door to leave. I got in his way. Remember the last time you
he kept on coming and even tried to shove. I took his arm, to his seat.
question of who must remain
room and forced the remain-
ed the bottle, of course, when ing him. If he had not found oral hydrate. This was far bet-
der the Senator, and left." ve done this. He was the last
and he did not drink anything he left their apartment. That, bers clearly going to bed at calendar that Mr. Markovich
true, Bill. If so, you should t I warn you, if you lie it will
and us that he had done it. That lose him all his business. He not for any real convictions
ent pressed a switch on his take Markovich into custody. r and said so many times that the sunny climes of California. sole affair, and the good Sen-
what a great man he was, and was to be expected given their murdered rather than commit

“FIRECRACKERS”
by Archie Goodwin

FOREWORD
I have often been asked how I first became acquainted with Nero Wolfe, that gargantuan, egocentric, orchid-growing, beer-drinking, self-proclaimed genius, undoubtedly the world's greatest detective. Admittedly, my answers have been a little vague, partly in deference to the privacy of people involved but, more important, to safeguard the well-being of one, Archie Goodwin.
You may recall a couple of early references:
"Born in Ohio. Public high school, pretty good at geometry and football, graduated with honor but no honors. Went to college two weeks, decided it was childish, came to New York and got a job guarding a pier, shot and killed two men and was fired, was recommended to Nero Wolfe for a chore he wanted done, did it, was offered a full-time job by Mr. Wolfe, took it."
On another occasion:
"The only girl I had ever been really soft on had found another bargain she liked better. That was how I happened to meet Wolfe - but that story isn't for me to tell, at least not yet. There are one or two little points that would need clearing up some day."
Perhaps that day has finally arrived. Both of the above statements are true, as far as they go. Oh, I know I have a reputation for dissimulating, as Inspector Cramer of the NYPD would be glad to attest. Sometimes, bending the truth a little is for a serious purpose. But mostly, it's pure flippancy on my part, merely to satisfy a whim, a mood, or to just plain rebel against conformity, never intended to be taken literally. In fact, about the only person I've never been able to bamboozle at all is the second (and last) girl I've really been soft on, Lily Rowan. When I first met her, I fed her a perfectly plausible line. She simply looked at me, through the most beautiful azure eyes ever created, and asked softly, "Is any of it straight?" In my most sincere manner, I hastened to assure her it was all true but the words which came out, solely of their own volition, were, "No, it's firecrackers."

The events leading up to my initial meeting with Wolfe involved a lot more than firecrackers. You might even call them a whole Fourth of July explosion. Except that they happened in December. In 1926. When, as an adventurous and (I hate to admit it but you'll find out anyway) naive youth of 18, fresh out of Chillicothe, Ohio, I was ready to take on the Big City of New York.

They materialized out of the mist, two dark shadows silhouetted against the dim light from the warehouse office window. A foghorn wailed mournfully in the distance. Somewhere down river a ship's bell clanged as if in answer. Silently, the two men advanced towards the window. Peering in, they saw exactly what they expected, a uniformed figure, presumably that dumb kid security guard, back to the window, hunched over his desk, probably half asleep. They never hesitated, raised their Tommy guns and shattered the office window with a series of staccato blasts. Enough bullets to kill a dozen men ripped into the back of the slumping figure at the desk. Another blast from the guns blew away the door lock and sent the door flying open. Without a word, the two gunmen marched through the door to view their handiwork...

You want to know how I ever got into that fool predicament? Or, more to the point, how I got out? Then we'll have to go back a way. But relax. I'm far too short of a Wolfean ego to write an autobiography. However, you'll have to forgive a touch of nostalgia.

To begin with, I was born in Chillicothe, Ohio. You thought it was Canton? Or maybe Zanesville? Either would have been quite a trick inasmuch as my mother was in Chillicothe at the time. And I did attend the State University in Columbus for a couple of weeks, mainly to please my mother. Oh, I know that long ago, I implied that my mother and father were both dead. That was half firecrackers. At that particular time, it simply suited my mood to be an orphan. I'm happy to say that my mother is still very much alive, occasionally visits New York, and enjoys dining with Wolfe and me.

But, back to college. Although the Jazz Age hadn't quite caught up with Chillicothe, it was running wild on the Ohio State campus. The students, if I may resort to hyperbole, prided themselves on non-conformity. Yet, they were all mirror-images of each other in their oversized sweaters, baggy pants and saddle shoes, patent-leather hair combed back, stiffened with slickum, and parted in the middle, appropriate shells for flasks, ukuleles and Greek-sounding recent Scopes trial.
It wasn't in class all every week porkers rooted pig·headedly re·publican. I couldn't
foreground students would have got that right. I could have persevered ... non·sequitur?)
strings rooted. If the college were "farm", .that I wouldn't have been able to bamboozle
be a small firecracker. But you'll have to visualize... Being the wonderful lady she is, she finally agreed and
the office window with a series of fuses to work on a current case, I have to get out of the office and walk through
headed for New York. In the spring, fruit trees blossomed in bursts of pink and white to yield
sweet corn. Around the front of the house were violets, tulips, narcissus, peonies and iris. I can still smell the sweet scent of the honeysuckle that climbed our
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began to head for New York. When I say "farm", that may be a small firecracker. But you'll have to visualize
it to understand the exciting contrast of leaving it for Times Square. It wasn't much of a farm by Midwestern standards, only about three acres. In the garden behind the house were rows of leaf lettuce, radishes, butter beans, carrots, cabbages, potatoes and those two most succulent Ohio crops, lush tomatoes and sweet corn. Around the front of the house were violets, tulips, narcissus, peonies and iris. I can still smell the sweet scent of the honeysuckle that climbed our porch railing.
In the spring, fruit trees blossomed in bursts of pink and white to yield seasonal and fall crops of cherries, plums and apples. In back were clumps of berry bushes, rhubarb, asparagus and an arbor of Concord grapes. What our major domo and chef, Fritz Brenner, couldn't have done with these! If Wolfe had ever known about them, he'd probably have had me commuting to Ohio.

