

*A split second was between the big blonde and eternity –  
but it took "Spick" Dotty just that long to act!*



## CLIP-JOINT CHISELLERS

by MAT RAND

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She was a clip-joint chippie, but she tried to be a straight one. Could she escape those insidious coils of gangland that were dragging her down into the underworld web from which death was the only escape?

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**B**LONDE Marge stretched her beautiful legs out full length under one of the tables in the Pink Kitten Club and slipped the heels of her pumps off her feet for greater ease. Marge, tall and graceful like a young poplar tree, was a fixture in the Pink Kitten. Across the table from her sat petite, black-eyed and raven-haired "Spick Dottie," her crony and confidante. Dot was a fixture, too, and together the duo comprised the most gorgeous of all the interior decorations.

Beautiful blonde and beautiful brunette, perfect specimens of types, were even more attractive because of their contrast. Turn these two babies loose on a sucker with a bulging bankroll and not even a thin dime had a chance of escape. As gold diggers they could chisel nicer and dig deeper than any two chippies on the big stem.

If the reader has ever heard of a clip joint it is sufficient to note that the Pink Kitten was one of those places and Marge and Dot were two of a score of come-alongs that steered and decoyed for the spot. The place was more expensively furnished than the average dump of its character and it boasted a little better swing band. Otherwise it ran pretty true to form. The only rule of the joint was to trim any and all suckers regardless of age, sex or previous condition or standing—and to trim them closer than an air-tight plug.

At the moment Marge was rolling her large and starry blue eyes in which there was an expression of pain. "Gol-damn all traveling salesmen," she said, as she kicked off a shoe entirely and nursed her toes with her tapering fingers. "Gol-damn all traveling salesmen. They can dance longer and drink harder than hell and they'll wind up at 5 A. M. craving more love than a soldier just back from the wars, and besides they can talk you out of your last garter buckle. They talk more and sweeter and last longer and spend less than any damn men this side of hell."

"'Blinkie' back in town again?" asked Dot, with rare understanding and an uplift of her heavily waxed eyebrows.

"Yes, the big brute, and last night he danced the hell out of me," admitted Marge, patting her swollen tootsies.

"You're stuck on Blinkie," observed Dot.

"That's the hell of it," agreed Marge, "I am, and what I can do about it is more'n I can figure out. I guess I oughta give him the gate on account of 'Shiv' but I just ain't been able to do it yet." "Shiv" Fisher was Marge's regular man. He owned the Pink Kitten. He was big and broad and husky

and simple. Once aroused he was as murderous as a black panther. Dot knew Marge could kid Shiv along for a short spell, but sooner or later he was going to get hep to the carpet-and-rug salesman known as "Blinkie" Booth.

"Better go easy," advised Dot warily. "If Shiv ever got a hunch you were two-timing him he would blast you like you'd bust a bubble. He'd blow you fuller of holes than a music roll. Better cut it, you damn fool. You can't take care of Blinkie and he can't take care of you. Shiv'll give you both the works and you'll be on twin slabs in the morgue! I mean it, dearie," and Dot was looking plenty serious.

"You're right, I can't take care of Blinkie," agreed Marge. "But I wonder, can't he take care of me? I wonder!"

"Well, for cri-sake don't drag me into it," pleaded Dot, with real terror in her solemnly dark eyes. "I got no yen to be carved like a squab or shattered like a dropped egg. I may be crazy, dearie, but I still prefer a limousine to a hearse!"

**I**T WAS mid-afternoon. The girls would have little to do until a few hours later when the playboys began rolling out from their silken coverlets and the tourists began unloading from buses and streamlined trains.

At a nearby table were some half dozen of the other clip-joint-chippie employees of Shiv Fisher. All were beautiful, all were wanton and most of them were criminally vicious. At still another table sat a couple alone. The man was Frenchy La Mare and the girl was his moll, Jeanne, known as Jazz Jennie. Neither was particularly good looking. Frenchy was squat, broad-shouldered, slung-jawed and had beady black eyes like a rat. He affected a tuft of a black moustache. The girl was slender and wiry. Her hair was a mop of dull brown and her chest was flat and mannish. Her hips and legs were full and feminine, but her shoulders and arms and hands were angular and bony.

