

The Money Machine

by Clee Garson, 1918-1944

Published: 1943
in »Amazing Stories«



Illustration:

The old Southern gentleman was turning out paper money by the
trunkful!

Bert and Mindy had one of the oldest rackets of all—selling machines that make money out of paper. But this machine really worked...

IN Kansas City we'd cleaned up to the tune of ten thousand bucks before that hospitable metropolis became too hot to hold us. In St. Louis we stopped over long enough to net a nice profit of three thousand more. Milwaukee was good for another three thousand, and when we breezed into Chicago, Mindy and I had sixteen grand in the kitty.

Believe me, brother, you don't count that kind of moola on your toes!

Little old Chicago had been selected as the last stop on our tour, and after working the mines in said Windy City, we'd planned to head south to burn some of that dough under the nice Miami sun.

We'd holed up in the Marquis Hotel, a small flea nest just north of Chicago's loop, and had no sooner unpacked our underwear than Mindy began harping on a theme I'd had a hunch he'd get.

"Why don't we follow the ducks south right now, Bert?" he demanded. "We got more dough than any two guys can use for one pleasant season."

"Listen," I told him. "When we started this tour we agreed that we'd follow it through as planned no matter how badly or how well we did, didn't we?"

"Yeah, but—" Mindy began.

"Okay, then," I told him. "We follow it through. This is the last stop for us, see? We work this town for what it's worth and maybe we'll end up another five or ten grand to the good. This is no time to get lazy."

"We've worked hard," Mindy whined in his nasal voice. "We owe ourselves a vacation."

"We'll get it," I promised, "as soon as we work our traps here in Chicago."

Mindy sighed, and I knew I'd won.

"Well, let's make it as fast as we can," he said.

"We're gonna do just that," I promised him. "As a matter of fact I'm going out to beat the brush for a lamb this very afternoon."

I had better explain that "lamb" is a business term peculiar to our trade. In cruder language it means "sucker." Members of the trade Mindy and I belong to are called, in polite society, confidence men. This is no doubt due to the fact that we make our cakes and ale by taking lambs into our confidence. Or, in brief, taking lambs.

Mindy sighed and rang room service for a quart of booze. When he put back the phone, he threw himself on the bed and lighted a cigarette.

"What tools we gonna use this time?" he asked.

A "tool," in case you have no experience in our line, is nothing more than the type, or kind, of shears you use to fleece the lamb. Tools run all the way from the old badger game—which is a very crude tool at best—to the slicker kinds such as the missing heir gag or trick real estate turnovers.

"I have been thinking about that, Mindy," I told my partner. "We have been working like dogs, yes, like dogs, with some of the slicker tools. Slick tool work takes a lot of buildup and a great deal of time. I feel the same way you do about heading south but quick. So, I figure that this time we'll use Old Reliable."

Mindy raised up on one elbow, looking at me with considerable surprise.

"Not the money machine?" he demanded.

"The money machine," I agreed matter-of-factly.

"In Chicago?" Mindy demanded even more unbelievably. "In a tough smart burg like this?"

"The bigger the burg," I reminded him, "the dumber the lambs."

MINDY still looked doubtful. He sucked on his cigarette for a minute, staring at the ceiling.

"I don't like it," he said at last.

"You leave it to me," I said. "I'll find the lamb."

"It will have to be a lamb with its brains knocked out," Mindy said dubiously.

"Lambs are born without brains," I reminded him.

Mindy shook his head doubtfully.

"Maybe so," he admitted. "But the money machine needs a pretty simple lamb for the slaughter."

I picked up my hat and coat.

"That's what I'm gonna look for," I told him. "Beginning right now."

"Where you gonna look?" Mindy asked.

"All over," I answered. "Like I always do."

"What about the machine?" Mindy wondered.

"Nick Faroni should have one," I said. "I'm gonna drop by his place on Grand Avenue and ask."

NICK FARONI'S little shop on Grand Avenue, while operating under the front of an antique shop, was, of course, nothing more than a joint serving as a supply store to confidence operators and muggs.

Faroni had been in business at various stands around Chicago for over a dozen years. He carried a line of everything from bogus cash to loaded dice, trick roulette wheels, fraudulent legal documents and gold edged stock which, of course, wasn't worth a nickel. He also had a few money machines.

After leaving the hotel, I went straight to Nick's place to look over his line.

It was a little store in an old building, and crowded with antique furniture and similar junk. Upstairs, however, in a big loft room, Nick kept his business supplies.

Nick was little and round with a completely bald dome and a scraggly black moustache.

Over a drink in the back of his store we talked shop and he was glad to hear Mindy and I were doing so well.

"In times like these," Mindy observed, "it is unusual to make so many dollars." He sighed and took another drink. "Here in town, business in your line and all others has been very bad. Only in the gambling line has there been any activity of any sort."

I said that was too bad, and that maybe Mindy and I were lucky and he agreed that maybe we were. Then we got around to the purpose of my call.

"I remember you had a line of money machines at one time," I told him.

Nick nodded. "They moved very slowly. I never really cleared a profit on them machines, and I have still got three or four upstairs gathering dust."

"That's fine," I told him. "I want one."

He looked surprised, even more than Mindy had.

"Are you kidding?" he demanded. "A smart operator like you should want a money machine?"

"I'm not kidding. That's the tool we're gonna use here in Chi."

"This town ain't Hayseed, Nebraska," Nick reminded me.

"I know that," I said. "It is a big town with a big heart and I am going to search for a big sucker."

Nick shrugged. "It's your business, Bert. I can't tell you anything about how to run it. You seem to be doing well enough. But—in Chicago, such a simple gag—" He shrugged again.

"Show me the machines," I told him. Nick shrugged once more. "Okay," he said. "They're fine machines, as money machines go. They even look like they'd work."

NICK wasn't lying. His money machines really did look like they'd work. They were about as big as a comptometer and the insides were filled with complicated machine work that looked scientific as hell as long as you didn't know the mechanism wasn't supposed to work.

You'd insert a ten dollar bill into the slot at the front—after previously planting two more ten spots inside—, turn the crank on the side, and presto—three bills, thirty bucks, would pop out!

The whole thing was designed to give the impression of making three bills out of one, of course.

Nick worked the machine for me a couple times, took it apart, showed me how to salt the extra bills inside, and then told me the price.

"Four hundred bucks!" I exploded. "That's robbery!"

Nick shrugged. "At the rate you and Mindy are now coining it, this machine can make you at least several grand. Why holler?"

I could have kicked myself for having let on that we were in the chips. But the mistake was made, and that was that. I knew Nick never budged from a price once set.

"But you said you've had these things lying around catching dust for a long time," I protested feebly. "After all, I'm doing you a favor, taking one of 'em off your hands."

"So they been taking up space I could of used for other stuff," Nick said, unbudging. "I gotta regain something of what I lost on 'em. My price is four hundred bucks. Take it or leave it."

"Okay," I said. "You robber." I got out my wallet and Nick wet his lips and smiled.

"You want I should deliver it?" he asked.

"I'll take it along," I told him.