My mother wasn't too happy when I returned to the farm and told her I wanted to
leave, my mother handed me an old Colt .45 Army automatic which had belonged to my father.

The few classes I attended were dreary lessons by disinterested professors from dull books written by dead people (i.e., dead now, questionable then.) The only live ones we studied were Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. I couldn't understand the one (I doubt the profs did either) and the answer to any question about the other was "sex". Even the so-called students would have got that right. I would have had A+! Perhaps if the college were co-ed I could have persevered...
Mainly, however, I couldn't stand sitting (is that a non-sequitur?) in class all day. Even now, when Wolfe and I are between cases or when he pig-headedly refuses to work on a current case, I have to get out of the office and walk through the streets of New York.

My mother wasn't too happy when I returned to the farm and told her I wanted to
head for New York. Being the wonderful lady she is, she finally agreed and
even staked me with part of the tuition money she'd set aside for college.

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Rhode Island Reds pecked away in the yard by the chicken house near the
barn. Farther back, in fact a lot farther, a pair of China Poland pokers rooted and grunted in the mud and slurped from the overflowing trough. In the pasture were too few cows to be called a herd but quite enough to supply my favorite beverage. And beyond, the pasture was bordered by dark woods which, when I was a youngster, seemed like the end of the world.

Describing the scenes of my lost youth, I'm tempted to wax sentimental. But, at heart, I was never really a country boy. If anything, I always was and still like to think of myself as a man of action. And, to me, the Big City has always been where the action is. After the Thanksgiving Holidays, while I was packing to leave, my mother handed me an old Colt .45 Army automatic which had belonged to my father. She'd heard a lot about crime in New York and figured I should

dle, appropriate shells for the embryonic brains below. They majored in hip
flasks, ukuleles and Greek fraternities with names I couldn't even pronounce. If William Jennings Bryan could have put those morons on the witness stand during the recent Scopes trial, he'd have had no trouble at all proving that man couldn't have descended from monkeys. Descended? The monkeys would have sued for libel.

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have some protection. To humor her, I tucked it in my suitcase and forgot about it. All it did later was save my life.

As I was leaving, my sister Meg, from childhood the object of bickering and rough-housing that masked a deep underlying mutual affection, handed me a package containing sandwiches and a cake she'd baked especially for me (she who hated to cook). I was startled to see tears in her eyes, gave her a quick peck on the cheek, and had to leave quickly to avoid choking up myself.

I walked to the nearby highway and caught a bus bound for Cleveland where I would board the 20th Century Limited out of Chicago to New York. I'd argued with my mother that it would be a lot cheaper to take the cross-country bus all the way but she insisted I go first class. During the nearly 200 mile trip to Cleveland, I amused myself by watching the billboards as they flashed by. "I'd Walk A Mile For A Camel". I was in good shape - I could do that. "Ivory Soap - 99 44/100 % Pure". In this far from perfect world, that seemed close enough. But that slogan will never last. And finally, a series that read, "THE 50 CENT JAR/SO LARGE/BY HECK/EVEN THE SCOTCH/NOW SHAVE THE NECK/BURMA SHAVE". By the time I got to Cleveland, I'd decided to smoke Camels, wash with Ivory and shave with Burma Shave every day whether I needed it or not. Look out Broadway, here I come!

II

If you're not a native New Yorker (is anyone?) you're bound to remember your first impression of that great metropolis. It was Saturday, a clear, crisp December morning, when my train pulled into Grand Central Station. The porters actually rolled out a red carpet across the platform and into the station. Talk about First Class. Thanks, Mom! Carrying my one bulging suitcase, I walked out onto 42nd Street in a state of exhilaration and excitement right smack into the clamor of Manhattan. More cars, buses and taxis than I'd seen in a lifetime raced each other through the streets. The crowded sidewalks teemed with frantic people rushing in every direction, all with the air of reaching some important goal known only to themselves. The pace was faster, the buildings taller, the girls prettier, the skirts shorter....

