

Draw One in the Dark

—By Walter DeLeon
ILLUSTRATED BY JEFFERSON MACHAMER

JANE ran the late shift at T-Bone Mahoney's, down near the Plaza in Los Angeles. Every night from seven-thirty till two. When was why almost any night you'd see Flash Fanchon, the feather-weight Spider Welsh, the jockey, and Silent Sam Simmons, who ran the poolroom up the street, dropping in for a cup of Java and a kidding match with Jane. And always standing outside between trips was the taxi belonging to Louis Spinoza, whose mother was banking his savings only because Jane had had a pint of blood to spare the time the old lady was in the hospital.

Big Bill Wysel, the Headquarters detective, who picked himself to marry Jane, looked at the cup of coffee she gave him one night and shook his head.

"Don't give me no cracked cup, he said, shoving it away. 'It's bad luck. I ain't going to drink out of no cracked cup for a couple of weeks anyway. I got a hunch about five thousand berries is going to fall my way and I don't want to disco'age it none."

"Where's it going to fall from?" asked Jane, filling up another cup for him.

Big Bill lowered his voice. "The K guy. A year the Bankers' Association is offering five thousand to meet."

"Check-passer?" I asked.

Big Bill nodded. "Cashed four thousand dollars worth of checks on the First National Bank of Lullston, West Virginia, before anybody thought to ask was there a First National in Lullston. There wasn't. He was J. K. Kirkwood on them checks. That was in New York. Pittsburgh donates about three hundred to M. M. Milliken. On his way to Chicago he stops off at Cincinnati and collects ten thousand on doctored certified checks payable to R. K. Keane. Always a K in the name somewhere; see?"

"What does he look like?" Jane asked.

"He don't look the same in any two towns," Bill grinned. "In New York he was a banker in town for the Bankers' Convention. In Pittsburgh he was a salesman for a Connecticut hardware concern. In Lacey he showed pretty letters of credit and Spanish introductions from Buenos Aires. He spent two weeks in New Orleans waiting on table in the restaurant across from the jail, listening to the plans the Chief of Police and the dicks were making to capture him. He left a note thanking the boys for the information."

"What makes you think he's coming this way?" Jane asked.

"They almost got him in San Antonio, Texas, a month ago, but he gaily jumps into the river and swims a get-away in the dark. A week later some K checks appear in El Paso, but when they go for him he ain't there. New Orleans, San Antonio, El Paso—the next stop is Los Angeles, ain't it?"

A Queer Customer

BILL eased down off his stool. "Night, Pete. I'll drop you a postal card from San Diego. Jane's going down there on a week's job," and he winked out.

"Talking about jobs," I said, "my helper quit me this afternoon. Find out if any of the boys need a couple of weeks' work, Jane."

As Jane walked toward the other end of the counter, I turned toward the door. Outside was a little chap, maybe twenty-five or so, his brown eyes following Jane. As I watched him, he took off his cap, opened the door and dragged himself in. His eyes were sunk back into his cheeks a little feverish. His face and hands were clean, but I saw the red and black rim under his collar that comes from the drive and sting of dirt and pebbles chucked at a bo riding the rods of a fast-moving Pullman. He sat down at the long counter.

"May I share your table, mister?" There was a squint in his eye and a comical break in his high-pitched voice that would make anyone grin. I offered him a cigarette. Refusing it, he waited for Jane to finish talking to Flash Fanchon. Then he spoke up in his funny way.

"Ah! 'Tis a good idea! They keep you waiting here till anything they serve you tastes good."

Jane turned around and gave the little chap a calm and cool look. He smiled.

"I beg your pardon, but is there a waitress around the place that could give me a little service?"

Jane's lips twitched.

"Where do you think you are—in a restaurant?" Jane inquired. "What would you like?"

"I'm not very thirsty; just give me a veal cutlet breaded, in a long glass."

Jane's eyes snapped. "How will you take it—with a straw or a spoon?"

"Neither," he answered. "Make it a hy— He suddenly swayed and lurched over against me. I straightened him up and flipped a little water in his face. He opened his eyes.

"Make it a hypo, so I can inject it," he finished.

But Jane had a bowl of soup in front of him and milk toast, a chow, and tea ordered before the little chap had the water wiped off his face.