The thing was heavy to carry, and when I got outside Nick's I couldn't find a cab. I was at least four blocks from a streetcar and there weren't any Elevates within two miles.

I cursed fluently as I set out for the nearest car line with the damned thing clutched in my arms. And two blocks later, when I tripped on the curbing and dropped the machine, my profanity was hotter than a welder's torch.

Picking it up, I knew right away that the damned thing had been dented badly by the drop. Peeling away part of the wrapping to have a look-see confirmed as much.

The front end was caved in, but bad.

Four hundred bucks caved in! I could have bawled. But instead, I continued to curse. Curse and glare at the machine and realize that Nick would charge me the same amount for another.

It was while I stood there giving myself, the machine, and Nick verbal hell, that I saw the little shop across the street. A little shop that looked, at first glance, like a combination shoe repair and pawnshop, but which had an exceptionally timely sign painted on its dirty window.

"THINGS FIXED," said the sign.

"ANYTHING REPAIRED," it said right below that.

"COL. AMOS MARSH, PROP.", read the bottom legend.

The things scattered in sloppy display in the window, roller skates, electric irons, glued vases, etc., were what gave it the first sight appearance of a pawnshop.

I looked at the badly mashed machine in my mitts, then at the shop. Providence, perhaps, had stepped in to save me four hundred bucks. I crossed the street to the dingy shop, half a flight down into a basement store, and peered in through the dirty window.

AN old man, wearing a leather apron, a white walrus moustache and white goatee, sat behind a counter inside, puttering with what seemed to be somebody's broken violin.

I went around to the door and pushed it open. A bell jangled as I stepped inside, and the old man looked up querulously from his work.

I was standing there looking down from the top of the steps leading into the basement shop, machine clutched in my arms, feeling suddenly a little bit foolish.

"You fix things?" I asked.

The old man looked to the window where his sign was painted, then back to me, a little testily, it seemed.

"Suh, that is what the sign on this stoah proclaims," he snapped. "You have something, suh, that you wish repaired?"

I suddenly realized how the "Colonel" fitted in before his handle. The deep south, for a fact.

"You're Colonel Amos Marsh?" I asked.

"A careful perusal of the window, suh," said the goateed old colonel waspishly, "should also make that apparent."

I went down the steps and over to the counter. I put down the package.

"I'd like to have you take a look at this machine," I told him. "I'd like to find out if you think you can repair it."

The old colonel put aside the violin, brushed off his leather apron, and got up and came over to the counter. On his feet and so close, he didn't seem either old or feeble any more. He was taller than I'd figured and his wide shoulders were straight, his back militarily stiff. Tough old codger.

Silently, he began to unwrap the machine. Silently, I watched him. He stared at it frowningly for a minute or so after it was unwrapped. Then he looked up at me.

"May I ask, suh, just what sort of a gadget this is?"

I hesitated, then decided that no explanation was better than a phony one.

"I'm very sorry," I said stiffly. "I can't possibly tell you. It's a secret."

"Then, suh," he asked, "how can you expect me to repair it?"

I pointed to the badly dented front.

"That's the only part that needs repairs. All I want to know is whether or not you can straighten it out."

The colonel squinted at the damage, grunting a few times as he moved his nose around it.

"I think, suh, that it shouldn't be too difficult," he said, looking up. "A little heat, hammering it out, a touch of paint, and it should be like new."

I felt very much relieved. "Fine. That's swell. How much'll you charge and how long will the job take?"

Again the colonel gave the machine an appraising squint.

"I think I can have it ready by this time tomorrow, suh," he declared. "And the charge, suh, will depend on the time and materials I find necessary to apply to its repair."

I got suspicious.

"Give me a rough idea of how much that will be," I demanded.

"Perhaps five dollars, suh, or perhaps ten. I can't tell as it is now."

IT sounded like highway robbery.

Ten bucks to hammer out the dented front of the machine, nothing more.

"Look," I said. "It isn't a watch. It won't take any delicate fixing. Don't you think that's a little high?"

The colonel shoved the machine across the counter to me disdainfully.

"I will have you know, suh, that you can take this elsewhere if you do not agree as to the, ah, fairness of my price. My work, suh, is expert. Nothing less than expert. I pride myself on restoring objects to their original state."

There seemed to be genuine indignation, sincerely ruffled pride in the old guy's voice. And after all, I didn't know what someone else would charge, if I could get someone else to fix it. I shoved the machine back across the counter.

"Okay, okay," I said. "Only please try to keep down the cost, will you?"

The old guy was looking at the machine now as if he might not work on it for any amount of dough. He glared belligerently at me.

"Do you question my integrity, suh?"

"No," I said quickly. "No. Not a bit. It's just that I, ah, can't afford to spend too much on the thing."

This seemed to pacify him a little. He looked back at the machine.

"Very well, suh. I will have this ready for you tomorrow at this time."

I decided it would be just as smart to leave on a happy note. After all, it might keep down the price. I grinned engagingly, looking around the shop.

"You certainly seem to have a varied bunch of stuff in here for repairs," I commented. "Must be an interesting business."

This seemed to warm the old guy up a little, for he smiled proudly.

"I have not done badly, suh, in this business," he said. "When you consider, suh, that I was born to the aristocratic and leisure class of the Old South, suh, never destined—so to speak—for trade or work of any sort, this," and he waved his hand to indicate the dingy little basement shop, "is no small accomplishment."

"Not bad," I admitted, wondering if the old guy was putting on just a trifle too much dog about aristocratic background in the Old South. I wondered how much of his colonel-routine was genuine, how much was bunk.

"I was always handy, suh," the colonel went on reminiscently. "Even when I was a wee tot on mah old pappy's plantation. But I nevah suspected, suh, that I would one day be forced to earn my livelihood with that talent."

I looked curiously around the shop. "This racket pay off well?" I asked.

The old colonel blinked puzzledly.

"I don't understand you, suh. Racket? To what do you refer, suh?"

"Just a term of speech," I corrected myself quickly. "I mean this business of yours. Do you find it, ah, profitable?"

The colonel went back into his freeze. I guess he figured the question a little personal. Which, of course, it was.

"My remuneration from this shop, suh, is sufficient for the needs and ambitions of an old man," he said coldly. "I am able to live with a certain dignity, while at the same time saving for, ah, certain future plans."

NATURALLY, my interest picked up. I smiled apologetically.

"I'm sorry for having been so snooping, old timer," I said. "But it did seem odd to see a man of your undoubted dignity and, ah, aristocracy, hard at work at a humble, though honest, trade. You were speaking of plans and ambitions. Do you mind a friendly stranger such as myself asking what they might be?"

This seemed to thaw the old boy out for good. He beamed hospitably, warmly.

"Well, suh. You look like a friendly man, an honest man," he said. "Fact is, you make me think of a Taggert. You a Taggert, suh?"

"Taggert?" I blinked.

"A Georgia Taggert, suh. I knew the Georgia Taggerts well in my time. Their plantation was next to my pappy's."

"Oh," I said. "Oh, yeah. I see. No. I'm afraid that I'm not related to the Georgia Taggerts. That is, as far as I know. But about those plans you mentioned."

