



Dan Jackson shook the man's right hand companionably, while Sue's heart abruptly plummeted. He hadn't understood!

Lady

IN DISTRESS

BY ROBERT ARTHUR

Illustrated by Al Schmidt

SUE O'NEIL first saw the heavy-set man who looked like her brother Tim, at noon, eating at the lunch counter in the ground floor drugstore. The sight of him gave her a momentary shock. Then she saw that the resemblance was only superficial, and breathed easily again.

When she saw him again after work, following her out of the Central Building, she decided he must be a new tenant in the building and forgot him. For Susan Shannon O'Neil had a matter of much more importance on her mind. A date with Dan Jackson. To celebrate his promotion from brass buttons to plain-clothes. A date which called for new

gloves and a new hat, at the very least.

At Jorman's next door she bought the gloves quickly. Then for the hat she settled on a red pillbox that perched jauntily atop her blond curls. Finally at the bag counter she bought three square brass initials such as adorned so many women's bags this season. She planned to pin the initials to the front of the pillbox, giving it an individual touch at practically no extra cost.

Well pleased, Sue O'Neil took the subway uptown to her tiny apartment. At the subway entrance she thought for a moment she saw the man who looked like Tim getting into a cab at the curb. But when she turned the cab was gone,

so it had probably been an illusion.

At least she thought so until, opening her door half an hour later, she took one step inside and came to a frozen stop.

"Come in, sister, close the door and keep quiet," said the heavy-set man, standing in the center of the room with a gun in his hand. "Yell once, you'll never yell twice."

Sue O'Neil believed him. She fumbled the door shut behind her and spoke with an effort.

"What do you want?"

"A little coöperation, sister. Sit down. I'll do the talking."

Silently Sue put her bag and the parcels containing the hat and gloves on the bed. She sat down. The heavy-set man, who had apparently first made sure she was heading home, then hurried to get there ahead of her, sat on the arm of the overstuffed chair, holding the gun loosely.

"Now, sister," he said, "do like you're told and nobody will be hurt. Get stubborn and somebody will be."

"Somebody?" Sue formed the word with dry lips.

"You maybe. And Dan Jackson positively. But good."

She had known it. It had to be something connected with Dan. Dan, who was going into court in the morning to begin his testimony against Lemson, the contractor whose business had been only a front for . . .

"You got a date with Jackson tonight," the man who looked like Tim said, as if reading her thoughts. "And tomorrow Jackson goes into court. The D. A.'s case hangs on what he has to say."

That was true. Dan had explained it to her. He had done most of the investigating on his own time. It was the reason for his promotion. His testimony would convict Lemson. Without it . . .

"So we don't want him to testify. He won't buy off. We could cool him, but cop killing is bad stuff. That's where you come in, sister."

"What do you want me to do?" Sue asked, her lips stiff.

"Help us get him into a cab with a gun in his ribs before he knows the score. When we get a 'not guilty' verdict we'll turn Jackson loose. Of course we'll plant money around so it'll look like he's been bought."

One-handed, the heavy-set man got out a cigarette and lit it. Through the curls of smoke his eyes bored into hers.

"You don't want to. But it's that or let him be burned down. He's too tough to take chances with. So which is it, sister?"

"I'll do it." It was the only thing she could say. Her thoughts were a confused whirl. Dan—they'd kill him if they had to. She knew it. Because this was too important to them; they couldn't fail. Unless she could warn Dan somehow. Warned, he could take care of himself. If only she could let him know somehow that something was wrong. . . . Sudden wild hope flared in her.

"I'll do it," she said again, swallowing. "I don't want Dan to die."

"Good." But the man who looked like her brother did not relax. "Then pick up that phone and call him. Tell him your brother Tim is in town from Cleveland and wants to take you both out for a feed and a show. But say anything out of line—" He wagged the automatic suggestively.

She did as directed, catching Dan at headquarters. Carefully making her words natural, she told Dan that Tim was in town and wanted to treat them. Dan sounded surprised and annoyed at first. Obeying whispered instructions she added that Tim wanted very much to meet him. Dan's tone changed then. It became hearty as he said that, even if it did mean ringing a third in on their date, he wanted to meet Tim, too. Then he hung up. She hadn't been able to get any message to him. But she hadn't tried. It wasn't time for that.

"You don't overlook anything, do you?" she asked bitterly as she put the phone down. "You even look like Tim. Enough to deceive someone who hasn't seen him, anyway."

"But who might have seen a picture of him," the heavy-set man said. "We don't fool, sister. This is important stuff. We been checking on you in case we needed to use you. We knew you had a brother, so we phoned Cleveland and got a report on him, and a picture."

"A nice lad, your brother Tim. You'll be interested to know he was tossed in the jug day before yesterday for getting drunk and beating up your old man. It would take a sister to love that mug." He laughed, silently.

He allowed Sue to dress behind the kitchenette screen. Dressed, she pinned her initials to her new pillbox with trembling fingers, and breathed a silent prayer that Dan would suspect danger before it was too late. Dan was smart. He'd had two years of college and was a radio ham and . . . he was clever! He'd know something was wrong. He had to!

She clung desperately to that hope during the taxi ride down town. Since Dan had to work late, they had agreed she'd pick him up in front of his apartment. The man who looked like Tim sat so he could watch her.

"Don't try anything, sister," he warned sharply as they approached Dan's building. "My friend driving has a gun too. Make a break and it's curtains for both of you. Take it easy and nobody gets hurt. Understand?"

Sue nodded, not trusting herself to speak. The taxi swerved into the corner where Dan was standing, tall and broad-shouldered, and she was opening the door, was clambering out, knowing the moment had come.

"Dan!" she cried, her voice gay. "This is Tim. He wanted so much to meet you! He says he's going to give us an evening we won't

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