A crowd came in and Jane was kept hopping for awhile. Only one question did she get time to ask "Sick, buddy?"

He shook his head. "Not any more. I caught the flu in Syracuse a month ago and the Doc advised the sun-kissed beauties of southern California for six months. So I came straight to you."

"You could of done worse," Jane said, walking away. I knew she was thinking of the K guy.

Kid Walker's Luck

"MORE tea?" Jane asked him when the crowd thinned out.

"No, thanks. Where's your boss-ent?"

"What do you mean?"

"I could walk out of course, but I believe in making bouncers' earn their money."

"You mean you're not going to pay for what you've eaten?"

"If the check was a nickel I

couldn't pay a deposit on it," he grinned.

Jane rang up the amount of the stranger's bill, from her apron pocket she took the money and tossed it into the till. Pulling out the receipt stub she shoved it and a pencil toward the little "chow."

"Can you spell your own name?" she asked, easy. The little fellow looked at her then.

"K. A. Walker," he wrote.

"Thanks," said Jane. "What's the K for?"

"Kid, to you," said the little lad.

"All right, Kid," she said. Now, listen, I'll leave word with Jane to give you a cup of coffee in the morning."

He looked up at her quickly, then grinned. "Much obliged, Miss Jane. But I'll have me a job before get hungry again."

"A job?" Jane flashed me a look.

"You've got a job, Kid, if you want it," I said, "helping me shoot film on the Idol lot. There's a hot bath and a cool bed waiting for you at my hotel, too. How about it?"

"I've cracked," said the little fellow, softly. "I've croaked and gone to heaven. Come on, St. Peter, 'tween night, angel. I'm going to dream about you."

Out he went, shaking his head, puzzled-like.

"This I locate Big Bill or one of the boys from Headquarters?" I whispered to Jane. Her grey eyes turned dark and hard as sea. "If I hear of you tipping off anybody that the Kid is the K guy, you're going to change eating places or suffer for sin topsy." Her voice softened. "I'll take care of the Kid, I bet. Leave him to me."

"How's the Kid making out with the company?" Jane asked me after the Kid's first week.

"Aces. Tom Kusch says he's going to make a director out of him and the boss threatens to put him in the office."

Jane's eyes glanced at the Kid chinning with Louis Spinoza.

"He's getting real plump, don't you think?"

I grinned. "He's fatter than this here old Egyptian mummy. The papers have been printing so much about."

Billy Murray, the demon reporter coming in for his usual cup of coffee, told us. "I interviewed a decadent of his this afternoon."

He pointed to an article on the second page which announced the fact that Prince Ptolemy Parmigan, etc., etc., who traced his ancestry back to the mummy had stoned off for a few days in our beautiful city on the tour of the world he was making following his graduation from an English university.

A Prince Arrives

WELL, naturally, Monday morning there were nineteen autos drawn up in front of the Prince's hotel, nineteen men inside inviting the Prince to visit their own particular studio and, on the sidewalk, nineteen cameras focused on the front doors. When the Prince finally emerged with my boss, nineteen shutters started taking sixteen exposures per second of a dapper-dressed young putty colored gent with a vacant eye. Taking off his hat, he uncovered long sleek black hair, parted in the middle and oiled down straight toward the Egyptian film. And then he screwed a monocle into his eye and emitted "Extraordinary" in hand-picked Plectidly accents.

"So that's all that's left of a long line of Kings?" grinned the Kid at the end. Looking at a genuine Egyptian I began to understand why Cleopatra fell for a pig-winner. Why do you suppose he picked on our outfit?"

In the car on our way back to the studio I explained to the Kid that the company would soon be pulling an Egyptian film, inspired by the publicity given Tut-ank-amen. "We'll take the action scenes, and close-ups here in California," I told him, "and fill out the rest of the picture with long shots of the pyramids, the Sphinx, the muddy banks of the Egyptian Nile and any other suitable scenes we can buy from the news weekly companies' libraries. I suppose the boss beat the bunch by asking the Prince for his personal advice and suggestions."

"Kidding himself or the Prince?"

"Kidding nobody. The film we'll shoot to-day, following the Prince all over our lot, will bring heavy money from aforementioned news weekly companies."

The next afternoon we escorted our distinguished visitor into the projection room to show him how he looked to others. I was surprised to hear behind me in the dark room the boss' voice while the film was being run off.