"Oh," that brought the old boy back. "Oh, of course. That's right. My plans, suh." He lowered his voice suddenly and looked around the shop like a conspirator. "I plan to return to the Old South, suh. To the land of my birth and allegiance. That, suh, is my ambition. I am going to return in the manner in which I was raised there—as a gentleman of leisure and culture and wealth."

I took another look around the dingy shop.

"You are?" I asked doubtfully.

"I am, suh," the colonel said positively. "As soon as I have saved the rest of the necessary capital." He sighed with the conclusion of his last words and looked suddenly less positive.

I nodded. "I see what you mean. You've been saving for that return all along, eh? And you need to save more before you can return. Is that right?"

The colonel sighed again. A very tired sigh.

"That is right, suh," he nodded.

I tried to make the question sound casual.

"Think it will be much longer before you have enough saved?"

The question worked perfectly. It fished out all I wanted to know.

"I am afraid, suh, at the present rate of my savings, that it will take considerably longer for me to arrive at the figure I need. You see, suh, considering my age, and the probable number of years left to me, I estimated that I should need thirty or thirty-five thousand dollars to live out the rest of my life in the Old South under the circumstances of my youth. To date, I have been only able to save six thousand dollars to that end."

MY eyebrows went up a notch and my palms got moist. Six grand! Again I looked around the dingy shop. Not a bad nest egg for an old guy in a business like this. I was beginning to have ideas.

"It would be certainly wonderful if you could, ah, stumble on an investment that would bring you all the money you needed for your ambition," I said casually.

The old colonel's eyes lit up like a beacon at the end of a blackout. Then the light flickered off again and he looked wearily despondent.

"But where could one find such an investment, suh?" he asked, purely conversationally.

I shrugged, casually, of course, and smiled.

"Sometimes," I said, "investments like that come up. You never can tell when." I turned and started up the steps to the door. At the landing before the door I turned around again. "I'll be in for the machine tomorrow at this time, Colonel Marsh," I said. "Do a good job, won't you?"

The old guy smiled vaguely and nodded. I could see that he was deep in thought over his plans and ambitions, so I practically tiptoed out the door. ...

MINDY was lounging in the lobby of our hotel when I got back. I grabbed him by the sleeve and steered him upstairs to our room, pronto. When I'd closed the door behind us and removed my coat, I walked over to the whisky and soda and poured out a couple of drinks. I handed one to Mindy, who was still blinking puzzledly and muttering.

"Pal," I said raising my glass. "This drink is to our success in a new one!"

Mindy almost lost his front teeth with surprise.

"What?" he squealed. "You gotta lamb set for shearing awready?"

I took a deep gulp from my glass and grinned.

"Brother," I asked, "how does six thousand bucks sound to you?"

"How do I look to you?" Mindy countered. "Crazy? Of course six grand sounds swell. But what's the pitch? Who's the lamb? What'll be the tools?"

"One question at a time," I told him smugly.

Mindy opened his mouth, then his eyes narrowed. He looked at my coat on the bed, at my hands, around the room, then back to me.

"Where's the money machine?" he asked. "Ain't we gonna use one this time?" There was relief in his voice.

I shook my head. "The money machine is already in possession of the lamb we're gonna shear. Only, he doesn't know that it's a money machine. That is, I haven't told him what kind of a machine it is. He's supposed to repair it. The front of it, anyway."

Mindy held up both hands.

"Wait a minute!" he implored. "Start from the beginning, why doncha?"

I grinned, poured myself another drink, and started from the beginning. Started from the point, at any rate, where I walked out of Nick Faroni's with the money machine. The rest of it I related step by step, word for word, everything about the old colonel and his shop and the busted front of the machine, and, finally, about the nest egg the old guy put away, and how the old guy could be a set up as a lamb.

"He doesn't know it yet," I concluded, "but the money machine is gonna be his investment, Mindy. We're gonna show him, with the machine, how he can put in a ten dollar bill and pull out three instead of one. And then we're gonna sell him the whole damn thing for six thousand dollars."

Mindy had listened, enraptured.

"Six thousand bucks," he murmured ecstatically when I'd finished, "plus sixteen thousand makes twenty-two thousand iron men. Boy, oh boy—Florida, hang on tight!"

I was on my feet, walking excitedly back and forth. I was getting a brainstorm that pointed to a definite improvement on the old money machine sales psychology. An improvement that fitted in nicely with the character type the colonel represented.

"Look," I said to Mindy. "This is an angle that just hit me, see. We'll go back for the machine tomorrow. The colonel will have the front end nicely repaired, no doubt. Then, instead of slamming right into our sales spiel, we'll try out the machine in front of him, see?"

Mindy blinked. "Of course," he said. "Of course we try it out in front of him. We try it out and show him how he can make three bills outta one. Then he goes fer it, but we are loath to let 'em have it at first. We go through the usual act until he's near crazy to own it and then—"

I cut Mindy off.

"Not at all," I said. "We don't show him how it can make thirty bucks outta ten. We just try out the machine, see? We try it out—since it's had a bad fall—to make sure it's still working. We put a ten dollar bill into it and, what do you know, *it doesn't work!*"

Mindy looked at me like I was crazy.

"You outta your mind?" he squealed.

I smiled tolerantly, going on like I hadn't heard him.

"You and I," I continued, "then go crazy as loons. We stuff that ten into it at least a dozen times, growing more and more frantic, see? And the damned machine still doesn't make three outta one!"

MINDY was shaking his head from side to side and moaning softly.

"Stop it, stop it," he begged. "I hate to see a sharp mind like yours going to pieces this way!"

I still ignored my partner's interruption.

"Don't you picture the old colonel?" I went on. "Can't you see him bugging his eyes out trying to figure what we're carrying on so about? Can't you see him asking himself what're we shoving ten dollar bills into the machine for?"

Mindy started to answer this. But I didn't give him time, I continued.

"So finally the colonel can't stand it any longer, see? He breaks in almost begging to know what's going on, see? I start to tell him, and you shout at me to shut up. You scream at me and ask if I want to give the whole thing away, see? I say what the hell difference does it make now. The machine won't work anymore. It won't make money for us anymore. Somehow the damned fall has broken it on us so we're sunk, see? That's what I say. Then I start to tell the colonel again, and by now he has half the story anyway, see? He's wise to the fact that it's a machine that makes money. And he's also dead sure, from the way we've been moaning our brains out while stuffing bills into it, that it must have worked for us before, see?"

"Go on," Mindy moaned, shuddering, "if you have to."

"Now here's the pitch, see," I continued. "I spill a story to the colonel on how you were given the machine by a dying inventor. I tell him how it worked for us plenty of times, even though we didn't know the inventor's secret of what made it work, see. I tell him that now, since it's broken, we're sunk, that we haven't a chance in the world to ever get it to work again. Then you break back in. You start moaning about how this had to happen when we needed four thousand dollars more than life itself. You mumble something about the lack of the four grand meaning utter ruin to your uncle in Canada, or something sad, see."

"Why four grand?" Mindy perked up to ask. "Why not six?"