I turned west on 42nd Street towards Broadway and Times Square, gawking like any tourist at the people, the store windows already dressed in their Christmas finery, and searching for the Woolworth Building, tallest in the world, towering high above the other skyscrapers. As the crowd thinned a little, my eyes were drawn as if by a magnet towards a young woman walking in my direction. Somehow, she stood out from all the others, a tall, lithe, shapely figure striding confidently ahead with exceptional grace and poise. As I watched in ill-concealed admiration, something to which she was undoubtedly accustomed, I noticed a seedy-looking guy, dressed in a bulky sweater and stocking cap, moving purposefully toward her. Suddenly, he snatched her purse and darted in my direction, dodging pedestrians, none of whom paid the slightest attention. As he came near, I dropped my suitcase and threw myself, all 190 pounds, in a body block that would have made my high school football coach proud. The would-be thief sprawled in one direction, the stolen purse flying from his grasp in another. No longer concerned with him, I hurried into the crowd. Still, no passing by as though this we

Now you might say I acted think I reacted with intelligence ways been my guide. In any e' girl in the world. She was a kr dark green eyes flashed from censed a tiny nose and perfe under a perky cloche hat. H perfectly.

As she thanked me, one of (them?) approached and asked worse for wear but otherwise cop was leaving he took me as If that mugger had a knife or work in the hands of the law, he heard my reply, "Yeah, leave lady's purse in the hands of th was destined to be played over.

When I turned back I could action set in. Over her mild pr she gave me an address on 38th to tell me her name was Dolores but she was presently "at liberty; I'm currently out of work. Me in a waterfront warehouse off.

We reached her apartment at the door. On impulse I said "If too. Why don't we try it together, dancer, but I promise not to st special for dinner. After all this is occasion!" She hesitated for a while, agreed that I could pick her up at Grand Central where I bought News. Pursuing the Classified rooming house in Greenwich the swellest neighborhood in advertisement promised clean cor· 6th Avenue and 9th th available room, liked it, rented.

My first week in New York was and the prospects of a new job highlights might be of intere
My first week in New York was noteworthy primarily for a whirlwind romance and the prospects of a new job. You don't need details about the former, but a few highlights might be of interest. After settling in my second-floor room, I went con-
out and bought a couple of late afternoon newspapers. The Evening Graphic, a tabloid, featured lurid articles such as “Love Nest on Park Avenue,” a photo of the esteemed mayor of New York, “Gentleman” Jimmy Walker in the area of a scantily-clad chorus girl, and a follow-up story on the nationally beloved evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson. She had failed to return from an excursion last spring. After 37 days, while her whereabouts remained a well-publicized mystery, she staggered out of a desert in Arizona, claiming she’d just escaped from kidnappers. According to the article, there was ample evidence that she’d been off on a month-long fling with her boyfriend. I decided that paper should have been called the “Porno Graphic.”

The Gazette was a lot different and it became my favorite New York paper. It included a great Amusement Section, filled with movie, restaurant, and nightclub advertisements. A restaurant called Rusterman’s sounded expensive but probably worth it. My eye was also caught by one for the Flamingo which read as follows: “Sophisticates . . .” (That’s me) . . .” attune your souls to happiness and synchronize your toes with tempo by Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra.” I was more than ready for a little soul attunement and toe synchronization!

The landlady charged me a nickel a call on the telephone in the downstairs hall, and stood nearby to make sure the calls were local as I made reservations for both places. That ought to impress Dolores! I shaved with Burma Shave, including my neck, took a bath with Ivory Soap, and dressed with special care in my gray suit with pinstripes, a light blue shirt, fresh collar, and dark blue tie. I was at Dolores’ apartment on the dot of eight. She kept me waiting only ten minutes. She was breathtaking in a flowered party dress that came just about to her knees, evidently in the latest style. Her gleaming auburn hair was “bobbed” in the most modern fashion. A single strand of pearls adorned her gorgeous neck.

From the beginning, we were completely at ease with each other. The dinner at Rusterman’s was the best I’d ever had (Sorry, Mom) but I blanched a little when the check came. At The Flamingo, we blended perfectly and Dolores taught me the latest dance craze, the Charleston. I admit I never did quite get the hang of it when the check came. At The Flamingo, we blended perfectly and Dolores taught me the latest dance craze, the Charleston. I admit I never did quite get the hang of it, mostly because I thought it was pretty silly. I was also surprised when, back at the table, she took out her compact and powdered her knees! But they were cute knees. And she certainly was my idea of a Broadway glamour girl.

During the week, we held hands through the new movie, “Don Juan”, starring John Barrymore, Mary Astor and Warner Oland at the brand new Warner Theatre. It was easy to see why such theaters were called “palaces”. The center of the mezzanine was big enough for an eight-day bicycle race. It featured marble figures in a flowing fountain. The walls displayed ancient statuary in gilded niches. The theatre itself seated 5300 people but they might as well all have been statues for Dolores and I couldn’t have been more alone in a crowd.

The movie featured something billed as “REVOLUTIONARY”. It was called Vitaphone Synchronization. During the film, you could actually recognize sounds - like the clashing of swords and the pealing of bells. The movie was preceeded by Vitaphone Shorts in which you could both see and hear the Philharmonic Orchestra playing Wagner’s Rigoletto and Pagliacci. (Years later a message at the end announced I figured this might be a boon or probably just another short-lived fad.)

