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Two of a Kind

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TWO OF A KIND

It was Wednesday morning. A baffling mist
clung lightly to the tops of the taller buildings.
The spire of the new Chrysler building was still
invisible in the cloudy vapor. The whole atmo­
sphere was one of metropolitan unrest. To the casual
visitor, the low rumble, the damp feel of the streets as yet
deeply shaded by high-flung masses of metal and stone, the
almost hostile air of hurrying office workers, must have been
most depressing. Yet it was all a part of him. He had
grown up in it. David Stuart would have been restless,
unhappy perhaps, elsewhere.

To some people New York is like that. Stuart was
indeed a lucky chap. Four years ago he had been gradu­
ated from a little high school in the quaint town of Flushing,
L. I. In the offices of the New York National Trust Company
he had found a clerk’s position. The few years of appli­
cation had gained for him the coveted job of first teller in
the branch bank uptown. In less than three months, Jones,
the assistant manager, was to be transferred to the foreign
exchange department downtown and the fact was practic­
ally assured that Stuart would be first in line for the assist­
ant managership. Then—there was Marion Pembroke.
They would be married when he got his promotion.

There was a lightness in his step as he ascended the
stairs from the subway this morning. In fact it was there
every morning now. Stuart was intensely happy. He
wanted to sing at his work like a schoolboy. He didn’t of
course. Banks do not permit such things.

He stepped merrily through the revolving door en­
trance to the bank, causing the rubber flaps to smack to­
gether rapidly.

Jones was there, his face buried in a morning paper.
At Stuart’s “good morning” he glanced up. For a brief
moment he appeared alarmed; then his mouth twisted into a wry little smile.

"Hello Tony, old kid," he said, "How does it feel to be out?"

Stuart halted and stepped to his desk, his face quite blank.

"Sir?"

Jones leaned back in his swivel chair and laughed.

"You haven't seen the morning papers, then?"

"No sir," replied Stuart, shaking his head.

The assistant manager called him to his desk, pointing at the same time to the outspread paper. "Take a look at that," he directed.

As he looked, Stuart caught his breath in amazement. That picture on the front page—could it be he? The resemblance was startling. When he read the headline, however, he knew that it was not his picture. Across the top of the sheet the words were huge, black, unavoidable:

TONY CASPER ESCAPES FROM SING-SING
Bars of Cell Cut Through. Hacksaw Blades on Floor.

"Your twin brother?" Jones asked lightly.

"Why, no sir," denied Stuart; he was more relieved now. He certainly looks enough like me, though. I never thought I'd have a gangster for a double. Rather funny, isn't it?"

By this time the others of the bank force had come in and were gathered around the desk, some of them poking fun at Stuart. Carter, the bookkeeper, was reading aloud the printed lines under the picture:

"Tony Casper, notorious gangster, escaped from his cell in Sing-Sing penitentiary, sometime between midnight and three o'clock this morning. He was serving a fifteen year sentence for his part in the Sonneborn robbery last month. The bars of his cell were cut through. Hacksaw
blades on the floor gave a clear evidence as to the manner in which the bars were severed. Prison officials are at a loss to explain how the blades were put into Casper’s possession.

"Climbing down over the wall by means of a rope of bed clothing Casper was probably carried off in a car belonging to his associates.

"Albany police are making every possible effort to recapture the escaped bandit. Three men who were seen loitering about the prison on Tuesday have already been taken into custody for questioning.

"Captain Hull said that while he was at large, Casper was in grave danger of losing his life at the hands of a group of racketeers on whom Casper ‘squealed’ at his trial. He further stated that these men will spare no effort to ‘take Tony for a ride’.

"Still think it’s funny having a gangster for a double?" Carter wanted to know when he had finished.

"Yes," said Stuart slowly, "why not?"

"Well, just suppose one of Casper’s enemies ‘takes you for a ride’ by mistake. Ever think of that?"

"No," Stuart admitted, "but it’s pretty foolish to worry over that anyway. Cheer up, Carter, you old adding machine driver. Try being an optimist for once."

Stuart was smiling but he was obviously upset. The suggestion could not help but have some effect upon his imagination. Never before had the phrase “taken for a ride” held such a sinister meaning.

He tried repeatedly to cast the thought aside. It returned each time more persistently than before. By ten o’clock it began really to worry him. He pictured to himself, and very vividly, the finding of his cold body on the steps of his boarding house where he had been shot down by a volley from a great touring car that swept around the corner as he had left the house. Perhaps there would be but one shot, well aimed, from the dark recesses of the little
alley across from his window. Or, they might force him into a car and drive off—and then — — . He trembled as his mind’s eye pictured policemen dragging his bullet-pierced body from the Hudson.

Stuart’s work did not progress so cheerfully this morning. He was glad when lunch time finally came.

He went to his favorite lunchroom. Some hot coffee and a juicy steak would fix him up, he thought. The meal did cheer him up tremendously, but there was faint whisperings, queer glances at him that he did not like.

"Why can’t these nosey old gossips let me alone?” he muttered.

The afternoon passed more easily. Stuart was in a better frame of mind when he went home in the evening.