"I'll get to that later," I said. "Four grand will sound far less suspicious than six grand, which is all he's got to his name, see? I got a scheme to get the other two grand the next day."

Mindy shook his head dubiously. "I'm beginning to see, but even so—"

I cut him off, rounding out my plan, "All this time, then," I went on, "I am wrapping up the machine sadly and getting ready to take it out of the shop. You keep moaning about the four grand and how awful it was that the machine had to break down at such a crucial moment. Then's when the old colonel breaks back in, see?"

"Why?" Mindy interrupted. "Why does he suddenly break in on our troubles?"

"Because, you dunderhead," I explained patiently, "the old colonel is a fixer. That's his business. He fixes things, see? He is more proud than Lucifer of the way he fixes things, see? He seems to think that there's nothing he can't fix. So, naturally, he'll figure that he'll be able to fix this machine. Knowing what kind of a machine it is, he'll figure that he'll net a pretty profit for fixing it for us."

"Good gosh!" Mindy broke in, shocked. "You ain't gonna let him try?"

I shook my head. "Of course not. Not while we're there, at any rate. We'll shake our heads sadly and thank him, but tell him, no. We can't let him fix it, because we know he isn't clever enough to fix it. That will get him riled, see? It'll work on his pride and his anxiety to have a fling at a job that'll pay off big dough to him. He'll knock himself out trying to get us to let him fix it. We'll still say no, that we think no one could fix it but the inventor, and he's dead, see?"

"It is all very complicated," said Mindy doubtfully.

"It is slick tool work, chum," I told him. "Because then you spring the Big Idea. You break in excitedly, shooting off your face about how badly you need that four thousand bucks inside of the next four hours, and how you'd be darned if it wouldn't be worth it to you to get rid of the machine then and there for four thousand bucks."

Mindy brightened a little. "Then do we sell him the machine for four grand?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Not right away. I break in then, and say you are crazy to sell a machine like that for such a piddling sum, and that I won't have anything to do with it, see?"

"No," Mindy said sadly. "I don't see at all."

"Look," I explained patiently. "By saying I won't have anything to do with the sale, even though the old colonel hasn't actually offered to buy the machine, I make him feel like he might have just been gypped out of the chance of a lifetime, get it? Then he begins to want to buy it!"

"Why?" Mindy asked.

"Because he's now more convinced than ever that he can fix the machine and make himself a mint, don't you see?" I told him. "We've been playing our parts so fast and furious up to now that it'll never occur to the old colonel even to doubt in the slightest that the machine once made money!" I paused. "The only thing on his mind now will be the fact that he has a chance to buy it and repair it, due to the fact that you and I need four thousand bucks in a hurry, see?"

"Yeah," said Mindy. But he still didn't sound quite convinced.

"So, like I said," I resumed, "I put my foot down and say we'd be nuts to sell it for four grand. Then you get mad at me and ask what good all the money in the world would be if we can't raise four grand in the next four hours to stave off ruin, see?"

"Uhhuh," said Mindy, frowning.

"Then I go into my biggest act," I went on. "I go almost mad with grief at being in such a tough spot. I beat my head and tear my hair and finally break down and admit that you're right. I admit that we've no other course than to sell the machine, and bemoan the fact that our days of great fortune are forever over."

"And then do we let the old guy buy the machine?" Mindy asked pleadingly.

I smiled and nodded. "That's right. Then we let him buy. But not before I tell him how Fate must have decided that it be this way, and tossed us on his mercy for the four grand. I remind him that if he can't fix the machine, he's out four grand. But I tell him that if he can, he's in a mint, with a chance to go back to his Old South like he wants, and to go back as a millionaire. I tell him maybe Fate has given him this one chance to make enough money quickly before he dies, and remind him that the six grand he's saved so far is still a lot of years away from the dough he really needs, see?" "Do you have to end up with that spiel?" Mindy implored.

I nodded. "It's a clincher. It's perfect psychology. It sounds so darned honest. He'll break his neck getting to the bank for the dough, then."

MINDY sat there in silence, staring at me with a mixture of awe and doubt.

"You sure you got this old guy figured right?" he asked.

"Positive," I said.

"I hate to bring this up now," Mindy said, "but you've planned all this on the fact that the machine doesn't make bills when we try it. Isn't it supposed to?"

"Sure it's supposed to, you dope," I said, "if it's salted with a couple of bills inside. But it isn't, and it won't be. So it won't make dough, get it?"

Mindy nodded. "Yeah, that's right. But you said you'd get the extra two grand out of him, too. How you figure on doing that?"

"Easy," I grinned. "As soon as I go to the bank with the old guy, you take a small part from the inside of the machine and pocket it, see. I figure we'll leave you alone in the shop to guard the machine when we go to the bank. That'll give you the chance."

"And then what?" Mindy demanded.

"And then, after we give the old guy twenty-four hours to tinker with the machine so it'll make money, we come back to his shop with the little nut or bolt you've removed the day before, see?"

"No," said Mindy. "I don't see at all."

"It's simple," I said. "Of course the old duffer won't have been able to get the machine started making money. He'll be pretty frantic by then. So we show him the little loose nut or bolt or whatever it'll be. We'll say we found it on the floor when we got back to the hotel. We'll say that obviously it's the missing part that accounted for the machine's not running, see?"

Mindy chortled with glee. "And then we offer to sell it to him for two grand, eh?"

I grinned. "Right. It's the missing part, and without it he won't be able to make the machine run. I get him to go to the bank for his other two grand—which'll be what we'll charge him for the missing part, see—and while he and I are gone, you'll salt the machine with the phony bills. When we come back, we put the bolt where it belonged, take his dough, show him how to crank the machine—which'll be salted with bills—and it'll make money, just like we told him!"

Mindy was doubly gleeful. "And we'll have tickets for a fast plane to Florida inside of the next hour. We'll leave him in his shop with the machine and clear out—but fast, right?"

I nodded confidently. "Right."

Mindy went over to fill himself another drink. He did so, turned and raised his glass, grinning.

"Here's to the shearing, tomorrow."

I raised my own.

"Six thousand bucks worth," I said.

Naturally, we both felt considerably fine. So we turned our attention to the bottle, the old conscience killer...

THE day of the shearing broke bright and clear. Or at least the part of it that we saw when we rose around noon as a result of our bout. Mindy, as always before a big deal, was jittery.

My hands were none too steady, myself. But a quick, cold shower and a big breakfast settled both stomach and fingers, and one o'clock found us ready to hop a cab for the old colonel's shop.

There was a slight delay in our departure while I made Mindy go back upstairs and change the violently checkered suit he always tries to wear to our confidence deals.

He reappeared again, dourly and still jittery, some ten minutes later and we piled into a cab.

"Why must you always try to dress like the Hollywood version of a toiler at your trade?" I demanded.

Mindy was glum. "Awright, aw-right," he muttered. "It gives me confidence, that zoot."

"You might as well wear a neon sign saying *Con Man* in big red letters," I told him.

As we got closer to the neighborhood where old Colonel Amos Marsh had his shop, Mindy's emotional state grew even more sour.