Dolores also introduced me to a drink, the cocktail. Frankly, I couldn’t resist the latter. She told me there were only one place where you could get a glass of liquor in all of New York. Obviously, the constant police presence which was in Washington Square Park roused when the doorman asked if I had a ticket from the manager of the warehouse. The exchange of a single dollar bill, card, good forever. That was cut there, it cost us nearly a sawbucks.

As we entered, the doorman lined up a rule entitled “Rules for Nightclub Goers”

You might find a few amusing:

“Do not ask to play the drum or the piano. It is not for your entertainment.

“Examine your bill when the doorman hands it to you. Human beings and are liable to error.

Please do not offer to escort ex-prizefighter, is there for that.

You can see we were having a good time and attempting to find gainful employment it came to “experience”. One night I was told that the manager of the warehouse security guard. She said it was one night I found something better. I wasn’t surprised she said we could still see each other. She said it was game, Mah Jongg, which was something we could walk in Central Park. Sounded Mike Jablonski, and set up an

Saturday morning was cold, far from the Hudson River. I dressed thought appropriate for the weather. From Broad Street, then west directly on to Park Avenue, from the main waterfront but aloof from its neighbors, looked no good reason for this place. The brick exterior showed definite signs that it could withstand any ocean storms.
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monic Orchesra playing Wagner's overture to Tannhauser, plus selections from Rigoletto and Pagliacci. (Years later, Lily taught me to enjoy that kind of music.)

A message at the end announced that same day soon movies would actually talk. I figured this might be a boon to the illiterate movie fan, but on the whole it was probably just another short-lived Hollywood fad.

Dolores also introduced me to my first speakeasy and that newly invented drink, the cocktail. Frankly, I could get along fine without either, especially the latter. She told me there were over 100,000 speakeasies in New York and that you could get a glass of liquor in any building on 52nd Street between 5th and 6th Ave.

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As we entered, the doorman called my attention to a plaque on the wall, head-
lined "Rules for Nightclub Goers. I still remember every one.

You might find a few amusing:

"Do not ask to play the drums. The drum heads are not as tough as some other heads. Besides, it has a tendency to disturb the rhythm."

"Examine your bill when the waiter presents it. Remember, even they are human beings and are liable to err - intentionally or otherwise."

Please do not offer to escort the cloakroom girl home. Her husband, who is an ex-prizefighter, is there for that purpose."

You can see we were having a ball. But don't think it was all fun and games. I was attempting to find gainful employment and always seemed to strike out whenever it came to "experience." One night, at the end of our first week, Dolores told me that the manager of the warehouse where she worked part time was looking for a security guard. She said it wasn't much of a job but might tide me over until I could get a glass of liquor in any building on 52nd Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. Obviously, the constabulary looked the other way. At the Club Gallant, which was in Washington Square not far from my rooming house, I was embarrassed when the doorman asked for my membership card. I needn't have worried. The exchange of a single simoleon brought me an elaborate wallet-sized card, good forever. That was only the beginning though. Before we got out of there, it cost us nearly a sawbuck.

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IV

Saturday morning was cold, gray and overcast. My rooming house wasn't too far from the Hudson River. I dressed warmly in a heavy sweater and cap, which I thought appropriate for the waterfront, walked north on 6th Avenue to 23rd Street, then west directly on to Pier 64. The pier was about a furlong removed from the main waterfront buildings. A lone warehouse, seemingly standing aloof from its neighbors, looked out on the Hudson. On close inspection, there was no good reason for this particular warehouse to be putting on airs. Its red brick exterior showed definite signs of aging. Yet, it appeared solid enough to withstand any ocean storms.
Everything was quiet on Pier 64, in direct contrast to the rest of the waterfront which was teeming with activity. Several large ships were docked, with huge cranes engaged in loading and off-loading. Longshoremen were wheeling heavily burdened hand trucks in and out of various buildings.

I wasn't too thrilled with my first view of the mighty Hudson with its odor of dead fish and with filthy flotsam and jetsam bobbing up and down against the dock. Across the river, on the Jersey side, was a large sprawling city which I learned later was Hoboken. Off in the distance to the far left, where the Hudson joined the Upper Bay that led to the Atlantic, I could see the silhouette of the Statue of Liberty. I don't mind saying that my heart beat a little faster at my first sight of this proud Lady.

Like the others, the warehouse loading dock faced the waterfront where it was handy to ships' cargoes. A narrow alley to the right provided access to non-sea-going vehicles. A solid looking door next to the loading dock evidently led to the manager's office. A man seated with his back to the window was partly visible. I knocked and walked in. "Mr. Jablonski?" I asked.

He swiveled around and glared at me through bloodshot eyes that must have been having a hard time recovering from the night before. Bristly black hair and a bristly black mustache framed a dark-complexioned face with high cheekbones. An almost invisible scar, running from his right eye to the corner of his mouth, actually emphasized his rugged good looks. His features were quite handsome in a coarse, rough and ready kind of way. His body was big and powerful looking, just slightly showing signs of running to fat. Across the grapefruit sized biceps of his left arm, visible under his rolled up shirt-sleeve, was a heart-shaped tattoo with the word, "MOTHER", emblazoned across it. Hey, I figured, if he loves his mother, he can't be all bad. But I still didn't like the look in his eyes.

