

SO MANY SHADOWS

by

Ernest Langford

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BATTLE STREET BOOKS

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People in the Play:

An elderly man living alone

A man on the run

A woman who just gets by

Setting:

A room in a run-down hotel. It is night. The time is the present.

(The room is a duplicate of thousands of other rooms in hotels where lonely men and women live out the tail-end of their lives. There is a narrow bed, a table and two chairs. The only light in the room comes through the window and from the lights in a building across the alley. The door opens and an elderly man enters supporting a young man in his late 20's.)

E. MAN: We made it. You okay?

Y. MAN: (Weakly) Yes. I'm fine.

E. MAN: Quite a climb up them stairs, ain't it? You want to sit?

Y. MAN: Yes.

E. MAN: (Pulls out a chair. Y. Man slumps onto it.) Sorry there ain't no light. The bulbs's shot. Gotta get another. Keep forgetting.

Y. MAN: It don't matter.

E. MAN: That's a fact. (Laughs) It don't matter. But we can see good enough, eh? You warmer? You sure was shivering when I found you.

Y. MAN: I'm fine.

E. MAN: I got a blanket if you want.

Y. MAN: No. I'm fine. Fine.

E. MAN: That's dandy. (Rubs his chin.) Hey, how about something to eat? You hungry?

Y. MAN: I'm thirsty.

E. MAN: (Pause) How'd it be if I heated up a can of soup?

Y. MAN: Sure. I'd like that.

E. MAN: Okay. So, first thing is to get that soup going. Right? (Goes to the bed, kneels and feels under it. Pulls out a box and takes out an old, battered pot. Holds it up to the light and flicks something out of it.) Spider.

Y. MAN: Hungry, I guess.

E. MAN: I ain't never seen a spider yet that didn't know where to get hisself a meal. (Puts pot on the table.) Not supposed to cook here. They say it's a fire hazard. Shit! The entire joint's a fire hazard. (Gropes around and pulls out another box.) But I don't pay no heed to the rules them guys lays down. (Takes a hot plate from the box and places it on the table.) No sir!

Y. MAN: Guys that obey the rules won't get no place.

E. MAN: That's a fact. That's one hell of a true fact. (Pushes plug into a wall socket. Sparks fly out.) Yippee! We made contact with the goddamn B.C. Hydro. Lucky for us, eh?

Y. MAN: You got yourself a short someplace. That's what you got.

E. MAN: Jeez, if all's I got is one itty-bitty short someplace, then I ain't going to worry my ass off. No sir! Not when everything in this goddamn joint is short. (Gropes far under the bed, grunting and complaining about things that refuse to be located. Finally pulls out another box.) Well, what do ya know, here she is! We got ourselves a meal. (Holds up a can close to his eyes.) I got all kinds of soup. Cream of mushroom. How about that?

Y. MAN: Anything'll do.

E. MAN: (Digs into box.) No, I can find something better than that. I got some beef soup in here somewheres. (Looks at another can.) Chicken noodle. No, we don't want that. (Examines another can.) Here's something with rice. Hey, this is like Santa digging into his bag, ain't it?

Y. MAN: (He sounds exhausted.) And you look just like Santa.

E. MAN: You ever go into a store at Christmas and watch kids go up to the Santa? Boy, isn't that something. They really think that old guy's Santa Claus. Brother, that's really something. There's a job I wouldn't mind having.

Y. MAN: And have little girls roll their asses on your knees, eh?

E. MAN: (Indignantly) Hey, don't you say stuff like that to me. I ain't the sort of guy that wants to look up little kids' skirts.

Y. MAN: Okay, so you ain't that kind of guy. But maybe the little kids'll do just about anything to get Santa to bring them more presents.

E. MAN: Little kids ain't like that. They don't have to do nothing, because they believe in Santa.

Y. MAN: Lucky kids.

E. MAN: Sure, and all I'm saying is that it'd be kind of nice if a guy could sit some place and have kids come up to him and believe that he could give them everything they wanted. And that ain't got nothing to do with feeling little kids' bums. (Looks at another can.) Hah! Got it! Scotch Broth! How about that? (Y. Man slumps far down on the chair.) You okay?