"I wish I knew some way to persuade you, Highness, to play the leading part in my new picture. I realize that money is no object—My dear sir, the amount of money you offer would always be an object. But it is the time, as I have explained, I am due to sail upon the—er, I forget the exact date. My secretary would know."

"Couldn't you postpone sailing?" the boss urged. "It will take our Mr. Kusch not more than three weeks to complete the scenes you appear in these weeks; two here and another in Mexico."

"There is a location a few miles from Tia Juana which is ideal for our purpose. It has the heat haze noticeable in all genuine Egyptian desert film."

"Fascinatingly interesting, of course. But Mexico—it's dirty, I've heard."

"I assure you, your Highness would not be uncomfortable. It would require no more than five days—and of course all expenses including a special pullman or two for the cast will be borne by the company."

"By Jove, it would be rather a lark. I think—yes, I'll do it. I'll get a telegram off to Lord Moncton immediately."

"Lord Moncton?"

"Of the British Legation at Washington. He's by way of being my sponsor here in this country, do you see?—furnishes the wherewithal and that sort of thing. By Jove, I mustn't neglect to inform my secretary to change sailing arrangements. Oh, I



The prince finally emerged with my boss.

say, you mustn't expect histrionic ability of me. I utterly haven't any."

His Royal Joblots

FOUR or five days later he showed he utterly hadn't something else. But in the meantime Big Bill had returned to Los Angeles and found how thick the Kid and Jane had become.

"Last night there's some trouble in the kitchen and Jane goes out to fix it," according to Flash Fanchon. "The Kid hops back of the counter, takes off his coat, ties an apron around his arm and tosses a napkin under his arm when in blows Big Bill."

"Where's Jane?" he asks.

"Behind the clock in Minnie's room" cracks the Kid. "The Kid fills the cup and shoves it all toward Bill."

"That'll be about all of that! Big Bill growls. 'Tell her Detective Wysel would like to see her.'"

"Ch, Detective Wysel. Yes, sir. Can I give up a cup of coffee, detective, while you're waiting?"

"Bill grunts. The Kid rattles around in the crockery and comes up with a prize. The cup has a gouge in the rim, like somebody has taken a bite out of it. And the saucer—you can hear the loose pieces grate. The Kid fills the cup and shoves it all toward Bill."

"Bill looks at it—once. 'Hey!' he yells. 'Do you think I'm going to drink out of this cup?'"

"'Drink out of the saucer if you want,'" the Kid fires back, "we ain't particular here."

"Jane comes out in time to hear the first choice thing Bill calls the Kid. "Oh," says Wysel, when Jane explains it's a joke. "Pete Stevens' new helper, is he?"

"Yes," says Jane, "and believe me, one grand little kiddier."

"Grand little kiddier," repeated Big Bill slow. Then, for no reason at all, he smiles and holds out his hand. "All right. No hard feelings. But you ought to be careful about fooling with cracked cups, Kid. It's bad luck."

"A minute later Jane chases the Kid out with a bunch that's going down to the beach, which gives her the chance to tell Big Bill, quiet, that she's thought over his marrying idea and it leaves her cold. Listen, Pete, tip off the Kid not to be pulling any funny stunts for Big Bill until he gets over his peeve."

I didn't get a chance to warn the Kid that he'd acquired an enemy until it was too late.

The day's work called for some tense melodrama on and around an Egyptianized scow anchored near Santa Monica. Tom Kusch had run things right up to the last scenes, an exciting rescue stunt, and decided he had time to finish up with the ship stuff that day. That would let us leave for Tia Juana early Tuesday morning.

"Now, Prince," Tom explained to Ptolemy Parmigan, "your sweet-heart, Miss Morris here, jumps overboard to escape the villains. You break away from the slaves holding you, rush over to the rail here, jump up on it and dive in after her."

The Prince looked down at the heaving ocean twelve or fourteen feet below him.

"My dear chap, I can't dive."

"Well, then, jump in," said Kusch. "It doesn't make much difference."

"But I—I can't swim, you see," announced his Royal Joblots, feeling for his monocle and not finding it.

"I've got a couple of men down there in a rowboat—for safety's sake. As soon as you hit the water, I'll cut off my camera, throw you a flock of life-preservers and you can hang on till the boat picks you up."