But at the boarding house there were cries of “Get the gun, here he comes”, and “Tony, that’s him.” Here it was all in a spirit of obvious fun however, for everyone liked Stuart; Dave, they called him. Even the prim and staid landlady made an attempt at humor by supposing gravely that she’d have to lock up the silverware. Stuart was laughing too, when dinner was over.

The week ran itself out eventlessly. People insisted upon joking of course. Stuart was a little annoyed, sometimes embarrassed, but he was forgetting to become concerned about it. As yet he could not help looking up as he passed dark recesses or heard the quick scream of brakes. Once a blown tire made his heart jump. Outside of this, life was subsiding into its normal channels.

Sunday evening in his room he was whistling gayly as he adjusted a bright blue tie. He was going to see Marion. He could almost see her eyes then, smiling up at him as they planned, together, that little rose-covered cottage. She was charming always.

Someone knocked at his door.. He was still shaping his tie.
"Come in," he called as he patted the tie into place and turned down his shirt collar.

It was then that he awakened from his musing. His mirror was playing tricks on him. Where he had seen but one image of himself, he now saw two.

Then his mouth went dry. The second image wore a grey suit, a snap brim hat. His own coat and vest were lying on the bed. He turned.

"Seem to know who I am, don't you?" The voice was not unpleasant.

"Tony Casper," he whispered. Stuart spoke with effort, for his tongue seemed too large for his mouth.

"Yes, Tony Casper. Stuart's the name, isn't it? Sit down, will you? I can't while you're standing. Bad form. you know."

Stuart sat down.

Casper remained standing, however.

"Listen," he continued in his faultless English, "you are a commercial man. You know very well that publicity has its advantages. Unfortunately, in my business, I have no use for advertising. The less I get the better I like it."

Stuart was puzzled. What was the man driving at?

Casper was still speaking, "You wonder what this has to do with you. Well, it's briefly this. Your looking like me is too much of an advertisement. I don't like it." The voice became gratingly hard. "So after next Sunday New York is going to be too small for you and me. See?"

"But," began Stuart. He was cut off. Something hard in Casper's hand was bruising his ribs.

Casper's face was menacing. "Next Sunday, see?"

Then he was gone. Stuart did not follow him. He was extremely weak. Mechanically he finished his dressing.

The evening at Marion's passed. He didn't know how. He managed to appear attentive but he was very tired. At least that is what Marion thought. She made him leave early.
Six days dragged by. Still he had told no one, not even Marion. He was worn; his clothes were crumpled from nights spent at his window staring. He stared all day, too, chin in hand. He was not looking at anything. He was trying to evolve some solution out of his tortured brain. He could not leave New York. The promotion, a lifetime opportunity, would be lost. He could not endure the thought of Marion’s marrying a mere clerk. Yet if he did not leave, Casper would surely keep his word. He would lose everything then. He could not tell which was the worst.

He ate practically nothing. His face grew thin, his eyes large in hollow sockets. He was changing almost overnight. He was desperate when he made his decision. He would stay. At least he was not a coward.

Monday at the bank was earthly torment. Yet nothing happened. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were likewise unbearable. Still nothing.

Friday he was alone except for Carter, the bookkeeper. Jones and the rest were downtown. He could not hold up much longer, he knew. He was working blindly now. A packet of bills fell from his fingers. He stooped to pick them up. He straightened up wearily. It was almost closing time. He did not see the man before his window. Out of the void came a voice; he would have known it anywhere.

"Will you change a twenty, please?"
"Casper."
"Yes, Casper." The words were deliberate.
Stuart closed his eyes. He was finished.
Casper was talking, though. "Stuart," he said, "you're a fool, but I admire your spirit. I'm not going to shoot you as I had planned. I'm leaving for Europe, and," his voice assumed a hard grate, "I want that money. Hand it over."

A snub-nosed automatic, pointing over the counter,
emphasized the command. Stuart did not move. For the first time in a week he was composed.

"Casper," he said quietly, "I'll see you to the devil first."

The police alarm on the wall was yards away. Stuart had been measuring the distance mentally and even as he spoke to Casper, he sprang for it.

"Keep away from that thing." Casper's words ripped out. His voice was a shriek as he fired.

As Stuart pulled the lever, the bank seemed to explode. The concussion threw him to the floor. Fragments were dropping on him; then it was dark.

He regained consciousness in the emergency ward of the Bellevue Hospital. A heavy weight seemed to bear down upon his chest. The rest of his body had no feeling.

What's the matter, Doc?" he asked of a white coated attendant.

"You're all right, son," he replied softly, "a shot in the left lung which will be O.K. in a few days."

"Casper - - " began Stuart.

He's dead," was the answer, "tried to shoot his way out and failed." Stuart closed his eyes and rested.

A few days later The Times carried the following few lines on the back page of its morning edition:

"David Stuart, employe of the New York National Trust Company, succumbed today at Bellevue Hospital from injuries received when he made a valiant and successful but fatal attempt to frustrate a hold-up of the uptown branch of the bank by which he is employed. Another victim of the robbery was Tony Casper, notorious gangster, recently escaped from Sing-Sing. It is believed that he attempted the hold-up alone, and when young Stuart resisted him he shot and killed the youth. Casper was shot down by police as he tried to make a get-away."

John S. Snyder.