Y. MAN: (Pushes himself up.) Just tired.

E. MAN: When d'you eat last?

Y. MAN: (Pause) Yesterday . . . no . . . I dunno . . . the day before.

E. MAN: (Getting to his feet.) I'll get this soup going. It ain't good to go too long without eating. I know, because I been without food a few times. (Looks around.) Goddamn it, where'd I put the can opener? (Titters) Know something? I'm like a dog that's buried a bone, then can't remember where he hid it. Ever watch a dog try to find a bone he's hid?

Y. MAN: Yes.

E. MAN: Good for a laugh, eh? Makes you wonder why they bury them. Like me and my can opener. (Feels in soup box.) Hah! Got it! I know'd I put it someplace safe. (Goes to the table.) Won't be long now. (Opens can. Pours soup into the pot.) We're getting there. Now, for the water. Have to get it from the washroom down the hall. Half the time you can't get in, because some guy's locked in there, sleeping. (Goes to the door.) Won't be a minute . . . I hope. (He goes out. Y. Man slowly levers himself off the chair, crosses to the window and looks out. While he stands there a light comes on in a room across the alley. Y. Man recoils to flatten himself against the wall, while someone draws curtains across the window room. He is still there when E. Man returns.)

Y. MAN: Who lives in that room over there?

E. MAN: (Goes to the window.) Oh, she's home, eh?

Y. MAN: She?

E. MAN: Dunno her name. I just know she's a waitress someplace, and does a bit of hustling on the side. She have a guy with her?

Y. MAN: I don't know. I just saw the light come on and the curtains being drawn.

E. MAN: When she gets back early, it usually means she's making a few extra bucks on her back instead of on her feet. (Mixes water with the soup. Sets pot on the hot plate.) Good a place as any for a dame to make a few extra bucks, I guess. Hell, I'll bet it ain't half so tiring as slinging hash all day.

Y. MAN: (Moves back to the chair.) Is she okay?

E. MAN: I dunno. I don't suppose she's perfect. But who is? (Finds a spoon and stirs the soup.) I sure ain't. Just as well, eh? Then guys that's perfect have something to preach about, eh?

Y. MAN: Yeah, it makes the bastards feel good.

E. MAN: And how! They can tell us dopes we're no good. (Puts two spoons on the table.) But when you get as old as me, you don't give a piss what guys say or think. You just want to be left alone.

Y. MAN: Maybe it's what you want, but it don't follow it's what you get.

E. MAN: Ain't that a fact. The guys up top gotta keep pushing us assholes around so's they can think how good they are. (Looks around.) Hey, I got half a loaf someplace. (Stares at the bed.) Hah! (Feels under the blanket.) Ah ha! (Takes out half a loaf.) Know something? A guy once told me about keeping bread in the bed. The best place to put women and bread is in bed, he'd say. They keep real good there. Real fresh. (Tries the soup.) Couple more minutes'll do it. Wonder what ever happened to that guy? He was real smart. Showed me how to do a lot of things.

Y. MAN: So didn't you know nothing?

E. MAN: Bugger all, bugger all. I still don't know much.

Y. MAN: You know enough to get by.

E. MAN: That's not saying much. Hey, you mind eating from the pot?

Y. MAN: It's okay with me.

E. MAN: Then I guess we can get down to our gour-met meal. (Y. Man slowly moves around to face the table. They dip spoons into the pot.) I always thought a guy should try to latch onto something big and stay with it. Y'know, like a sucker hangs onto a fat salmon.

Y. MAN: So what did you latch onto?

E. MAN: Nothing. That's why I'm stuck in this room. (Y. Man eats slowly, painfully. E. Man slurps and sucks in the soup.) Want some bread?

Y. MAN: No. Was you in the Second World War?

E. MAN: Tried to get join up. Hell, they didn't want me in the army. Said I was a real unhealthy specimen. Which I was . . . flat feet . . . varicose veins . . . and god knows what else. And I'd thought up a real good plan for myself. I'd blow a leg off and get me a pension for life. (Cuts bread and begins eating it.)

