

# THE SUNDAY BEE

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## The Boss' Bounty



By Will Payne

*An Inside Story of the Informal, but Not Wholly Invisible, Government That Cheats the Law and of a Man Who Defied Death for Conscience's Sake*

**I**N MARCH one Eugene Donovan was "let out." He was 28 years old, married, with a 2-year-old daughter. Being "let out" was all the fashion then. For months factories had been shutting down, office forces dwindling, jobs growing fewer. Donovan spent a week seeking another position; but even in those few offices where he had a right to expect consideration because of personal acquaintance he was met with a rather bored air, as though asking for a job under present conditions were quite unreasonable.

At the end of the week he said to his wife, "I'll see Uncle Frank in the morning."

It was an acknowledgment of defeat. Frank Cochran was not really his uncle, but only his mother's cousin. At their infrequent meetings Cochran had always worn a kindly air, however, and he was a mighty man. The newspapers said he was one of the bosses—the Marindale-Brophy-Cochran-Hanson machine—who ran the town. Friends had suggested to Eugene that he might easily find a career under his powerful relative's patronage; but the suggestion had never appealed to Donovan, who was modest, with no pride of opinion or tendency to self-righteousness, but with some prejudice of a general sort against professional politics. Going to Uncle Frank was an acknowledgment of defeat; but his problem was very simple—to wit: "Find work or starve."

Never would he forget how Uncle Frank solved that problem for him. The boss was carefully dressed as usual that morning, the knot of his four-in-hand tie slipped down so far that the collar button was exposed. A shock of dark reddish hair, with gray threads in it, tumbled above his big, round face, which was mottled with large, faint freckles. Sitting massively at the desk, he listened to the young man's anxious recital, mechanically tearing narrow strips from a sheet of blank paper and folding the strips over and over until they would fold no more, then dropping them to the floor—quite impassive save that a quizzical little smile wrinkled under his heavy, drooping eyelids. And when Eugene finished, the boss' answer came at once, with no questions, no conditions, no moralizing, no flourish. Cochran merely said:

"All right, Gene. I'll take care of you. Don't worry. Come and see me tomorrow afternoon."

Repeating it to his wife half an hour later, with a heart gratefully aglow, Donovan declared: "That's everything he said—just 'Don't worry; I'll take care of you.' It was nothing—the way he did it!"

The grateful glow persisted. He was an uncle, indeed! When the whole world shut one out of doors to starve, Frank Cochran merely crooked a little finger, and one was let in again!

The job proved to be that of paymaster, and the salary \$200 a month—quite as much as Donovan had expected. It was not a city job, either—at least not nominally. An extensive public improvement, known as the Supplementary Drainage System, was then going forward—under contract on a "cost plus" basis, which meant that the city paid the cost of the work, whatever that might be, plus 10 per cent profit for the contractor. In time it became apparent to Donovan that not much labor was received from him in return for his \$200 a month; and that Uncle Frank's generosity in taking care of him was really at the expense of the public treasury—*that* he died on that was like looking a gift horse in the mouth.

To house the contractor's field staff two rough wooden buildings had been thrown up on a branch of bare earth at the western confines of the city. Donovan's office as paymaster was in one of them. Everybody thereabouts, it seemed, was interested in politics and there was much time for conversation. Now and then, for an hour at a stretch, the establishment had the air of a club rather than of an office. It presently occurred to Donovan that this reasonable set of machine politics, about which the news columns wrote so much from time to time, had the same essential character of being a good fellow. His being big boss Whelpley, who helped everybody and would run his hand off to be a boss for a friend.

The machine there was a great deal of talking on the job, with this here and that there and so on. Usually the point the boss made the money (that) and a lot of the rest of the machine, the newspaper said, was a creature of the political machine. But eventually the machine did, which

to that; and Donovan rather thought he had been a prig in priding himself on his aforesaid independence of mighty Uncle Frank.

Then, at 10:29 o'clock of an October night, Donovan found himself again in the boss' presence. Beaming Gus Whelpley had called for him at his little flat just as he was getting ready for bed, saying he was needed to check over the pay roll figures. But when they entered Whelpley's apartment genial Gus had laid a hand on his shoulder and said in his ear, "The old man wants to see you," and shunted him into a snug little den where the boss sat alone awaiting him.

Cochran was evidently not happy this evening. Two fixed parallel lines ran down the center of his forehead and his sandy eyebrows drew together—like a man suffering from a hard headache. There was no quizzical little twinkle under his heavy eyelids, but an ominous, iritated smolder.

He looked like a man in bad temper—holding it in leash with some difficulty. That, in fact, was his state. Fate, or chance, had played the scurviest kind of trick upon him, and in a way it was all owing to this precious young "nephew" of his. Coming out to this secret, nocturnal interview he had heartily wished the young nephew in Tophet, or anywhere else out of the way. But he was quite philosopher enough to know that wishing would do him no good. Here was a condition; he must deal with it. Sit-

There was the crux of Ollie Dunn's actions. The door was provided with a spring lock, but never before within Donovan's recollection of it had this lock been set so that the bolt would catch when the door was closed. Who had set the lock so that it would hold him in the room when Ollie Dunn, happening to step out just at the psychological moment, also happened to close the door behind him? Again Donovan's voice thickened a bit, and he drew his hand quickly across his brow, as though to banish something, as he went on:

"The door hadn't been locked before. I didn't know just how to open it—fumbled with it a minute. Then I stepped back and chucked myself at the door. It's just a thin pine thing, you know. Second time I bumped it the casing split out and I went through into the front room—kind of stumbling. . . Well, a man was running past, toward the front door. He was so close that I grabbed him. . ."