There was an empty chair next to his desk but he didn't offer it. He didn't offer to shake hands, either. He grunted through half-clenched teeth as though he hated to make the effort to talk.

"You're Goodwin?"

I admitted it.

He waved me to the empty chair.

"Miss Day recommended you," he began, "and her judgment is usually sound, especially when men are concerned. But, hell, you're just a kid. I hope she didn't go all female because you happen to be good-looking in a college-boy type of way."

I was beginning to dislike him. Without conscious effort, the remainder of that interview could have become a part of the curriculum of the Harvard Business School as a classic example of How Not To Get A Job.

"Come to think of it," I replied, "she did say I had a profile like John Barrymore." I slowly and deliberately turned my head to the side. "What do you think? A little too much nose?" Then, I continued. "But she must have thought I had other assets."

He smiled but there was no warmth in it. "Tell me about 'em, kid." (How I hated that!) "You think you got guts enough to take care of this pier and warehouse?"

That did it. I now decided to take a bumpkin to the hilt.

"Dern tootin'," I drawled, "I crawled through the henhouse and barn. There's a man in there who could prove it, to say nothing of rear ends full of buckshot."

He didn't know whether I decided to play it straight. "Well, "Yep," I said proudly, "I'm a hunter. Bill all rolled into one. I kid you not."

By this time, he should have beenklä:ing. Instead, he put on the hail and spunk. You won't have to worry about a decision machine parts. They're going to forget about the thing to a thief. He'd never be able to attempt here and I certainly didn't know whether.

"This is a full-time job that's going from the evening to 7 the next morning. Also, about once a month, there's a night shift for a week. We charge ten dollars a night."

He mentioned a salary but I didn't go along, and I'll show you another way.

I still hadn't decided to think of it. "I'd rather see, just aisle after aisle of pliers. Several workmen were boss nearby, they were trying to make the effort."

Back in the office, Jablonski put on his security guard uniform and said, "Take me. It was a .38 special, a big hammer, it was fully loaded, just in case when you check in."

On that note, we shook hands.

Sunday, I tried to sort out Sunday, I tried to sort out that I simply didn't make sense. I couldn't answer his questions. Thought that was way out of line with considering his expressed opinion. None of it added up.

I examined the revolver already used for years. I broke open the hammer; it was fully loaded and apart. It was badly in need of...

24
rast to the rest of the waterfront. Ships were docked, with huge shoremen were wheeling heavily mighty Hudson with its odor of bong up and down against the sprawling city which I learned the silhouette of the Statue of a little faster at my first sight of the waterfront where it was provided access to non-sea·ading dock evidently led to the window was partly visible. I bloodshot eyes that must have had up shirtsleeve, was a heart-toned across it. Hey, I figured, if I didn’t like the look in his eyes, he didn’t offer it. He didn’t offer self-clenched teeth as though he her judgment is usually sound, you’re just a kid. I hope she good-looking in a college-boy avious effort, the remainder of curriculum of the Harvard Busi·Get A Job.

had a profile like John Barry-o the side. “What do you think? she must have thought I had some about ‘em, kid.” (How I hated her care of this pier and warehouse? That did it. I now decided I didn’t want his damn’ job. So I played the country bumpkin to the hilt.

“Dern tootin’,” I drawled, “back home I did a pretty good job guarding our henhouse and barn. There’s a lot of dead foxes, weasels, raccoons and dirty rats who could prove it, to say nothin’ of some would-be chicken thieves with their rear ends full of buckshot.”

He didn’t know whether I was putting him on or not. After a moment, he decided to play it straight. “You know how to shoot a gun?” he asked.

“Yep,” I said proudly, “I’m a regular Davy Crockett, Dan’ Boone and Buffalo Bill all rolled into one. I kin shoot a squirrel’s eye out at ninety feet!”

By this time, he should have booted me out on my rear end, or at least tried. Instead, he put on the hail fellow well met. “OK, Goodwin,” he said, “I like your spunk. You won’t have to worry about guns though. This warehouse is full of precision machine parts. They’re valuable enough but they wouldn’t be worth anything to a thief. He’d never be able to get rid of ‘em. There’s never been a robbery attempt here and I certainly don’t expect any.

“This is a full-time job though,” he continued, “seven days a week from 7 in the evening to 7 the next morning. These are tough hours but the pay is good. Also, about once a month, when a big shipment comes in, we have to put on a night shift for a week. We don’t need a guard then so you get a week off with pay.” He mentioned a salary that was a lot higher than I’d expected.

“Come along, and I’ll show you around.”

I still hadn’t decided to take the job but I went along anyway. There wasn’t much to see, just aisle after aisle stacked to the ceiling with cardboard contain·ers. Several workmen were moving the cartons around in hand trucks. With the boss nearby, they were trying hard to look busy.

Back in the office, Jablonski opened a door to a small closet and brought out a security guard uniform and handed it to me. “I think this will fit you all right,” he said. Then, he reached into his desk drawer, took out a revolver, and gave it to me. It was a .38 special, a brand I wasn’t familiar with. “You won’t need this,” he said, “but it’s loaded, just in case. Be careful with it. I’ll be here Monday night when you check in.”

