind Liddell went out the door, was back in a minute. The redheaded meatball who had been with Marko at the Harbor Cafe that morning walked around Liddell, nodded.

“That’s the guy, Nick.”

The icy blue eyes flicked at him. “Call me Cardell. That’s my name.”

Condon tried a smile, missed by a mile. “Okay, Mr. Cardell. No offense.” He turned his eyes back to Liddell. “He took Marko out of the Harbor Cafe this morning. I ain’t been able to find him since.”

Cardell looked Liddell over. “You’re Liddell, aren’t you?” Without waiting for an answer, he turned to the girl. “Where is Marko?”

“He was home the last time I saw him.”

“You’re a liar,” Condon snarled. “I was there just before I came out here to give Mr. Cardell the score. Nobody was there.” He turned to the man in the chair. “She’s working with this fink.” He licked at his lips. “I could make her tell.”

“Keep your hands off her, meatball,” Liddell told him. The muzzle of the gun in his back bored deeper, made him wince.

“See what you can do with her, Condon,” the white-haired man nodded.

Condon grinned, walked over to where the girl stood, grabbed her wrist, twisted it. “Where is Marko, baby?” A thin drool of saliva glistened at the side of his mouth, ran down to his chin. He twisted harder, brought a scream from the girl. “Where is he?” He brought his face close to hers.

Suddenly, she brought up her knee, sank it in his groin. He loosened the hold on her wrist, clasped both hands to his midsection, sank to the floor. Liddell felt the pressure of the muzzle in his back relax for a second. He threw himself to the right, twisted and slashed out at the gun hand. The man behind him was caught flat-footed, his reflexes were too slow to squeeze the trigger. The gun went sliding across the floor. Before the man could move, Liddell was on him.

He jabbed out with the tips of his fingers, sank them in the man’s adam’s apple, sent him to the floor gagging and gasping for breath. Then he turned to Cardell. The white-haired man was standing at his desk, jamming his finger on a hidden button.

“He’s calling for help, Liddell,” the girl shouted. “Bolt that door. They can’t break it down.”

Liddell threw the heavy bolts on the door, turned the key. When he turned to face Cardell, the white haired man had a gun in his hand.

“It looks like the only way to get a thing done right is to do it yourself, doesn’t it, Liddell?” The gun in his hand was pointed at Liddell’s midsection. “You’ve been pretty lucky until now, but—”

“Drop the gun, Nick,” the girl broke in.

The white-haired man turned startled eyes on the girl, gaped at the ridiculously toy-like .25 she held in her hand. He swung his gun, snapped a shot at her. It hit her in the shoulder, swung her halfway around. His second shot caught her squarely in the chest, slammed her back against the wall, where she slid to the floor.

Liddell went for his .45, but almost before it had cleared leather, the white-haired man had made a break for the far wall. He turned, snapped a shot at Liddell that chewed splinters out of the wall next to his head. Liddell ducked, dropped away. The white haired man touched a hidden spring, disappeared through a sliding door. Liddell snapped a shot at the doorway, waited. When there was no answering fire, he crept over to where the girl lay. Her hand was pressed to her breast in a futile effort to stem the blood. Already, a thin stream of red was seeping through her fingers.

“Don’t worry about me, Liddell. Go after him.” When he tried to slide his arm around her, she shook her head. “He’ll be back in a minute with his goons. Go after him.” She coughed weakly, a thin stream of red ran from the corner of her mouth. She tried to talk, sagged back. After a moment, her eyes began to glaze.

Liddell swore under his breath, crept to the sliding door. It led to a small passageway. Beyond he could see the parking lot. Gun poked in front of him, he worked his way cautiously to the end of the passageway. Half a dozen cars were grouped near the entrance. One of them was the rented Buick.

He looked around, saw no sign of Cardell. Suddenly, he heard voices from the direction of the front of the club. He caught the flash of white shirt fronts in the dim light. Cardell was returning with two tuxedoed guards.

Liddell estimated his chances of making the car, then sprinted from the passageway. He had just slammed the door behind him when Cardell spotted him. The night club man raised his hand; it seemed to belch fire. A small hole appeared in the windshield.

Liddell kicked the car into life, eased it into gear as Cardell and the tuxedoed guards came charging at him, their guns blasting. Liddell flicked on the headlights, waited until Cardell was in the center of them. The night club man stood there, squeezing his trigger. The windshield fell to bits around Liddell as his foot released the clutch, jammed down on the gas. The car roared, sprang forward like a living thing.

There was a faint jar, then the road was empty in the glare of the headlights. Liddell jammed on the brakes, walked back to where the men lay in the road. Two of them were still living, but the white-haired man lay on his back, one leg folded crazily under him. His gun lay near his outstretched hand.

“You’re right, Nick. If a man wants a thing done right, he’s got to do it himself.” Liddell turned, shouldered his way through the crowd that was pouring out of the club, and headed for a telephone.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover has been created for this eBook.

[The end of *Finish the Job* by Frank Kane]