"Is—really, you know—is the scene absolutely necessary?" He coughed. "A touch of cold—"

"Very well, your Highness," said Tom. "I'll get someone to double for you. All you'll have to do is run across the deck and jump on the rail."

His eye fell on the Kid. "Can you swim?"

"Sure."

The Kid in Trouble

"WANT to double for the Prince?"

"Sure," the Kid grinned.

Later he appeared on deck in the Prince's costume, a little black false moustache on his lip contrasting comically with his light hair.

"Oh your hair and part in the middle," Tom told him. "When it's oiled and wet it will photograph as dark as the Prince's."

"Take your places," Tom called. "Ready, everybody? Camera!"

Up and over went Morris. The Kid didn't jump—he just lifted himself off the rail and floated far out in a swan dive. The little side roll he gave himself took him under without a splash.

He bobbed the Kid's head. In long, strong strokes he cut through the swells toward Morris. They splashed around terrifically for a minute before starting toward shore.

But when the rowboat pulled out, the Kid helped Morris in and then started swimming alongside it. Only it wasn't swimming. It was all the water stunts and clowning I'd ever seen and a lot more.

I was telling some of the boys about it early that night at T-Bone's—the Kid volunteering to take my camera out and turn in my film for me, when Big Bill Wysel dropped in.

"A water-dog, eh?" Bill quietly left the place. Then I remembered about the K guy jumping into the river in San Antonio.

"Where's the Kid?" Jane asked when she came on duty.

"He should have been here twenty minutes ago," I said. "Something in my expression made her ask, sharp, 'Is the Kid in trouble?'"

"He wasn't the last time I saw him. He— It was no use. I told her about Big Bill and everything as soothingly as I could.

"Eight o'clock—half-past-nine o'clock. Still no sign of the Kid. I rang up the studio. The Kid had come in about six and left fifteen or twenty minutes later. By eleven there wasn't any color in Jane's face."

"Don't be silly, Jane," I told her. "Everything's all right."

"Is it?" she asked. "You know my little sister—worked at the switchboard at the C—Hotel? I nodded. "They let her out this afternoon, without giving her any reason at all."

"Well,"

"Big Bill's cousin is the house detective here."

A few minutes before twelve, Jane whispered, "Listen, Pete, will you ring up headquarters and—"

She stopped dead, her eyes glued to the door. Lurching through it, stumbling and feeling around like a blind man came the Kid.

"Kid!" Jane had him in her arms before any of us moved. "What happened you?"

"My dear me, the works—at headquarters," mumbled the Kid. "Jane, dear would you get a cold towel for my eyes? I've been looking into a hundred watt lamp for three hours."

"For what?" Jane asked as a couple of the boys leaped for the towel pile.

"They said the writing on the check I signed looks like the K guy's writing."

"Who said so?"

"Big Bill,"

"Sadie," she called to the other waitress. "You take my place behind the counter, Louis—to Spinoza."

"Get your taxi, Pete, you'll stay here with Sadie till closing time, won't you? I'm going to take the Kid home with me to my mother."

Royal Generosity

THE next morning I was thinking about Jane and the Kid when I entered the studio. The girl at the switchboard stopped me.

"Some woman phoned a few minutes ago for you. She left word that the Kid wouldn't be out to the studio to-day," she said.

In the office with the boss was the prince.

"Good morning, Pete," the boss nodded. "The prince wants to ask a favor of you."

"It's this way, old chap," the prince stammered, embarrassed. "I didn't avoid hearing the message that came for you. Rotten luck; what? Extremely likeable little fellow. I hope it's nothing serious."

"Oh, I don't imagine so," I said. "The exposure—his long immersion in the water—and he but recently recovered from flu—he broke off, 'I feel a keen sense of responsibility; he was substituting for me, do you see? Do you think he might accept from me at least his doctor and nurse fees?' He drew a wallet from his pocket."

"Sure," I said.

The prince extracted from the wallet a few small folded papers and some large bills. Laying the papers on the desk he counted out two hundred and fifty dollars and held it toward me.

"You're too generous," I said, looking pointedly at the two ten-dollar bills which were all that was left of his cash.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That's quite all right. My secretary—my beggar—settled and closed all my accounts before cashing the usual check from Lord Moncton. He's trying to arrange that, now, over the wire. I insist upon your taking these few dollars for the Kid, Stevens. I'll make out somehow, I'm sure."