On that note, we shook hands and I left with a good deal to think about.

Sunday, I tried to sort out my feelings about that interview with Jablonski. It simply didn’t make sense. First, why did he overlook my obviously flippant responses to his questions? That certainly wasn’t his style. Second, why offer a salary that was way out of line with the requirements of the job? Third, why hire me at all considering his expressed contempt for my so-called youth and inexperience? None of it added up.

I examined the revolver he had given me. It looked as though it hadn’t been used for years. I broke open the cylinder. Except for the chamber under the hammer, it was fully loaded. I ejected the cartridges and decided to take the gun apart. It was badly in need of cleaning. The firing pin didn’t look quite right. On
closer scrutiny, I could see that the end was filed down. That gun would misfire. It was useless.

I reassembled it and tucked it away in my bottom drawer. I took out the old Army Colt automatic, cleaned it thoroughly, and made sure the magazine was fully loaded. Then, it was time to decide on my future course of action. It was obvious that I was being set up. But for what? Of course, the sensible thing would be to bow out and chalk it up to experience. But I was just curious enough, stubborn enough, and, I admit, with enough youthful pride to resent being played for a sucker. I decided to see it through. There was no doubt about Jablonski’s role.

Reluctantly, I began to wonder about Dolores. It bothered me so much that it must have taken all of 30 seconds for me to get to sleep that night.

With less than two weeks 'til Christmas, I spent most of Monday morning in Macy’s, selecting presents for my mother and sister, and getting the wrapped packages off in the mail. In the afternoon, for the first time since I was in the cradle, I took a nap in preparation for my night’s work. After a so-so meal in a nearby diner, I dressed for action. The uniform coat was a little large so I wore a heavy sweater underneath. It would probably be cold in that warehouse, even with a Franklin Stove in the office. My Colt .45 didn’t make much of a bulge in the pocket. I met Jablonski at the warehouse, determined to show no sign of suspicion. He offered some last-minute instructions which were pretty routine, gave me a key to the office, and his home phone number to call in case of emergency which he assured me would be unnecessary.

As soon as he was gone, I locked the office door and made sure the overhead doors at the loading dock were securely fastened. I went through the warehouse, aisle by aisle, corner by corner, to make sure I was alone. Then, it was time to find out exactly what kind of precision tools the cartons contained. I very carefully opened several cartons at random, examined the contents, and resealed the find out what kind of precision tools the cartons contained. I very carefully opened several cartons at random, examined the contents, and resealed the cartons. Just as I suspected, the precision tools were all liquid, Gin, Rum and Rye. Back in the office, I stayed in the shadows and kept my eye on the door while I pondered this new information. About 2:30 a.m. my reverie was interrupted by a discrete knock on the door. It was another uniformed figure, this time in the uniform of the NYPD. With my hand gripping the automatic in my pocket, I cautiously let him in. In a brogue as thick as the fog rolling off the river, he proudly introduced himself as Officer Francis Xavier Mulrooney.

"Sure, 'tis a pleasure to meet you, me boyo," he began. "Me beat's right along Twelfth Avenue and I've got in the habit of droppin' in here each night for a few minutes to warm me old bones. 'Tis not surprising I am thought to find another new security guard. Nobody can put up with Jablonski very long. You wouldn't be havin' a wee drop, now would you, to help ward off the chill?"

I told him I thought we could spare a wee drop, went into the back, opened a carton, brought out a bottle of rye, and poured him a generous wee drop. He downed it in one gulp. "Sure an' that hits the spot," he said, so I poured him another. "You know, me boyo," he went on, "half the warehouses on the waterfront are filled with bootleg booze. But 'tis no concern of mine. The gangs and unions here take care of their own troubles. As for me, I've got enough troubles o' me own what with the speaks, the streetwalkers, the pawnshops and family squab-

bles on me own beat. 'Tis a rat's wagon to cart someone off to jail.

As he left, he turned to me an’ said, "Take a word o' warnin’ from me, boyo. Take a word o’ warnin’ from Jablonski. He's no good atall at all. He'll play you just the same.”

The next few nights were pretty eventful, too. I suspected he was losing, I began to look forward to hearing the front and the neighborhood. I kept my suspicions about Jablonski.

Everything exploded into action one night when I heard the phone ring in the door of the office. "Mr. Goodwin! You fall over spilling the Scotch, didn't you?" she spit it out made it appear that at least a "fallen woman".

It was Dolores. She sounded bewildered. Something terrible has happened and I had to see you first." Her voice bordering on hysteria. I tried to calm her down. She said she was and I said I'd be getting to her apartment. She lowered the chain, and broke into a small smile. "Thank you. Take a word o' warnin'."

The apartment was in a state of chaos. She had left the door unlocked. She was working at the office, I over lading so, at first, I paid no atten-
down. That gun would misfire.

I went through the warehouse, looking for and made sure the overhead carts contained. I very carefully checked the contents, and resealed the cartons. I did not want any liquid, Scotch, Bourbon, whiskey or any other alcohol to be smuggled into the warehouses on the waterfront. The gangs and unions had their share of trouble. I've got enough troubles o' me own beat. 'Tis a rare night indeed when I'm not callin' the paddy wagon to cart someone off to jail."