Y. MAN: You coulda been killed.

E. MAN: Oh sure. I took that into account.

Y. MAN: You coulda been shot in the gut or had your balls blown off.

E. MAN: So what! Most times my gut was empty, so losing it wouldn't've mattered much, and the only women that ever showed any interest in my balls was hustlers when they thought I had a couple of bucks in my pocket.

Y. MAN: Maybe you'da felt different if you'd actually lost your balls or a leg or arm.

E. MAN: Depends. I wouldn't have minded if I'd been well paid for losing them. Hell, I know'd guys that lost their feet riding freight trains in the depression and they got bugger all for that. So I figured if the goddamn government'ud pay me if I loses a leg or a foot or me balls, then that's fine with me. See what I mean?

Y. MAN: I'd as soon keep what I got.

E. MAN: Hell, who wouldn't! But a guy's got to live and eat. Leastways, that's what I found out. (Gets up.) You finish the soup. I'll set the mattress on the floor. (Removes one mattress from the bed, puts it on the floor. Between the mattresses is a pair of pants. He holds them up.) Funny ain't it? I've always thought if a guy has two pairs of pants to his name he's got his self-respect. (Titters) Stupid, eh?

Y. MAN: No, it ain't. Guys gotta have something to hang on to.

E. MAN: Well, could be I hung on to the wrong things. (Hangs pants over his chair.) You want the bed or the mattress?

Y. MAN: Either'll do.

E. MAN: You finished the soup?

Y. MAN: (Lies over the table.) I don't want no more.

E. MAN: (Looks into the pot.) That's how things go, ain't it? A guy's so hungry he thinks he can eat a steer, then somebody gives him half a sandwich and he can't even finish it. I guess we can eat what's left in the morning, eh?

Y. MAN: That'll be fine. Fine. (Points to window.) How well d'you know that woman?

E. MAN: I know her to wave to when I see her standing at her window. And sometimes she don't have a stitch on, but I guess she don't care if an ole guy like me sees her.

Y. MAN: I want you to get her over here.

E. MAN: Hey, now wait a bit. You're in no shape to take her on. Hell, you could hardly make it up the stairs.

Y. MAN: I don't want to screw her. I want to ask her questions.

E. MAN: She won't come over here, mister.

Y. MAN: Oh yes, she will. (Takes money from his pocket.) Wave this under her nose and tell her there's more where it come from.

E. MAN: (Takes and examines the bill.) Jesus! Where'd you get this?

Y. MAN: I picked it up somewheres.

E. MAN: Oh sure. You was just walkin' along the street and you seen this hundred dollar bill lying in the gutter. Right?

Y. MAN: No. It was in a bank.

E. MAN: (Goes to sit at the table.) You should of told me. I had a right to know.

Y. MAN: So what would you have done? Screamed for the cops?

E. MAN: No. I ain't that sort of guy. (Stares at the note.) They said you got away with fifteen grand.

Y. MAN: That much! (Manages to laugh.) Not bad, eh?

E. MAN: The cops've been looking every place for you. They can't figure out where you went.

Y. MAN: I hid in a shoe store.

E. MAN: A store! For crissake! A store.

Y. MAN: I slipped in and began doing stuff, like I was working there.

E. MAN: For god's sake! Didn't the cops come around?

Y. MAN: Sure, and what they seen was me working my butt off fitting shoes onto customers' stinky feet.

E. MAN: But what about other guys there? Didn't they catch on?

Y. MAN: I worked in a department store once, and I'm telling you, guys in those places wouldn't notice if a corpse showed up and began fitting shoes. That's how much they care. So I just walked in and said I was extra help, and when the cops showed up, they said they ain't seen no bank robber.

E. MAN: Wait a bit. The newspaper said a cop fired and hit you.

Y. MAN: Why'd you think I'm leaning over this table? I got a bullet someplace in my gut.

E. MAN: Didn't you bleed any?

Y. MAN: No. I think the blood's stayed inside. Now, get that woman over here.

E. MAN: Why?

Y. MAN: Because every hustler has a quack on tap. That's why.

E. MAN: But she's not a regular hustler.

Y. MAN: Maybe not, but she'll have a doc. They all do. Now, get over there and show her that bill.

E. MAN: Why don't I look after you?

Y. MAN: Do you have a quack? Can you take this bullet out of my gut? (E. Man shakes his head.) Do like I asked, old man. Just do it.