This pair looked able to do almost anything sinister, from haunting a house to frightening little children, yet they played heavy roles in the affairs of the Pink Kitten clip joint.

The modus operandi of the place was quite simple and never varied. Near the street entrance was a short bar which joined a service bar further back. The bar at the entrance was to attract street stragglers who would enter for a drink and then be lured into the dining hall spider's web either by the beauty of the girl decoys or by the excellent swing

music of the orchestra. Besides these lures there were regular chippie steerers who worked the streets and the hotels and a few crooked taxi drivers who took a cut on all victims steered by them to the hurrah joint.

Once back in the dine and dance hall of the Pink Kitten the victim was plied with spiked and loaded drinks at his or her own expense. When a victim passed out he was robbed and then carried from the place to a waiting taxi which transported him to a remote point to be left seated on the curb or prone in the gutter.

If the victim did not pass out he was knocked out. Then he was robbed, after which he was transported to a remote point, as has been said, where he was unloaded and left alone, friendless, penniless and often bleeding. The rough stun was always taken care of by the La Mares. If the victim was a man, Frenchy would knock him cold. If it was a woman Jazz Jennie would do the dirty work.

Of course, the victims were always blamed for starting the fight. To the waiters fell the task of rifling the suckers' pockets while carrying them out to the waiting cabs. Among the waiters were a couple of the most accomplished dips or pickpockets to be found in all the big town.

Frenchy and Jazz Jennie were real Paris apaches, and Paris apaches are known as the most brutal crooks in the world. The La Mares had left Paris under a cloud and at a time when the Prefect of Police was looking for them on a simple little charge of bloody murder! Shiv had befriended them while they were learning English and getting established in the big city. In their gratitude, or rather their obligation, they stood ready to commit any crime in his interest. They were well paired. In disposition they were mean, vicious and double no-good. For doing much of Shiv's dirty work they took a cut out of the sucker money like all the employees, and like the other employees they rated free meals.

Such was the lineup and the outlook at the Pink Kitten on the bright afternoon when the sophisticated and hoidenish beauty, Blonde Marge, found herself—like the farmer's daughter—deeply in love with a traveling salesman.

**T**HE salesman, Blinkie Booth, was a character to be reckoned with, although they did not suspect this in the Pink Kitten. He was tall, light and prepossessing with a personality that bubbled. He was in the big town from three days to a week about seven times a year. The rest of his time was

spent drumming his wares in the New England territory. His features were regular and he would have been handsome were it not for a cucumber ear and a scarred right eye and upper lip.

Blinkie told few people the secret of these scars. He had been lightweight champion pugilist at college until a younger and tougher contender knocked him out from under his crown and left him scarred for life. It had been a grudge battle over a girl and Blinkie lost both the fight and the girl.

Leaving college, he had been a sports editor on a big newspaper for a few years and then he had decided to use his natural aggressiveness in the field of salesmanship. This was a wise move. His salary plus commission amounted to about \$150 a week. He was given to periodical sprees when in the big town but was a sober hustler on his job. He was agreeable and liked music and laughter. Blonde Marge was only one of many women who had fallen for him in a big way. He liked her company, but for that matter he liked all blondes.

Things were altogether too peaceful around the Pink Kitten on this afternoon. Shiv Fisher, the boss, spoiled it all. He strolled into the place dressed flashier than a neon sign and noticed that his chippies and other help were lolling about. Then he went up in the air like a balloon and exploded:

"For Cripe's sake! You'd think this joint was a flop-house the way you bums is snoozing around nursing your hangovers and blotting up drinks. Get the hell out of here, you floozies, and steer a few flies into the trap! Listen, you guys, yes you"—to the waiters and bartenders—"take the sag outen your spines and hop around here like we might pick up a few honest dollars somewheres before closing time!"

All hands arose at the tirade. The girls plastered their mugs with make-up ready for their strolls on the stem. The men began polishing glasses and arranging tables.

Just as Spick Dottie and Marge reached the doorway Blinkie Booth sagged into the joint. He was carrying a katzenjammer that weighed a ton and was primed for fun and frivolity.

"Come on, you gorgeous dolls," he said, waving the two girls to the bar, "what's wrong with having a snifter."