"Don't look like no district where you'll find six grand growing on trees to me," he grumbled.

I was getting enough of that noise.

"Shut up!" I told him. He glowered, and with a minimum of muttering, shuts up.

Ten minutes later we pulled into the street where the old colonel's shop was located.

After we'd paid the driver and the cab left, Mindy stood moodily on the sidewalk, staring at the dingy shop window which said that we were outside the establishment of Colonel Amos Marsh, who fixed things.

I peered in through the dirty window, but I couldn't see the old colonel inside.

"He's probably in the back," I said.

We entered the basement shop, and the opening of the door caused the bell to tinkle.

As we started down the steps, old Colonel Marsh came out of the back. I was in front, and he saw me first, and smiled.

"Ahh, how are you, suh?" he smiled over his white goatee. He wore his leather apron, as before, and he wiped his hands on it.

"Splendid," I said cheerfully. "How are you today? The machine repaired?"

The colonel nodded, beaming with pride.

"I am fine, suh. Yes. The machine is repaired. And an excellent job I did, suh, if I do say so myself."

"Good," I told him, walking over to the counter. "I'm glad to hear it." Mindy was right at my heels, so I turned, waving a hand at him. "Colonel Marsh," I said, "I'd like you to meet my close friend, Mr. Charles Oakly. You'll be interested to know that he owns half interest in the machine you've repaired for me."

"Pleased," grunted Mindy.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, suh," said the colonel affably. "I think you will also be pleased by the work I did on your machine. It looks quite like new, suh."

"That's nice," said Mindy.

"Well, let's see it," I suggested.

The colonel nodded, turned away and went to the back of his shop. I turned and gave Mindy the wink. He nodded doubtfully, still jittery.

IN a minute the old guy came back with the money machine in his mitts. He carried it tenderly, and with pride. It was shining so brightly that I knew he'd given it a polish after repairing it; and I had to admit that the job he'd done on the caved-in front was a honey. You'd never have known the machine once had so much as a pin dent in it, now.

The colonel placed the machine on the counter.

"There you are, suhs," he said beamingly. "I hope you approve of my repair job."
I shook my head marvelingly.

"Excellent isn't the word for that work, Colonel," I said. "It is super-magnificent mending!"

The colonel's chest swelled proudly.

"Thank you, suh. Thank you very much."

I held up my hand. "Don't tell me what you're going to charge, Colonel. I know you said it'd be somewhere between five and ten bucks, but such a price—in view of the job you've done—would be robbery. I'll pay you fifteen."

The old guy's eyes almost popped out of his head. He flushed with elation.

"That is very generous of you, suh. Very generous, indeed."

"Wait!" It was Mindy who broke in suddenly. He stepped up to the counter and looked at the machine.

The colonel frowned troubledly, evidently fearing that he was about to lose that extra five I'd tacked onto his charge.

Mindy put those doubts briefly to an end.

"I don't mean anything about the fifteen," he assured the colonel. "It's a swell job, and worth that. I'm thinking of something my friend hasn't thought of yet." Mindy turned to me. "Since the damn thing dropped," he asked worriedly, "hadn't we oughtta see if it's still awright?"

I frowned, taking my cue.

"I never thought of that," I said. "But, hell, I don't think it fell hard enough to hurt the operation of the machine. It'll work, don't worry. You'll see when we get to the apartment—"

Mindy cut in again.

"I can't wait that long. I got an awful feeling that mebbe dropping it ruint the works inside."

I laughed uneasily, taking a snide glance at the colonel, who was taking in all this a bit bewilderedly.

"Don't be silly," I said. "Of course, it still runs."

Mindy made his voice hoarsely worried.

"I wanta see, now," he demanded, persistently.

I looked at the colonel. Then I looked back at Mindy.

"Not in public!" I protested.

The colonel, catching the idea, flushed and pretended not to be listening. He walked over to the end of the counter and began fiddling with something.

Mindy lowered his voice to a hiss.

"He won't be able to figure it out. We can just try it once, now!" he insisted.

The colonel still pretended to be engrossed at the end of the counter. But it was obvious that the old duck was taking in every word we said, and sneaking side glances at us.

"All right," I agreed reluctantly. "Just try it once, if it'll ease your mind."

"Got a ten dollar bill?" Mindy asked.

I brought out my wallet and gave him a bill. Then, with a sharp glance at the colonel, I draped myself over the counter just enough to cover Mindy's actions with the machine.

Mindy put the ten dollar bill into the thing, muttering worriedly as he did so. Then he turned the crank. Of course, since the thing wasn't salted, nothing happened. The ten dollar bill just came out the other end.

Mindy let out a yell of horror.

"Migawd! What did I tell you!"

"No," I bleated. "No. Something's wrong. It can't be broken! Try it again. For God's sake, try the damned thing again!"

Mindy repeated the action feverishly. From the corner of my eye I could see the colonel edging to a position where he could get a glimpse of what was going on. Our fish was getting curious as hell.

We went roaring into our act, then, Mindy holding up his end of it perfectly. His jittery state was over, now that he was "playing" before an audience. At least half a dozen times more we shoved that ten dollar bill into the machine, cranked the handle, and watched it come out again unaccompanied by the two other tens which would have emerged had it been salted beforehand.

The colonel had tossed all pretense of minding his own business to the winds. He had now moved back behind the counter where we stuffed the money frantically into the machine, staring at the routine with popeyed bewilderment.

And then, in the middle of our feigned hysteria, I pretended to notice the colonel's observation for the first time. I whirled toward him, grabbing Mindy's arm as I did so.

"We've been watched!" I gasped.

Mindy sucked in his breath and stared. Both of us stared at the colonel and the old man was crimsoning in embarrassment.

The colonel tugged at his droopy moustache, touched his goatee apologetically, and turned his eyes toward the ceiling.

"He knows what we've been doing!" Mindy hissed sharply.

I looked back at the machine, resuming my frenzied tone of anguish.

"What difference does it make now?" I groaned. "The damned thing won't work any longer, anyway."

Then Mindy went into the toughest part of his act. Sheer despair. The four thousand dollars-and-how-are-we-ever-going-to-get-it act. The colonel was gaping at us again, his curiosity almost unbearable. Just to keep it in his mind, we stuffed the ten dollar bill into the machine, turned the crank, watched it come out alone, and shrieked bitterly a few times more.

And then, of course, the colonel couldn't stand it any longer. No one could have. He asked us what it was all about, particularly what we thought we were doing when we put the money into the machine and cranked it out again.

In feigned despair, I began to tell the old guy. Mindy broke in hoarsely to tell me to shut up. He demanded to know if I wanted to give our secret away to every stranger we met. I told him what was the difference now, and so forth. I pointed out that the machine was useless, wouldn't make money for us any longer—all because of the fall it had had.

Then I started in telling the colonel the answer to his questions, even though he's got a pretty good idea of what it's all about just from the exchange of words I had with Mindy.

It was easy, then, to go into the dying inventor tale, and how Mindy and I had been given the machine by this inventor we'd befriended as he was dying. The rest of the yarn, as I'd planned it, went off smoothly. And what was more important, the colonel seemed to be eating it up.