E. MAN: I'll have to wait `til the guy she's got there leaves. Listen, why don't you lie down?

Y. MAN: How do you know he's still there, eh?

E. MAN: Because she always draws the curtains when she's got a guy with her. But she don't ever close them when she's alone. Hey, come on, lie down.

Y. MAN: Maybe I will. I've not been laying down much. It's been two days.

E. MAN: Couldn't you have laid on a bed in the store?

Y. MAN: You kidding? There's watchmen in those stores. I stayed in the shadows . . . waiting. (E. Man helps Y. Man to lie down on the mattress.)

E. MAN: But ain't those stores always lit up real bright?

Y. MAN: Oh sure, but the brighter the light, the darker the shadows. There's always a shadow, somewhere.

E. MAN: I got a few in here.

Y. MAN: You find a shadow and you hide in it for a while. At first, the shadow don't mind you hiding in it, but after a bit you can feel it wants to get rid of you, so you start looking for another you can hide in.

E. MAN: (Uneasily) Hey, what d'you mean? Shadows ain't real things.

Y. MAN: Oh yes, they are. They're the castoffs of living things. You find some shadows that are darker than others. You discover there are shadows inside shadows. (Pause) You think she's finished yet?

E. MAN: (Goes to the window.) The curtain's still closed. I guess the guy's taking his time. Some guys are like that, and some like a real quick job. She always opens the window, too . . . even in the winter. Wants to air the room out, I guess. Sometimes when I'm laying in bed her shadow comes onto that wall. It looks real pretty. When she turns I can see her tits moving.

Y. MAN: So what d'you do then? Hop up and show her what you got?

E. MAN: (Laughs) You kidding! I just lie there and wish I wasn't so goddamn old.

Y. MAN: When I was fitting shoes in the store, a dame sat down and said she wanted to try on boots. So when I sit down to fit them, she opens her legs and I seen everything. She didn't have nothing on.

E. MAN: Oh jeez! What did it look like?

Y. MAN: Like millions more in the world.

E. MAN: (Nervously laughs.) Nothing special eh! Y'know, I've had guys tell me about different things that happened to them, but I ain't never had nothing like that happen to me. Never. Hey, what did you do?

Y. MAN: Nothing. Because a cop come along right then to ask if I'd seen a guy running through the store, and while I'm talking to him, the dame takes off.

E. MAN: Weren't you scared? I'd've pissed myself. What did you say?

Y. MAN: That I'd been too busy working to notice anybody running around.

E. MAN: Did you have the dough on you?

Y. MAN: You kidding! I slipped it into a shoe box.

E. MAN: Boy! You sure got nerve! (A light appears on the wall.) She's through. Say, was you prepared to use the machine gun?

Y. MAN: Machine gun! Is that what they said? What a laugh! I had a toy pistol.

E. MAN: Oh boy! Fifteen grand with a toy gun!

Y. MAN: Has she come to the window yet?

E. MAN: No. I'd best go over there.

Y. MAN: Listen! Tell her there's money in it for her.

E. MAN: Sure, sure. I'll tell her. (Goes to the door.) I'll lock the door, eh? You got to take care in this joint. Guys can't be trusted. (Opens, then closes door.) Oh, wait a bit. Better check which floor she's on. (Returns to window.) One, two, three . . . same as mine I guess. Hey, there she is. (Waves)

Y. MAN: (Pushes himself up.) Can she see you?

E. MAN: Sure. She's waving back.

Y. MAN: Shout. Open the goddamn window. Get her to come over here.

E. MAN: Hell, this window's froze shut. (Gestures) Shit! She thinks I'm after her tail. She shook her head and put her hands up like she's lying her head on a pillow. (Gestures more. Points to Y. Man, as though shooting at him.) It's no good. She don't get it.