The girls, one on each side of him, elbowed to the bar. Business had begun for that day.

Frenchy and Jazz Jennie La Mare lagged back. Frenchy had gotten an earful of what Marge

and Dot had been saying about Blinkie and was just sweating his dirty hide to unload the big gossip to the boss.

“Your broad, the big blonde, is slipping you the skids,” he began. “She just told the Spick that she’s nuts about that Blinkie guy.”

“That’s right,” echoed Jazz Jennie, “but what’s the profit in starting trouble with a good cash customer?”

“What’s zat?” asked Shiv, unable to believe his ears.

The Frenchman repeated his accusation.

“Well, I’m damned,” said the simple but murderous Shiv. “Here I’ve been taking care of that damned Blinkie guy, playing him for a half-wise scout and not letting him get taken for any quick money and the son has been cutting in on me. Just watch me a minute and I’ll break his god-damned neck!”

Shiv strode over to where Blinkie was standing with the two girls near the doorway. He grabbed Blinkie by the collar, turned him around, and still holding him, said:

“So you think you’re putting one over on me and playing me for a sap, using up this blonde’s time and spending only chicken-feed in my dump, eh? Well, just see how you like that!” Shiv swung with all his strength a heavy fist that was adorned with brass knuckles. It was intended to break Blinkie’s jaw, but it didn’t.

Blinkie waved it away gracefully and jerked his collar free. Then he swung from the floor. He landed a terrific bop on Shiv’s button and sent him staggering back into the arms of his waiters who had rushed forward. Then Blinkie with a chippie on each arm strolled out onto the crowded street. Shiv and his waiters followed. Frenchy La Mare slithered up like a snake. He was directly behind Blinkie and had unsheathed a keen, long-bladed knife.

But Shiv, noting the array of witnesses called off his dogs of war. “Nix!” he commanded, most expressively. “Wait until we get him in the right spot and we’ll package him up for the morgue!”

“Come back here, Blondie, you ——— ———” yelled Shiv to the girl now disappearing up the street. But she either did not hear or heed him. Dot had strolled in the other direction and about her business which was well for Dottie!

**W**ALKING together along the side street toward the main stem, the salesman and the blonde made an attractive couple. Men and women

turned to look at them. “Show people,” said a wise old woman, “but the big blonde girl looks frightened; I wonder why?”

Blonde Marge was content just to walk with Blinkie. He seemed to her a force which linked her in some strange way to decency and respectability. Hers was a compulsory prostitution enforced by Shiv and his scheming Frenchy and Jazz Jennie. There had been nothing she could have done about it. She was not the type for labor and she had no theatrical talent. But destiny was calling to her courage now—calling her away from her habitual lazy passivity. She knew she had to warn Blinkie of impending murder even though it would surely cost her her own life.

“You’d better chuck me, Blinkie,” she said finally. “Shiv thinks he owns me and they’ll kill you if I keep taking time off for you.”

“Yeah?” said Blinkie, apparently not impressed.

“Yeah,” said Blonde Marge. “I am all goose-pimply thinking what will happen to me. They’ll sew me up in a sack! Three guys and a girl beaten up in that spot died of injuries! They’ll stop at nothing! There is no reason why you should get yourself murdered on my account.”

“Nobody in that joint is going to commit any more murders,” said Blinkie, emphatically. “I can take care of myself.”

“But they’ll gang up on you and take you for a ride. It don’t matter so much about me, but—”

“Gang, huh? Ride, huh?” mused Blinkie as the full purport of the girl’s words sank in. Then after a pause: “Listen, Marge, I’m not without friends. If they gang I’ll gang. But how about you. You got any friends, girlie? I mean outside of that dirty dump?”

“Only you,” she said plaintively, “and I can’t think of getting you in such a hell of a jam. I’ll go back, lie you out of it, and take my medicine.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” said Blinkie. “We’ll go get a drink in Charlie’s. It’s in the next block. I have not had a vacation in years. I’m taking a month off to clean up that damn rat trap. You’ll stay close to me and I’ll see you get the breaks. It was decent of you to put me wise. Damned if I ain’t getting to like you.”