As he left, he turned to me and said, "You seem like a fine lad, Goodwin, my boy. Take a word o' warnin' from an old cop. Keep a sharp eye on that Polack, Jablonski. He's no good at all."

"Instead, Mr. Goodwin! You're wanted on the phone. It's a matter of life and death."

"This was something terrible happened and I suspected he had a few other watering holes as well. Nevertheless, I began to look forward to his visits. I learned a lot from him about the waterfront and the neighborhood. Although he might prove to be a welcome ally, I kept my suspicions about Jablonski to myself."

"This was Dolores. She sounded breathless. "Oh, Archie, I'm so glad I caught you. Something terrible happened and I'm getting ready to leave New York but I had to see you first."

"Me voice broke. She was obviously in a state of excitement. She said she was and I said I'd be there as fast as I could, and broke all records to get to her apartment. She let me in and immediately closed the door, opened the chain, and broke into tears. I held her and did my best to soothe her. The apartment was in a state of disorder, clothes and personal articles strewn on the floor, open suitcases partly packed.

"When her emotions were under control, she brushed away the tears, took out her compact, and repaired the damage to her features. She was obviously in a state of excitement. She said she had to run and I said I'd be there as fast as I could, and broke all records to get to her apartment. She let me in and immediately closed the door, opened the chain, and broke into tears. I held her and did my best to soothe her."

"When her emotions were under control, she brushed away the tears, took out her compact, and repaired the damage to her beautiful features. She was obviously in a state of excitement. She said she had to run and I said I'd be there as fast as I could, and broke all records to get to her apartment. She let me in and immediately closed the door, opened the chain, and broke into tears. I held her and did my best to soothe her. The apartment was in a state of disarray, clothes and personal articles strewn on the floor, open suitcases partly packed.

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suddenly I caught the words 'hi-jack' and 'security guard'. I continued typing but tried to listen more carefully. I didn’t get it all but heard enough to realize that Mike was planning to have his own warehouse robbed. And it’s supposed to take place tonight! The last thing I heard him say was, ‘You won’t have any trouble with the country bumpkin’.

“When he hung up, he looked at me kind of funny and asked if I’d heard any of his conversation. I assured him I hadn’t but I don’t think he believed me. If he decides I heard too much, I know he wouldn’t hesitate to kill me. That’s when I realized that I don’t belong here and why I’m packing to catch the afternoon train back home to Kansas. But I couldn’t leave without seeing you for one last time and warning you not to go near that warehouse tonight!

“You know, Archie, I like you, I really do. But I’ve been kidding myself all along trying to be a Big City girl. It took all this to make me see that at heart I’m really just another kid from the country. You’re different. I know you’ll make it big in New York. The only thing I’m sorry about is leaving you, that we couldn’t get to know one another better. Maybe if we’d met under different circumstances…”

Here, she stopped, and I was afraid the waterworks would start again. I tried to persuade her to stay, that I’d take care of Jablonski, but it was no use. Finally, I patted her hand, looked into those gorgeous emerald eyes for the last time, and said, “If it will make you feel any better, you’re more than enough of a Big City girl for me. You swept me right off my feet which are usually planted solidly on good old terra firma. C’mon, I’ll help you pack and see that you get to the station and on that train for home.”

Which I did. We kissed good bye, each with our own mixed feelings of relief and regret. Just before she boarded the train, she said, “You know, Archie, even my name is phony. It isn’t really Dolores Day. That was just a stage name.” She paused and added wistfully, “I guess now it will never get up in lights on Broadway.” She didn’t offer her real name and I didn’t ask. I watched as the train pulled out of the station, leaving clouds of white smoke in its wake, and carrying her off into eternity, leaving only the bittersweet memory of my first love. I’ll never forget her. But I won’t tell Lily.

So much for sentiment. Now, I had more practical problems to ponder.

VI

It was late afternoon when I returned to my room. There wasn’t much time to get ready for the evening’s entertainment. I made a few preparations and, making sure my landlady was otherwise occupied, I sneaked out with a couple of pillows under my coat.

At the warehouse, I made the usual survey to be certain I was alone. Then, I got to work, fashioning a man-sized dummy from the pillows and packing straw from the warehouse. Dressed in my uniform coat and hat, hunched over the desk, back to the window, the dummy looked pretty life-like. I stepped outside to make sure. It wouldn’t fool anyone on close inspection but, through the window, in the dim light of the office lamp, it should serve its purpose.

Satisfied, I positioned myself in the shadows of the warehouse where I could watch the office without being seen. I was pretty much on edge, not really nervous or afraid, just keyed up from an emotion that didn’t come to me naturally.

So now, we’re up to date. You’ll notice I described in the opening paragraph an incident that didn’t get out of it. Sort of.

Although all my senses were on high alert, the sound of running feet still leveled steadily, and was reaping the reverberations from the shadows of the warehouse. For a moment, the gunfire seemed to materialize out of nowhere, even on the waterfront, for they sometimes conveniently called ‘doin’ the killin’ is the guilty party.”