Y. MAN: Go get her, old man! My guts are going haywire.

E. MAN: Okay, okay. Take it easy. I'm on my way. Maybe I should get an ambulance.

Y. MAN: You call them and I go straight through that window. Goddamn you, get the woman! Now!

E. MAN: Okay, okay. I'm off right now.

Y. MAN: And don't telephone the cops.

E. MAN: (In the open doorway.) You got no call to say that.

Y. MAN: Maybe not, but I don't want to lay here worrying you're off someplace telephoning the cops.

E. MAN: Didn't I give you my word? (He has assumed the cloak of offended dignity.)

Y. MAN: So you give me your word! Big deal.

E. MAN: Mister, I don't know where you come from or what sort of guys you mix with, but me, I was raised to keep my word after I once give it.

Y. MAN: Okay, okay. So I believe you. Now get that woman over here.

E. MAN: I'm on my way. I just want to make things clear, see? I ain't the kind of guy that breaks his word, see?

Y. MAN: (His voice very faint.) Sure, sure . . . you want everything clear.

E. MAN: That's what I said. So take it easy, okay?

Y. MAN: Yes . . . yes, I will.

E. MAN: Yes sir . . . that's what I said and that's what I mean, because I ain't the kind of guy that says things he don't mean. (Y. Man accompanies this by faintly muttering `Yes, yes, yes.')

So when I locks this door you can lay down and relax, you know I'm going straight down them stairs, and there won't be no stopping on the way even if some guy was to come out of his room with a bottle of rye and offer to share it with me. No sir. I give my word, and that means I'm going out that front door and around to where she lives to knock on her door and ask if she'll come back with me. Okay?

Y. MAN: (Very faint.) Yes, yes . . . get her . . .

E. MAN: So, I'm off.

Y. MAN: Off . . . off. (E. Man goes out and locks the door. Y. Man lies back and looks at the wall. The shadow of a woman crosses it several times.) Shadows. Living shadows . . . but you don't know they're alive until you try to hide in them. You find some are real unfriendly, they want you to move on . . . and some want you to stay. They don't mind if you go deeper and deeper into them. They're like some women, they close around you and draw you into themselves. (The light vanishes from the wall, but he does not notice it has gone.) But then they get tired of you and tell you to move on. Go on . . . get out into the light where everybody can see you. Go on, get out. Get out. (The door reopens and E. Man enters followed by the woman. She

is in her mid 30's, heavy-bodied, but quite good-looking. She has on a pair of jeans, a windbreaker and slippers.)

E. MAN: Better lock the door. (He does so and they go to the mattress.) I got her. I laid it all out to her.

WOMAN: (She leans over and stares at Y. Man as if calculating.) The old guy told me what you want, but the only doctors I know are in hospitals.

Y. MAN: You've got to know a quack.

WOMAN: I don't. Honest, I don't. If I did I'd tell you.

Y. MAN: (To E. Man.) Did you show her the dough?

WOMAN: He showed it to me and said there was more where it come from. But I'm telling you it, don't make no difference, because I don't know no quacks.

Y. MAN: (Grabs her ankle and pulls himself up.) You gotto. You gotto. (Takes more bills from his jacket.) Look . . . look! That's more'n you'd make slinging hash and laying on your back in six months. Well, ain't it?

WOMAN: Look, I didn't come over here to be insulted by you. So let go my ankle.

Y. MAN: But it's the truth, ain't it? Well, ain't it? (Holds up the bills.) Look at them! Find me a quack, and they're all yours. Goddamn you, you gotto know someone!

WOMAN: Me and the old guy here is trying to help you. And I'm telling you any doctor'ud send you to a hospital.

Y. MAN: I don't want just any doctor. I want one that won't talk. Get it?

WOMAN: You're the one that don't get it. because you're asking for what ain't around. Listen to me, fella, you got any friends? You got a girl friend someplace? Me or the old guy here could get in touch with her.

Y. MAN: I don't have nobody. What about other women out on the street? Eh? They must know somebody.

WOMAN: I know nothing about them.

Y. MAN: But you can go out and ask them.

WOMAN: You joking? You know what time it is?

Y. MAN: Some'll still be around.

WOMAN: Maybe, but I'm not walking the streets at this time of night. Now look, me and the old guy know you're in a tough spot, and we're trying to help you. But you gotta give us time.