A thrill ran through the beautiful Marge. Her tired, worn nerves took life again.

They had the drink they both needed. Then they went to a big hotel. “You’re living here with me,” said Blinkie simply. “Whatever you need, clothes or anything else, don’t go out for them. Just

phone any store in town and have the bill charged to me downstairs at the desk. We'll take our meals in the room here for a few days. You sit tight. I'm going out for about an hour, then I won't need to leave you again."

Where Blinkie spent the next hour was not known to Marge until a long time afterwards. He spent it in Dale's gymnasium where champion athletes of all sorts were wont to train, congregate and fraternize. It was a part of his old stamping grounds in the days when he was a very wild but, nevertheless, quite efficient sports editor.

When he returned to Marge, he had a bottle on his hip. "Go easy on this," he said, setting the bottle down on the dresser. "We are going to need our noodles. We're going to walk into the Pink Kitten at midnight tonight and bust the place wide open. We're going to bounce Shiv and his punks and apaches around!"

"Tonight?" asked Marge, incredulously.

"Tonight," said Blinkie, emphatically.

**S**HIV FISHER was nursing a grudge that was so ponderous that, figuratively, it bulged the brightly decorated walls of the Pink Kitten. He was giving all the hardworking, pavement-pounding chippies hell and was reading them the riot act. The same fate was being meted out to waiters, bar-boys and chefs. Shiv was in a terrible humor.

The night crowd was just beginning to clutter the street when Shiv summoned his massed pulchritude to the women's room and opened up on the girls:

"You molls know what happens to dirty little chippies what double crosses me, don't cha?" he began. "Well, that what's going to happen to that \_\_\_\_\_ Blonde Marge and that dirty rat of a rug peddler that she's lost her head over. And don't none of you dames get the idea that she is going to get away with it. The moll don't live what can two-time Shiv Fisher and live to go 'round bragging about it. Now all you cheap chippies get wise to yourselves and keep your lips buttoned. 'Cause why? 'Cause any jane what squawks is going to get a double dose of what's coming to her; see? Now all of you tarts get busy!"

The girls around the Pink Kitten were used to this and all took the dressing-down without comment, that is, all except Spick Dottie. For the first time in her life she lost her fear of the big bruiser who insisted on being her boss whether she liked it or not. Dottie threw Shiv a dirty look and talked back:

"What's the matter, sorehead," she asked, "ain't a girl got a right to pick her own company? What you got that would make a girl like Marge give a damn about you?"

Shiv for a moment was dumbfounded. Then he deliberately walked over to where Dot was standing and hit her a terrific blow just above the right breast. He picked this spot that the injury might not spoil the girl's beauty.

Dottie fell like a mule had kicked her! She fell heavily on her back, then squirmed over onto her face before she lost consciousness! She did not arise!

"Look at the dirty \_\_\_\_\_," said Jazz Jennie, ever ready to do the boss's dirty work, and Jennie walked over and started stamping the prostrate girl in the ribs with her high heels.

Shiv looked on for a minute in evident sadistic delight then he strode forward and pulled Jazz Jennie away. "Let her alone," he said, "She had her taste of medicine. She's a good money getter; don't ruin her looks." Jazz Jennie withdrew.

"We ought to stamp hell out of her and send her to the hospital for six months," said the French woman in her vicious fury. "I hate these fresh chippies."

The wave of brutality was interrupted by a wave of excitement that rolled from the front of the house. A waiter rushed back. It was 11:30 P. M., a little early for any roughhouse, but the waiter surely looked wildly amazed. "Come out here, Shiv," he called, half opening the door. "For the lova Mike, come on out and see who just blew in!"

Shiv hurried out onto the dine and dance floor and paused. "Right over at that table," directed the waiter.

Shiv looked and instantly recognized the current heavyweight prizefight champion of the world! With the champion was his entire camp—trainers, rubbers, sparring partners and a few admirers, about a dozen in all. They filled three tables. Shiv rushed over to the champ and leaning over, he smiled and said:

"Your drinks and eats are on the house, but I'll have to charge you for your friends."

"We're not eating or drinking," replied the champ. "We are just waiting here for some friends."