This was a vital part of the story, and Donovan allowed down to go over it carefully, like a man negotiating a difficult bit of road:

"He had on an old rain coat with grease stains down here"—indicating on his coat—"and a faded plaid cap. There was a black cloth around his neck with a knot sticking out behind—a mask you see, that had fallen down from his face. He had a flour sack, about half full, in his left hand and an automatic gun in his right hand. . . He was so close that

I grabbed at him as he went by. And he ducked out to one side, turning his head toward me, and pulled up the gun and popped at me. . . I don't think," he added, with conscientious deliberation, "that he could have meant to hit me, because he was only two arms' length away. Of course, he was running and kind of short for sideways—his head turned—so that might have spoiled his aim. Yet he was so close it seems he would have hit me if he'd really tried to. The bullet must have gone six inches wide of me. Probably he shot just to stop me."

A humble and embarrassed little smile appeared on Donovan's face, for the shot had stopped him—wherefore he had been asking himself at intervals during 10 hours how much of a coward he was. The mortal bark of the gun, almost under his nose, had set up certain reactions in his nerves without asking his consent.

"I just stood still," he confessed, with the embarrassed little smile. "The next minute the man was out of the door and hopped into the car, and they were off in a cloud of dust. . . Then I went behind the counter. Benny was dead. The doctor thought he'd died instantly."

The lifeless face of young Benny Mitchell, as he lay on the floor beside the office table, from which the payroll envelope had been scooped into a flour sack, came vividly back into his mind, and he wotted his lips. A drawer in the table was pulled half way open. An automatic pistol lay in the drawer. Police experts viewing the scene, opined that Benny had been rash. They thought he'd been ordered to hold up his hands, and probably had obeyed, and then, at

some point in the holdup, had recklessly sought to seize the pistol, and been shot down. Donovan had been fond of young Benny Mitchell. He turned now at last to the overwhelmingly vital point anxiously, as though entreating the boss to believe him:

"You see, I got a good square look at him, Uncle Frank—as good a look as I'm getting at you right now—square into his face. I'm absolutely sure about it. The man was Handy Andy Hatch—no question at all about it!"

So he had declared to those who came running to the scene, attracted by the pistol shots. So he had declared to the first policemen who arrived there, and later to the captain, and still later to the inspector—and all along, to the newspaper reporters and every other inquirer. Absolutely, beyond shadow of doubt, the man was Handy Andy Hatch!

This declaration had produced a sensation. They had all questioned him particularly on the point. Mightn't he be mistaken? The police inspector had seemed fairly to bid him to be mistaken—not because the inspector approved of highway robbery and homicide, or really wished a criminal to escape the law, but because he guessed that if this stubborn young man persisted in not being mistaken about the robber's identity there was going to be no rest of trouble. For Handy Andy Hatch was a celebrity of a sort, and Uncle Frank, although in a humble way, a boss in politics.

But Donovan insisted that he would not be misled—positively the man was Hatch. And there was something about Donovan that carried conviction. Standing to his identification, he had the reputation of a fellow who was set in the wall of a law.

The parallel lines on Cochran's forehead deepened a bit, with further drawing together of the corners of his eyes with a handshaking. His heavy-lidded eyes were fixed with a look of cautious dullness on the young man as he said very distinctly: "You're strong about it, aren't you? . . . Well, I can't say he didn't. . . I'm a politician, you know, but I'm not a



"The casing split out and I went through into the front room."

—I naturally, he ordered the nephew not so much as a nod by way of greeting—just lifted heavy lidded, smoldering eyes to him, made the slightest gesture toward a chair, and said tersely, "Sit down."

With a deep stir of wonder, Donovan obeyed, sat in hand. "What about this holdup, Gene?" Cochran began, a rumble in his voice that went with the smolder in his eyes.

For the 20th time in the last 10 hours Donovan patiently repeated the story:

"Why, we'd made up the pay roll as we always do. It was about 11:45. We always eat lunch in the office on pay day, you know—early—for the men begin coming in for their pay almost any time after 12. Ollie Dunn and I went into my office. Benny Mitchell was in the front office, behind the counter, with the pay roll. Ollie Dunn made an excuse to step outside and swing the door to behind him as he went."

Donovan's voice thickened a little, with a slight choking, over that statement, and his eyes fell from his uncle's face. To the police and the newspaper reporters he had said simply that he was alone in his office—not that Ollie Dunn had gone in there with him, then stepped out, closing the door behind him. Why had Ollie Dunn stepped out closing the door behind him, just at the psychological moment? Painfully that question had been coming up, in the back of his mind, for 10 hours. But he had not even hinted the question to anybody. . . Of course, Ollie's action would have been just an unfortunate coincidence. Not for a great deal in such a solemn case as this would Donovan—a man of almost unimpaired suspicion against any one. Remembering Dunn's action to Uncle Frank, his eyes fell to an embroidered vest and he went on quickly:

"I heard somebody speak in the front room, but I said no attention to it. . . He had probably taken the first big bite out of his second bean sandwich at the moment. . . Then, a minute later, I heard the door in the front room. . . Of course, I took to the door, but it was locked