Y. MAN: Time? I'm running out of time. (He crawls off the mattress and uses the table to pull himself to his feet.)

WOMAN: Hey, what you doing? (Y. Man moves towards the door.)

E. MAN: You ain't fit. (Follows Y. Man.) You ain't fit to be on the street. Come back and lay down.

WOMAN: Sure, you gotta stay warm. Look, first thing in the morning, I'll ask around. I promise. Come on now, lay down here. Come on.

Y. MAN: Stay away. Leave me alone. (Leans against the wall by the door.) Don't you touch me.

E. MAN: Please, mister. Once you get in the street the cops'll see you. You can't hardly walk.

Y. MAN: They won't see me. I'll be in the shadows. (He sags against the wall.) They won't. Where are you?

WOMAN: We're right here, fella.

Y. MAN: Where?

E. MAN: In front of you.

WOMAN: Come and lay down.

Y. MAN: No. (Shouts) No! (He pitches forward. They catch and carry him to the mattress.)

E. MAN: (Kneeling to look at Y. Man's face.) Mister, you okay?

WOMAN: He's dead.

E. MAN: Oh jeez! Oh jeez!

WOMAN: You'll have to call the cops now, but wait `til I get back to my place. I don't want nothing to do with it. (Leans over to look at Y. Man.) Did he say where he hid the money?

E. MAN: He said he hid it when the cops followed him into the store. Y'know what he told me? He pretends he's workin' in the store when the cops is in there, lookin' for him. Ain't that the limit? And y'know what else? A dame sat down, told him she wanted some shoes, and when he's putting them on, she opens her legs so's he can see she don't have no pants on.

WOMAN: Some women do that, but they're no worse than guys that sit in bars with their pricks hanging out. (She hesitates, then kneels, unfastens Y Man's windbreaker, feels inside and takes out a flattened bag.) This must be it. You want to see what's inside?

E. MAN: (Nervously) You want to?

WOMAN: Why not? He's dead, so he don't care what happens.

E. MAN: He sure had nerve.

WOMAN: A lot of good it did him. (Empties contents of the bag onto the table.)

E. MAN: Jesus Christ! Look at it!

WOMAN: (Staring at the money.) You'll have to turn it over to the cops. (Pause) Well, won't you?

E. MAN: They'll ask where it is.

WOMAN: You bet they will. That's a lot of dough.

E. MAN: I ain't never seen so much money.

WOMAN: Nor me.

E. MAN: He sure had nerve.

WOMAN: Don't keep saying that.

E. MAN: Okay. Except you don't meet many guys with that kind of nerve.

WOMAN: So look where it got him. (While talking she arranges the money in neat piles.) There's all kinds of nerve in this world. His kind. My kind. Your kind.

E. MAN: Me! I don't have no nerve.

WOMAN: (Mirthlessly laughing.) You don't think it takes nerve to live in this rat hole? You don't think it takes nerve to live in my dump? Did you pick this joint? Did you pick your life?

E. MAN: There ain't nothing else.

WOMAN: That's right, there's nothing for the likes of me and you. Nothing, except to nerve ourselves to do things we hate. You think it don't take nerve to take a guy to my room and strip naked so's he can fuck me? I'm telling you, old man, it takes more nerve to go on like we do than to do what he done.

E. MAN: Maybe . . . but it ain't the same kind of nerve.

WOMAN: Who said it was? If you and me didn't have nerve, mister, we'd get a bottle of sleeping pills and swallow them. (Gestures towards Y. Man.) I don't look up to guys like him.

E. MAN: Well, I ain't so sure I wouldn't rather be him than me. Though, mind you, I don't blame anybody for what I am. Hell no!

WOMAN: That's right. You don't blame nobody, so nobody gives a shit for you. (Pause) You think anybody seen me coming in here?

E. MAN: No.

WOMAN: So, if nobody seen me come in, and nobody sees me leave, then nobody'll know I been here. Right?

E. MAN: I guess so.

WOMAN: (Pause) So, if I was to take this dough with me, nobody'ud know where it was. Would they?