"You don't need to worry," the boss smiled. "What was the size of the check Lord what's-his-name sent? I might be able to cash it for you."

The prince unfolded one of the papers on the desk, stamped with the British Embassy seal. "Twenty-five hundred dollars."

"Oh, that's all right," the boss said. "Endorse it and I'll send a boy right down to my bank with it."

"Oh, I say, please don't trouble—"

"No trouble at all, your highness." Languidly the prince started writing his catalogue of names on the back of the check. "The old fossil should have telegraphed it instead of putting me under obligations."

The boss interrupted with a laugh. "There's no obligation, prince. The amount of this check is just about what I'll owe you after your week in Tia Juana. That's all the protection I need."

On the expression on the prince's empty face you couldn't tell, as he stared at the boss, whether she was going to be insulted or not when the boss' words should finally sink in.

"By jove," he said after a moment, "I didn't think of that. Our contract, of course. Wierdly practical, you Americans; what?"

Jane's sister answered the ring. "Oh, yes, Mr. Stevens," she said. "Jane left for Frisco this morning on business—for you know."

"How is he to-day?"

"Kidding my mother into hysterics."

"Tell him I'll be out to-morrow with— Then I spilled the welcome tidings."

A Circus Acrobat

BUT Sunday I had the feeling that someone was following me, so Jane's house was about the only place in Los Angeles I didn't visit.

Late Monday afternoon, just as a few of us were going into the projection-room, Jane appeared.

"Come on in with me," I said. I've got to look at some film. What's new?"

"Just this Pete. There isn't a thing to keep them from railroading the Kid. He's a vaudeville and circus acrobat. But the vaudeville troupe was with—the only men who can really identify and alibi him—their called for Australia last Saturday."

I told her about the two-fifty gift. "Listen; let's retain a good lawyer with that sack; and go straight to Chief Rogers. He's square and fair and—"

"And in the hospital waiting for an operation. Nobody can get to him."

In silence we looked at the film. It was Sid Hockins' take.

"That's the prince," I told Jane, "trying to register Occidental surprise and horror not unmixed with love."

Jane leaned forward in her seat. "That—the prince?"

As she looked the film jumped to the shot of the Kid standing on the rail of the ship.

"Watch his dive," I whispered. Then came the footage showing him cutting through the swells, reaching Miss Morris and starting with her towards shore. Then flashed on the screen a fairly close-up shot of the Kid. He was lying on his back in the water, his head stuck up so his wet hair was plastered tight to his scalp, his eyes staring up with a silly vacant expression, his mouth hanging open.

"I thought you said the prince couldn't swim," said Jane.

"The prince? That's the Kid," I grinned. I bolted back to Sid.

"Where did that come from?"

"I had a few feet of film left," he answered, "and when the Kid passed on his way to the ship I wound the roll out on him."

"I see." Turning around I found Jane gone—so quietly I hadn't heard her leave the dark room.

"She went out," the gateman told me, "and got into the taxi with Silent Sam Simmons and Louis Spinoza."

It was just half-past seven when I turned the corner to T-Bone's. Behind me running fast came little Flash Fanchon.

"Come on, Pete," he called. "You can help."

I got into T-Bone's two jumps behind him.

"Jane!" Flash shouted.

She came out of the kitchen.

"Beat it," Flash whispered. "They've took the Kid—went out to your house and got him—and now they're coming after you—to find out how much you know."

Jane Talks

WITH her finger, absently, Jane began tracing slowly a long crack in the cup of hot milk she carried. "Big Bill took the Kid—out of my house—because I wouldn't marry him," she said in a dead voice. Up went her head.

"You'll never have any luck as long as you keep cracked china around you," he told me."

Wham! went the cup on the floor in twenty pieces. Bang—crash—the saucer followed it.

"Get out! All of you! Out! I'm going to tell them all I know. But I'm going to break up my bad luck first."

A sweep of her arm cleared the counter of dishes.

"Come on, fellows," I said. "Let's keep the crowd out."

For a moment begun to collect.

Bulling through the crowd came Ben Barrow, police lieutenant, and with him Swede Yeager, Mill Wysel's buddy.