THEN Mindy came in every so often with a moan about the four thousand dollars we had to have, and how were we ever gonna get the money now.

I began wrapping up the machine most sadly, as Mindy moaned on and I threw in a wail here and there. The most crucial point in our plan was coming up, and my palms were getting moist. Still, the old colonel seemed pretty well in hand.

Sure enough, in breaks the old guy just as I had planned.

"Pardon me, suhs," he said eagerly. "Perhaps, if you were to let me have a chance to fix that machine for you, I might be able to do—"

We both exchanged glances that were sadly, wryly humorous. No, our glances said, no, you couldn't fix it in a million years. You don't have half enough skill and brains for that. Then we said as much vocally to the old guy. I caught the indignant flash in his eyes the minute we refused to let him try.

"The only one in the world who could fix this machine is the inventor," I told the old guy with sad kindness. "And, unfortunately, the inventor is dead. No, I'm sorry, Colonel. You'd never have a chance fixing it."

The old guy began to bristle. His pride had been wounded, and now nothing on earth would ever convince him that he couldn't repair that machine if he only had a chance. Too, you can see a little bit of that sad human element known as greed working inside the old guy. He's pretty well convinced by now that the machine—when working—actually makes money, and he's thinking already in terms of what it would be worth to us if he could repair it.

He began to perspire from his sudden anxiety to have a go at that machine. To perspire, and to plead.

I was firmly but politely sales-proof. No. We couldn't let him try it. He might make it further off form than its original self. No. He just wouldn't be able to do it. Thanks, just the same.

By then I had the machine half wrapped and was looking around for a piece of string, when Mindy came back in with explosive force. He opened his barrage with a moan about the four grand we needed so desperately in such a short time. He announced that if we didn't get the four grand in a few hours we might just as well jump in the river with the machine around our necks. And then he wound up dramatically:

"For four thousand bucks I'd sell the machine in a minute!"

"You're out of your mind!" I yelled. "This machine is worth a million billion bucks if we can get it working again! I won't have a thing to do with selling it!"

"How badly do we need that four thousand bucks?" Mindy yelled angrily.

I looked suddenly white, and scared. I looked as if the lack of that four grand would mean at least the electric chair. I gulped, and looked at the machine with tears in my eyes.

"But, if we could only get it repaired, it'd be worth—" I began.

Mindy cut me off. "Maybe it would," he said. "But no one knows how to repair it. Least of all ourselves!" He took a deep breath. "And if we don't get that four thousand in a couple of hours—" He let the sentence trail off ominously.

IT was then that the colonel cleared his throat and made his first bid.

"Being from the Old South, suhs," he said, "I am a gambling man at heart. I have confidence that I can repair that machine. Such confidence that I would be willing to offer most of my small savings for its purchase. Four thousand dollars, suhs."

I looked at the old guy a minute. He was so excited he was shaking. I could see what was running through his mind. If he repaired the machine he could make back his investment in an hour and clean up enough dough in the next ten to live for the rest of his life in his Old South like a multi-billionaire.

I shook my head sadly.

"No, Colonel. I couldn't let you risk your capital that way. From what you told me yesterday, your entire ambition rests on that money and the fact that it will some day be enough to permit you to return to the Old South." I shook my head again. "No, as much as we need that money, sir, I couldn't allow you to risk your ambitions on the chance of repairing our machine."

"It's a fair gamble," Mindy broke in. "We need the money, and if he repairs the machine, he'll be able to live like Royalty for the rest of his life in the Southland. If he's only got about four grand at this time in his life, it's a cinch he won't pile up enough in this store here to get back South as a gentleman of leisure before he kicks off."

Old Colonel Marsh broke back in, his eyes pleading and watery and fixed on me.

"That, suh, is precisely the situation," he said. "I have saved for many years to get what I have now, but it is not sufficient to fulfill my plans for retirement in the Old South. I will need more, much more, than I could ever hope to get by saving. This, suh, would be a gambling opportunity in which I could bank my skill in repairing the machine against my savings. I would, I *am*, quite willing to take the risk!"

If any lamb ever begged to be fleeced, it was old Colonel Marsh.

I looked at Mindy, then at the colonel, then at the machine. I sighed heavily and let my shoulders sag in surrender.

"Very well," I said. "It's a deal. We need the money too badly to argue any longer. I hope you have luck with the machine, Colonel. In what bank do you keep your money?"

IT was one of the easiest fleecings I'd ever made. I went to the bank with the old guy and waited outside in the cab while he drew out four thousand bucks in cash. Mindy, in the meantime, was back in the old guy's shop "watching" the machine. Removing the part we'd sell for another two grand to the lamb the following day, of course.

When we got back to the old guy's shop, Mindy gave me the wink which signalled that he'd copped a bolt or nut, and we might as well scram. I had the old guy's dough in my pocket, and we only took long enough to fill out a bill of sale giving him possession of the machine. Then we beat it.

Mindy was crazy wild with joy all the way back to our hotel in the cab. He took back all the nasty doubts he'd had about me, and counted the money over and over at least a dozen times.

"Four grand," he kept repeating, "plus sixteen grand we already got, that makes twenty thousand bucks—plus two thousand more tomorrow. Yow!"

I took the four grand out of his hands and stuffed it back into my pocket.

"Tonight we celebrate," I promised. "And tomorrow morning you make reservations on the noon plane out of this town, then we'll call on old Colonel Marsh and sell him a bolt for two thousand bucks."

"Marvelous!" Mindy sighed ecstatically.

We celebrated, of course, that evening. Nothing was too good. Sky was the limit, and we did the town right. It was really worth it, considering the dough we'd cleaned in one afternoon's work. And, too, it helped get the kind of pitiful picture of the old colonel and his life savings out of our minds...

COLD gray morning came, as cold gray mornings always come to two people with hangovers. It was pretty bad. My head was double the size of a beacon, and just as full of flashes. Mindy wasn't any better. But it was nine o'clock, and we had a hell of a lot to do if we wanted to pick up our extra two grand and ride out of town on the wind by noon.

While Mindy packed our luggage, I called the airport and made two Miami reservations for noon. In the meantime our breakfast, consisting of two bromos apiece, was sent up by the management. We dressed, then set out for the little shop on Grand Avenue where our lamb was waiting his final fleecing.

In the cab on the way, even Mindy had compunctions, we were both that low with hangovers.

"Seems kinda greedy, but what the hell!" he observed.

"You mean about taking his last two grand?" I asked.

Mindy nodded. "Yeah, that's right. But we're crazy if we don't."

"Yeah," I agreed. "Crazy-crazy."

Neither of us said any more about our consciences after that, and finally the cab pulled up in front of old Colonel Marsh's fix-it shop.

When we entered, the bell jangled as always, bringing the old guy out from the back. He looked up at us, startled, then pleased.

"Well, suhs!" he smiled. "How are you, suhs?"

I was a little bit surprised at his cheerfulness. But then, maybe he was still puttering with the machine, fully convinced that it would take a little time to fix.

"How are you coming on the money machine?" I asked.