E. MAN: (Nervously) I dunno. I guess they wouldn't.

WOMAN: Then all you'd have to do would be to telephone the cops. Right?

E. MAN: I know . . . but

WOMAN: And you'd explain how you found the guy in the street and tried to help him. Right?

E. MAN: I dunno if I've got nerve for that.

WOMAN: I think you have.

E. MAN: Maybe the cops wouldn't believe me. Cops don't believe guys like me.

WOMAN: They won't have no choice. So what if they tear your joint apart? What'll they find? A bunch of cockroaches. They'll know who the guy is soon as they see him. So you won't have to tell them a damn thing. And you'll be telling the truth. You didn't know who the guy was. Well, did you?

E. MAN: No. I thought he was sick. That's why I brung him here.

WOMAN: So what're you worried about?

E. MAN: Suppose they push me around?

WOMAN: They won't, because you don't have the dough.

E. MAN: (Nods towards the money.) What'll you do with it?

WOMAN: I'll stash it some place.

E. MAN: (Hesitantly) Maybe we should count it.

WOMAN: (Shrugs) Sure. Fine with me. Hey, why don't you pick out the hundreds, and I'll count the fifties and twenties.

E. MAN: Okay. (They commence counting the money, E. Man slowly, the Woman rapidly.) Jeez, ain't this something!

WOMAN: I'll make up two bundles. And we play it safe. Right? We don't throw the dough around like we've won a jackpot in Reno. Well, do we?

E. MAN: I guess not. Hey, you won't take off or nothing like that, will you? I mean you'll play straight with me, won't you?

WOMAN: (Arranging and counting the piles.) Sure, I'll play straight.

E. MAN: I mean . . . we're pals, ain't we?

WOMAN: That's right, we're pals. You want to count it too? I make it fourteen thousand five hundred.

E. MAN: Oh jeez! Fourteen thousand five hundred! Oh jeez!

WOMAN: So, you trust me to do what I said, eh?

E. MAN: I guess I do.

WOMAN: There'll be seven thousand two hundred and fifty in each pack. (Starts to put money back into the bag.)

E. MAN: Maybe I should keep a couple of --

WOMAN: (Angrily interrupting him.) -- Don't be such a goddamn fool! Do you want to play this safe or not?

E. MAN: I just wanted to get a mickey of rye, that's all.

WOMAN: So what do you say if the cops ask where the twenty bucks come from? Well?

E. MAN: I could say I found it.

WOMAN: You found it! For crissake! You old guys can't see beyond the end of your nose, can you?

E. MAN: Okay, okay. You take all the dough and keep it safe.

WOMAN: That's right. I'll keep it safe. (She puts the bag into her windbreaker.) So long as we stay hid we'll be fine.

E. MAN: We'll hide in the shadows, like that guy did. (Indicates the Y. Man.)

WOMAN: Shadows. What shadows?

E. MAN: He talked about them . . . said they were alive.

WOMAN: (Moves towards the door.) I don't know nothing about shadows. All I know is, if you don't want a boot in your gut, keep your mouth shut and don't play the big shot. Right?

E. MAN: (Full of offended dignity.) I give you my word.

WOMAN: Oh sure. But what's it worth? I don't trust words. I live by what I know, not by what I'm told. The cheapest things on this earth are words. So you give me your word! Big deal!

E. MAN: If it's not good enough for you, leave the money here and the cops can have it. Anyways, why should I trust you?

WOMAN: Because I'm out to survive, like you, that's why. (Suddenly smiles at him.) Well, do we trust each other?

E. MAN: We got to.

WOMAN: That's right. We gotta. (Moves towards the door, then turns back.) There's something else you'd better know too, so's we're in the clear with each other. I do know of a quack.

E. MAN: (After a pause.) You should've told him.

WOMAN: Why?

E. MAN: I give him my word. That's why.

WOMAN: I knew he was finished the minute I saw him.

E. MAN: He trusted me.

WOMAN: I didn't see no evidence of him trusting anybody. (Turns away, then swings back.) Look, I didn't have to tell you about me knowing a doctor. I told you because I gotta trust you, like you gotta trust me, because we're in the same boat. Ain't that right? (E. Man stares at her for what seems like a long time before he nods agreement.) So, are we going to shake on it? (She holds out a hand and he clasps it.) We'll make out. You'll see.