"Oh, it's you, Lieutenant Barrow," cried Jane. "Come to take me to headquarters to talk. You used good judgment in bringing Swede Yeager with you to take a woman to jail. His wife is still wearing the black eye he gave her last week."

"Cut that!" yelled Ben. "Shut up and drop them plates!"

"That line comes easy to you, doesn't it, Lieutenant; your wife keeps you in practise saying it."

Ben reached the door. A plate splintered at his feet.

"Stand back!" commanded Jane. "I'm going to tell about the check you split with the Greek bootlegger in your precinct—"

"Go get Wysel," bawled Ben to Swede.

"Go get Wysel," echoed Jane. "I want to tell about the jail sentence he framed on Silent Sam Simmons because he thought he could steal that little Mexican dancer from him if Sam wasn't around."

Suddenly I realized that she was expecting something.

"Listen, Swede," she called after Yeager, "tell Big Bill to bring his cousin along—the one that made my sister lose her job because she wouldn't tell me what a grand husband Wysel would make. Get him—"

"Jane!" Big Bill himself plunged in. "What are you trying to do?"

"Big Bill!" A shower of plates crashed to the floor. "You must be tired out after having a subtle old woman and a little fellow like the one I'm going to marry—all in one day."

"Now, listen, Jane—"

A motor horn squeaked around the corner. Pressing through the crowd, reckless, came Louis Spinoza in his taxi.

"Langway!" he shouted, jumping down he flung open the door of his car.

Out stepped Prince Ptolemy Parmigan of Cairo, Egypt, and right alongside him Silent Sam Simmons. The point of the bulge in Sam's coat pocket never wandered from his royal highness' short-ribs. Right in to the restaurant they brushed.

Another K Check

HERE he is, Jane," said Sam. "Cold as ice."

"Come and get him, Lieutenant," Jane called Barrow. "Here's your K guy. And remember, you got him from me."

"The K guy!" Barrow's eyes were popping. "That's the Egyptian prince—"

"Are you going to argue, or do I take him to headquarters myself?"

"Listen, Jane—"

"Look out!" I yelled. For a second Sam's gun had wavered. In that second the prince jumped toward the kitchen door.

Jane whirled around. A soup bowl streaked through the air. Thud! The prince went down like a log.

"Open his collar," Jane said. "Now will you believe me?"

Three inches below his collar, the putty color ended in skin as white as any man's. Jane poured a little salad oil on a napkin and began rubbing the hair over his temple. In a minute she showed us a black smudge on the napkin. "Hair dye," she said.

The prince shuddered, groaned and opened his eyes. Wysel helped him to his feet.

"Who hit me?" the prince inquired.

He looked at Jane. In pure Brooklynese he moaned, "I'll say she packs a hefty punch."

An hour later the Kid and Jane were receiving congratulations at one end of the counter at T-Bone's.

"How did you work it out?" I finally asked Jane. "What started you?"

She laughed. "The picture of the Kid floating in the water. I thought it was the prince."

"In a flash I remembered a lot of things—the K guy being chased out of New Orleans, San Antonio and El Paso. I remembered how uninterested in playing in the picture he was until the boss mentioned Mexico. Right away he saw the easiest way imaginable to cross the border."

"I knew the K guy was a crack swimmer. Yet the prince wouldn't get himself wet. His color would run. Then I ran out and asked Sam and Louis to locate the prince and bring him here."

"But listen," I said, "you must have had something more definite than a putty-colored hunch to make you turn the prince over to the police."

"Of course, I had. You told me about it—the British embassy check for twenty-five hundred dollars. Before escaping for good, he just couldn't resist passing one more K check."

"K check?" I repeated, puzzled. "It wasn't a K check he gave the boss. Moncton is spelled with a 'c'."

Jane slowly smiled. "You've got to admit it sounds like a 'c'. Anyway the reward belongs to me."

"Pardon—to us," piped up the Kid. "Ah, Mr. Walker," turned to him, smiling affectionately, "did I hear you inviting the boys to a cup of coffee on the two hundred and fifty dollars the prince gave us?"

"It's a good idea," laughed the Kid. "Then with a wink at the gang, he said: 'And listen, don't give me no cracked cup.'"

"Ed, and 'Cop right, 1924." Jane laughed.

NO THEORIST
EVERY skillful hunter is no theorist but a man of practical aims.