"Excellently, suh," he replied. "Just excellently, if I do say so."

I nudged Mindy to bring out the bolt, then said: "We've got something here that fits on the machine, Colonel. Something that must have fallen loose in our apartment. It is undoubtedly the reason it failed to work. We brought it here today, frankly, to sell to you. But," I put in quickly, "to sell only if it makes the machine work."

The colonel wiped his hands on his leather apron and smiled a little bewilderedly.

"You say that you found an extra part which was undoubtedly responsible—by its absence—for the failure of the machine?"

"I think so, Colonel," I said amiably. "And we're going to sell it to you darned reasonably, if it proves to be the missing item in the operation of the machine."

A puzzled look came into the colonel's eyes and he tugged abstractedly at his goatee.

"But, suh, that is most strange. You see, I have already repaired the machine. It is working splendidly, suh."

"Sure," I said. "But this part will—"

And then I realized what he'd said!

"Say that again!" I choked hoarsely.

"I have repaired the machine, suh," the old colonel said proudly. "Just as I thought I could. It is working perfectly, suh, and I have been making money for the last two hours." He smiled, half-bowed. "I am deeply grateful to you both, and if you will excuse me, suhs, I will return to the machine."

Mindy broke in then.

"Listen," he said sharply. "You're crazy. That machine wouldn't ma—"

I cut him off with an elbow jab in the ribs.

"Sure," I said a little hoarsely. "Sure we'll excuse you, Colonel. You don't mind if we drop back some time when you, ah, aren't so busy?"

Old Colonel Marsh smiled amiably. "Of course not, suhs. Mah latch string is always at your disposal. Good-day."

I took Mindy by the elbow and got him out of there. The old colonel went back into the rear of his shop. On the sidewalk a few stores down, I stopped for breath.

"What's this all about?" Mindy demanded indignantly.

I took out a handkerchief and mopped my brow.

"I don't know," I admitted. "But it isn't going according to schedule. That's why I wanted to get out, quick, in order to figure this thing out."

"Don't tell me the old guy is making dough!" Mindy snorted scornfully.

"No. Of course, he isn't," I agreed. "That's ridiculous. But something is in the wind. That old devil is up to some scheme of some sort; otherwise, why would he lie to us like that?"

"I dunno," Mindy said. "Why?"

I saw a cab and whistled it over to the curb. We climbed inside, and I gave the driver our hotel address.

"I don't know why, either. But there's something funny going on, and we're not leaving this town until we figure it out. I'm canceling those Miami reservations until we figure old Colonel Marsh's game."

EXACTLY eight hours later in our hotel room, I stamped back and forth through the smoke and cigarette butts and whiskey glasses, still trying to figure it out.

Mindy was stretched out on the bed, eyes half closed, listening dully to my self-arguments, and occasionally putting in a weary word.

"If he was still the sucker," I ranted hoarsely, "he would have bitten on our extra-gadget gag."

"Right," Mindy intoned tiredly.

"But he didn't bite. Instead, he thanked us very kindly and said he already had the machine working. A sucker wouldn't say that," I continued.

"Why not?" Mindy wondered.

"Because," I went on hoarsely, "a sucker wouldn't try some snide and clever turnabout on us. A sucker would holler copper so loud it would break all the windows on Grand Avenue. But the old guy didn't holler copper and he didn't bite on our offer of an extra gadget for the machine. He didn't do anything according to Hoyle. All of which means that something awfully funny is going on."

"Well," said Mindy wearily, "mebbe he did make the machine work, like he said. Why don't we forget the extra two grand and head for Miami, huh?"

I poured myself another drink.

"No," I said. "I got a feeling in my bones that says we're in the middle of something, and I won't budge out of this town until I find out what that something is."

"Well, relax a minute or so, anyway," Mindy moaned. "That panthering up and down is driving me nuts. Have another drink." He sat up and grabbed the scotch and the soda-siphon. I downed my drink, handed the glass to Mindy for a refill, and sat down wearily.

"He said it works," I muttered disgustedly, "when any ass knows it couldn't work. What in the hell is he up to?" I was referring, of course, to our old chum, Colonel Marsh.

We had four more drinks while I did some vocal jujitsu with myself all over the room. But the more I knocked myself out trying to figure the angles the old guy was playing, the more my head rang.

Three drinks and an hour later, Mindy's nerves got the best of him.

"Dammit," he yelled, "there's no sense driving ourselves crazy around this room here. Why'n't we got back to the old guy's shop and ask to see the damned machine. Then we can ask him what he's trying to pull. That's the only way we'll ever get an answer!"

I was willing to agree to anything, then.

"Okay," I muttered. "Let's catch another drink, then get started."

We caught four more drinks, then left for the old guy's...

FOR some reason—maybe the liquor, maybe caution—I told the cab driver to drop us off a block away from the old guy's shop. Mindy and I weaved the rest of the way down the street on foot. Out in front of the colonel's fix-it emporium, we stopped.

There were no lights on in front of the store, and the door was locked. But light glimmered from the back.

"He's working overtime," I hissed to Mindy. "But on what?"

We stood there weaving a little, trying to sort our opinions, and then I got a bright idea.

"The back of his shop faces an alley," I said. "Let's go around to the alley and see if we can peek in."

We weaved our way down the block until we found the alley entrance. Then we stumbled on past ash-cans, followed a turn, and one minute later were tiptoeing

up to a lighted basement window which could belong to none but the colonel's shop.

Mindy was the first to gape in through the window.

"He's down there, awright," Mindy hissed.

"Shhhh!" I hissed back, elbowing him aside and taking a look myself.

Mindy was right. Old Colonel Marsh was down there, all right. Down there, moving around in a workshop equipped with a big wooden table on which was our money machine.

In the corner of the room were two huge, old-fashioned steamer trunks of the sort that spelled Rhett Butler, Mint Juleps, and the Mississippi River. The sort of trunks Grant might have had carried into town when he took Richmond. One of them was open. Open just enough to reveal that it was stuffed, literally *stuffed*, with wad after wad of paper currency!

I almost had a heart attack.

Mindy had moved up behind my shoulder. And now he saw it, too. He almost choked to death.

"Migawd!" he gurgled, "look at all that moola!"

My hands were shaking so much I could scarcely control them.

"What're the denominations of them bills?" Mindy gasped. "There must be a million bucks there!"

"I don't know," I managed to croak. "Can't tell from here. One thing's certain, though. That's *dough*, folding money, paper joy, jammed in that trunk!"

And then the colonel walked back in front of the table and machine and turned the crank on the side of the machine. Three bills spilled out and he calmly stuffed these in his pocket. He turned the crank again, after inserting one of the bills in the front. Three more popped out, and he put these in his pocket.

Mindy had a grip on my arm that would have crushed a girder.

"The damn thing is making moola!" he gurgled.

I could only nod, my eyes still on the old colonel.

"Are them twenty, ten, fifty, or hundred dollar bills he's making?" Mindy croaked.

I shook my head. "Still can't tell from here. But, chum, that's *dough*. There's no doubt about that!"