E. MAN: Honest?

WOMAN: Yes. (Goes to door.) You give me time to get back to my room before you call the cops.

E. MAN: You can turn your light on.

WOMAN: Sure, I'll do that.

E. MAN: (Somehow managing to combine eagerness with timidity.) Y'know, I can see you plain when you open your curtain with the light on.

WOMAN: That's right, you can see me. Okay, so one night if I don't open the curtain you'll know I'm probably lying on the bed with my throat slit.

E. MAN: (Shocked) Hey now, don't say things like that. I mean

WOMAN: I know what you mean.

E. MAN: I mean, you look real nice, that's all.

WOMAN: Like something worth having, eh. Cheap?

E. MAN: No, no, honest. I didn't mean it like that. It's like I'm looking back at something . . . something I used to dream of.

WOMAN: When I stand at the window, it's like I'm looking into a mirror, and seeing something that was once worth having.

E. MAN: You gotta believe it still is.

WOMAN: No. All I care about now is knowing I'm still living and that I'll be alive tomorrow morning. That's why I stand at the window, old man. Knowing that people see me there and remember their dreams puts life back into my body. (Harshly laughs.) But what me and you feel and think don't much matter, does it? It's surviving that counts. So, what'll you say to the cops?

E. MAN: Well, like I told you. I come across him in the street.

WOMAN: That's right. You found him, brought him here, and he died up and on you.

E. MAN: He sure did. Hey, I'll say I made soup for him (Fetches pot to show her.) Scotch Broth. I was keeping what's left for his breakfast.

WOMAN: (Pats his arm.) You treated him real good. Tell that to the cops too.

E. MAN: Hell, I didn't know he'd robbed a bank.

WOMAN: Of course not. You were just being a good guy. And that means you'll be fine when the cops question you. Just fine. Now, don't forget, wait until you see me back over there. (She points to the room on the other side of the alley.) Okay?

E. MAN: You think I'll be all right? The cops can't do nothin' to me, can they?

WOMAN: You'll be fine. Just fine. (She goes and the E. Man moves back to stand by the mattress.)

E. MAN: I'm real sorry she didn't let on about knowing a quack. Honest. I mean, you can see it wasn't my fault. That's right, ain't it? I did my level best to help you. There ain't many guys around that'd do that, y'know. (Chews his lips.) About the dough, you don't mind me and her sharing it, do you? I mean, you wouldn't want the cops to take it back to the bank, would you? I mean, maybe her and me don't count for much, but we still got to live. That's right, ain't it? I

know as she kinda lit into you and said as she didn't admire your nerve. But I ain't like that, mister. You went out there and took a risk. Maybe you didn't come out on top, but you had the nerve to do it . . . and I ain't never had nothing like that. So I want you to know that I would've got you a quack if I could of, because that's what I give my word to do. And don't be mad at her. Life's tough for a dame like her. (The light goes on, and for a moment the woman is seen, naked. Then the light is extinguished.) Did you see that! Ain't that something, eh? You heard what she said about me being over here, keeping an eye on her. I guess she must kind of rely on me. She must think I'm a decent sort of guy, eh? Ain't that something! (Nervously laughs.) Jeez! Oh brother, ain't that something. (Puts the pot on the table.) I gotto go, mister, I gotto go call the cops. (Halts by the door, chews his lips, then goes back to the mattress.) Know something? If I hadn't found you in the street and brought you here and had you die on me, I wouldn't have found out how she feels about me, would I? She counts on me to let her know she can go on living. But what I don't get is why it had to happen like that. I set out to keep you alive and then I find out about her. Does that make sense to you, mister? I mean . . . if you hadn't robbed that bank . . . (Stops, chews his lips.) I don't get it, I just don't get it. (Goes towards the door, halts, turns back to the mattress.) Mister, d'you think somebody has to die someplace so's another guy that's living can find out something about himself? Y'think that's how it works, mister? I don't get it. (Stops at the door.) I won't be gone long, mister. Honest. (Goes out.)

THE END