Shaken as I was, I couldn’t resist eliciting an epitaph. “Sorry, gentlemen, but it’s time to turn to go into shock but I didn’t want to be left behind.”

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He thought for a moment. “Tell you what, gentlemen, I’ll call Homicide West. He’ll be at the waterfront. I’ll give him J-M-B and I’ll explain it all.”

I assured him that they were welcome.

“Sure an’ I try to keep out of trouble!” he exclaimed, looking back at me as he turned to go into shock but I didn’t want to be left behind.”

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ity guard'. I continued typing but heard enough to realize that I was robbed. And it's supposed to take time, won't have any trouble. "You don't think he believed me. If he hesitate to kill me. That's when I was packing to catch the afternoon without seeing you for one last house tonight!

I've been kidding myself all along, time see that at heart I'm really. You know, Archie, even that was just a stage name." She never get up in lights on Broadway. I watched as the train pulled in its wake, and carrying her off for my first love. I'll never for practical problems to ponder.

There wasn't much time to think: a few preparations and, making sure I was certain I was alone. Then, I got out with a couple of pillows and a coat and hat, hunched over the petty life-like. I stepped outside to the rear section but, through the window, served its purpose.

I stepped outside to the rear section but, through the window, served its purpose. I knew you'll make it big in Hollywood. That's when I stepped from the shadows of the warehouse interior, my Colt .45 leveled unwaveringly at the two men. For a moment, they stood utterly still, frozen in time, all the world like two statues in a Greek tableau. Alert for the slightest movement, in a voice I was proud came out without a tremor, I quietly told them to drop their weapons which were now dangling from their arms, pointed towards the floor. They reacted exactly as I had anticipated. Recovering quickly from the shock of my sudden appearance, they each started to raise their guns in my direction. My first shot caught the nearest gunman dead-center in the chest. My next didn't vary a millimeter as it downed the second. As they fell, I kicked away their weapons and knelt to make sure they were out of commission. They were. Permanently.

Shaken as I was, I couldn't resist one parting remark, quite possibly a fitting epitaph. "Sorry, gentlemen, but the dummy you shot wasn't me." Then, it was my turn to go into shock but I didn't have time to give in to it.

The sound of running feet outside brought me back to action. I turned, gun still leveled steadily, and was relieved to see my friend, Officer Mulrooney, come puffing into the office.

"Glory be!" he exclaimed, looking at the two bodies on the floor. "Are they dead? Are you all right?" I assured him that they were and I was and filled him in briefly.

"Sure an' I try to keep out of any trouble on the docks," he said, "but when I heard the gunfire, I thought you might be needin' help. And, indeed, me boy, it seems that you do. The Homicide Bureau doesn't take kindly to killings anywhere, even on the waterfront. And, in spite of evidence to the contrary, which they sometimes conveniently overlook, they're often quick to assume the one doin' the killin' is the guilty party."

He thought for a moment. The racket from the gunfire was evidently no cause for concern along the rest of the waterfront which, I had come to learn, kept strictly to their own business. Finally, Mulrooney, almost as if thinking aloud, offered a suggestion. "Tell you what, me friend, you could be in a heap o' trouble. Now there's a friend o' mine in Homicide who used to patrol this same beat as mine. Many a night, we were partners together. He's tough but a square shooter. Is that phone still working?"

He picked it up, jiggled the hook, finally got the operator and put through a call to Homicide West. He talked with a Sergeant Cramer, quickly filled him in on the situation here, listened a moment and hung up. He told me Cramer was on his way and warned me to play it absolutely straight with him.
In exactly twelve minutes, a police car pulled up on the dock, stopped in front of the office, and two men got out. The first, who gruffly introduced himself as Sergeant Cramer, was a big man with a sizeable bottom and heavy, broad shoulders underneath a thick, muscular neck. His round face was beet-red, probably from the cold. Sharp blue-gray eyes, under bushy gray eyebrows, looked as though they didn't miss much. He wore an old felt hat. His open overcoat revealed a three-piece suit. The other dick, a Sergeant Purley Stebbins, was also big and broad. His bony face sprouted oversized ears and pig-bristle eyebrows above a firm square jaw. There was a no-nonsense quality to both men.

Cramer took out a big cigar, lit it, and asked Mulrooney a couple of quick questions before turning to me. “All right, Goodwin,” he growled, “how did you know these two goons were going to hit this morning?” I expected that question and had a ready answer. “I got a phone call yesterday morning, tipping me off.” Of course, he wanted to know who made the call but I had already decided to make no mention of Dolores. As for Jablonski, I wasn't exactly sure how to deal with him, but I wanted him for myself. So I merely said, “It was Mr. Anonymous.”

Cramer didn’t believe me but he gave up for the moment. He told Mulrooney to stay until he could send a lab and forensic crew to take care of the bodies. Then, he gruffly ordered me into the car and Stebbins drove us to Homicide West on 20th Street.

[ED. - I hope you’re enjoying this little tale. I think our friend Charles Burns has done an excellent job of editing this story which Archie has finally chosen to tell us. Tune in next issue for the next exciting chapters.]

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October 1990

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