The colonel had stopped putting bills into the machine and running out three in return. He walked over to the open trunk stuffed with paper money and slammed it shut. Then he locked it, put the key in his pocket, and went over to the other trunk. He opened it to look inside an instant.

The second trunk was also crammed with money!

Now Colonel Marsh closed the second trunk and locked it, going back to the machine. He stood there, looking at it fondly, proudly, until he turned suddenly to face the door that led to the front of his shop.

I SAW what made him turn. The entrance of a big buy in tattered overalls. Then a pantomime took place. The colonel pointed to the trunks and the man in overalls nodded, grabbing the first trunk and dragging it out into the front of the shop.

I turned to Mindy.

"Get out in front and watch on the sly," I hissed. "See what happens. I'll watch this end."

Mindy nodded and left.

The colonel waited patiently until the guy in overalls came back and dragged the second trunk out into the front of the shop. Then the colonel went over to the money machine, patted it fondly, and took off his leather apron. In another minute he was slipping into a coat, and in another minute after that, he snapped off the light.

I almost lost my mind. It was impossible to see whether or not the old colonel had picked up the machine after he snapped off the light and walked out front.

It seemed like an hour before Mindy came dashing back into the alley and fell over an ash-can. As I picked him up, he told me. The old colonel and the guy in overalls had put the trunks on a horse-drawn wagon. Then the colonel had climbed up beside the guy and the two clattered off down the street, the trunks bouncing around in the back of the wagon.

"Was the colonel carrying the money machine when he left the shop?" I demanded hysterically.

"No." Mindy shook his head. "I'm positive he wasn't. Neither was the freight hauler."

I grabbed Mindy hard by the arm. "Chum, come on! We're going to break in through that alley window before the colonel comes back!"

We weren't subtle. Burglary wasn't our regular line. We just kicked in that basement window, picked out the glass splinters remaining, and climbed into the back of Colonel Marsh's shop.

Three minutes later, machine in our arms, we were running like hell down the alley. Ten minutes after that, we had cut six blocks across town and climbed into a taxicab with our precious burden.

Maybe it was the liquor, maybe it was the elation, maybe it was the excitement, maybe it was all three. At any rate, Mindy and I were hilariously ecstatic as we rolled along in the cab with the machine on the seat between us.

"A million dollars!" Mindy yowled.

"A hundred million!" I corrected him.

"Two hundred billion million," I was corrected in turn.

The cab driver glared back at us.

"Maybe you two financiers would like to give me the address yuz wanta go to," he suggested.

"To our castle!" I shouted gaily, giving him our flea nest's address.

"No!" Mindy declared. "We gotta have a drink. A nice big drink before we get around to the labor of making a million bucks inna few hours or so!"

That sounded all right. In fact, it sounded swell. We gave the cabby the address of an ultra swank bar. Four hours later, or at three ayem precisely, we left said drinkery singing hilariously, machine still in our arms. In the interim, Mindy had passed out ten dollar bills as tips to every employee in the joint. But what the hell, we could afford such piddling gestures.

SOMEHOW we managed to get back to our hotel room without falling down any elevator shafts, Mindy gave the bellhop fifty bucks and sent him out for some champagne.

Tenderly, we placed the money machine on the dresser. It was a little hard to see, inasmuch as it was sometimes two machines, sometimes three, and occasionally just fuzzy. But I went to our trunk, got out every last bit of our twenty grand bankroll from the false bottom which served as our hiding place for moola.

We waited until the bellhop came back with the giggle water before starting out on our first million. We had a couple of drinks in toast to success, a couple more in toast of the toast, and then took our mighty cash bankroll and started to prove it was puny in comparison to what it was soon going to be.

Mindy was as drunk as I was—which was terribly drunk—but he had sense enough to lock and bolt the door before we started. And then the first bill—we couldn't see the denomination, thanks to the blur that covered all objects we looked at—was shoved into the front of the machine and the crank turned.

Three bills popped out, and Mindy and I whooped like madmen, had another drink, and shoved another note from our bankroll into the machine. Three more bills popped out.

It was wonderful. It was like nothing Midas ever dreamed of. An hour passed and we were knee deep in paper currency. Another hour passed and we'd completely filled one closet. Another hour trickled by and we must have cranked out a thousand or more bills. Inside of another hour, we'd used up all the bills in our twenty-thousand bankroll and were shoving the ones made by the machine back in. They made three each. It was endless.

I don't know who passed out first. It doesn't really matter much. I was the first guy to come out of the fog at eleven o'clock the following morning. I opened my eyes to find myself on the floor on my back, staring up at the dresser on which the money machine still stood.

I was lying in a welter of paper currency. The entire room was a windstorm of paper currency!

Mindy, snoring on the bed, was almost completely covered with paper currency!

The room stank with alcohol and cigarette smoke and paper currency.

Groggily, I climbed to my feet. My heart was pounding so fast I thought it would pound right on up and out of my throat. Riches! Untold wealth! Money that—

And then my vision came into focus. My vision came into focus and I saw one of the pieces of paper currency clearly for the first time.

It was paper currency, sure, but not paper currency of the sort I was used to. *It was paper currency of the sort issued during the Civil War by the Confederate States of America!*

I crumpled it into a ball, threw it away, picked up another, and saw it was also Confederate moola. Then I picked up another and still another bill. They were all the same. Confederate dough!

I looked around for a quiet corner in which to get deathly sick. Looked around, while realizing that twenty thousand bucks in good present-day U.S. money had been turned into this Confederate currency by two drunken boobs named Bert and Mindy!

And then I remembered the colonel. And I thought of the Old South. My language was strictly vile.

I looked in my wallet. There was a dollar bill there, present-day U.S., which had evidently escaped notice last night. Automatically, I inserted it in the front of the money machine and cranked the handle.

Three bills popped out. Three *Confederate* bills.

The colonel had fixed the machine. Fixed it to make money, too. Only the money was his kind of money. Confederate stuff. I thought of the stuff in the old colonel's ancient trunks. It had undoubtedly been the same kind of Rebel riches.

Then I looked at Mindy, snoring under about fifty thousand dollars' worth of Confederate money. I looked at him and decided to let him wake up and find all this out himself, the hard way, like I had...

THERE really isn't any postscript to this. Mindy and I still have the damned machine. And it still makes money, Confederate style. We've wasted another small fortune on it, trying to make it pay off in on-the-level currency. Of course, the damned thing won't.

We went back to the shop where the old Southern colonel fixed things. We looked all over the neighborhood, that is. But we couldn't find the shop, or the colonel. Or anyone who knew about either shop or colonel.

At the bank, where the colonel had gone to get the four grand to buy the machine, they didn't know of anyone by that name, or of that description.

But I think I know where the colonel is now. He's in the South. The Old South that he spoke of so tenderly. Living like a king on some vast plantation, spending his Confederate fortune right and left in a manner befitting his style and station.

Huh? You don't get it? Why, I mean *Old* South. Just like he said it, O-L-D!

But Mindy and I have got one consolation, one hope of squaring the score with that affable old stinker. Wait'll he tries to spend that machine-made moola when Grant takes Richmond!