A moment later two heavyweight contenders entered and with them was a crowd of their following. At intervals other professional fighters of all weights began to straggle in with their co-workers and cronies. The place was getting filled

up. Shiv went to each table to extend courtesies, but the answer was always the same: "We're not eating or drinking, we're waiting for some friends."

Shiv was plainly puzzled. "What the hell," he said to himself. "My place full of celebrities and not a man spending a gol-damned dime? Must be a gag. Pretty soon they'll open up and spend their heads off. What a night this is going to be."

Just before midnight the champion wrestler of the world entered the place and with him was a crowd. The place was now teeming with a rough and ready bunch of sluggers and man-maulers. Drake's gymnasium where Blinkie, as a sports editor, used to hang out, was certainly well represented. When the champion entered with some lesser wrestling lights and a crowd of hangers-on and admirers they brought the doorman in with them. He was walking meekly.

"We're going to lock the street doors and pull the blinds and have a swell party!" shouted the wrestling champ.

Everyone in the room laughed uproariously and Shiv laughed, too. He was greatly pleased; he could see a bulging night of heavy spending. But who was that just coming in? Was it?—yes sure enough it was!

Blinkie with the big blonde on his arm was passing the check stand. Shiv, with a murderous frown on his face, started forward. The sports crowd arose as a man. Each individual picked an attaché of the restaurant and glowered. The champ wrestler strode over to Shiv and said through his heavy beard: "Lay down, you dog, or I crack every bone in your rotten body!"

Shiv was breathless, astounded, speechless, at the sudden turn of events! He saw his men being searched and their knives and guns being taken from them. He saw the big front doors being closed and locked by a doorman who was altogether intimidated. Blinkie walked forward and knocked Shiv flat on his face. When Shiv got up Blinkie frisked him for his gat and socked him over the head with it.

**T**HE champ pugilist and his crowd were in the kitchen collecting knives and cleavers and telling the kitchen force to play dead. The champ wrestler walked over to the service bar and grabbing a bartender's wrist in each hand, he broke their forearms with a twist. Then he said, as they groveled in pain, "From where you work you can see everything that ever goes on in this joint. If

Shiv Fisher is tried for murder, you boys will testify and tell the truth."

"Oh, yeah," said one of the injured men.. "I'll see you in hell first!"

"Please yourself," said the wrestling champ, "but unless you do I'll shake hands with you guys every time you come out of the hospital and every time I shake hands with you I'll break your arms, and back into the hospital you go again!"

There was yelling and fighting in all parts of the room by now. Every professional fighter had picked his rat for his own particular job of extermination. All the Pink Kitten crowd were being beaten to the floor as fast as they could get up. After a few downs they stayed down!

Frenchy and Jennie La Mare were crouching in a corner, but not for long. Frenchy, his knife taken from him, jumped out and began to flay with his fists. Jazz Jennie pulled from her sock a long knife that had been overlooked in the search. She made for Blonde Marge whose back was to her! She primed with all her strength for an upward thrust! A split second was between the big blonde and eternity, but it took Spick Dottie only this long to act! She, too, had a knife that had been overlooked! It was Latin against Latin and enough bad chippie blood to float a tub! Dottie nursed the grudge of a thousand insults and dirty tricks at the hands of the apache Jennie! Dot reached Jazz Jennie just in time! She drew her knife across the French woman's throat and Jennie with a ghastly gurgle sank to the floor!

The crowd that had come in from the kitchen after laying the chefs under their own tables carried big cleavers and other implements of war. They began hacking furniture and smashing big mirrors, glassware and dishes. Others were hammering tables with chairs and shouting in rare enjoyment.

Shiv was sitting on the floor with a swollen head and a look in his eyes that could be translated with the one word, "murder!" He tried to arise and could not. The Frenchman saw him there. He jerked himself from the arms of a husky who was holding him and rushed over to Shiv. The Frenchman had evidently gone plumb nuts at seeing his woman slain. He glared at Shiv and shouted:

"You double-crossing rat. You put that Spaniard up to kill my Jeanne, because you wanted to keep from paying us the more money like I wanted. For that you die!" Before anyone could reach him the Frenchman kicked the sitting figure with all his might. His foot landed directly under

Shiv's chin. Shiv's fat head plopped back violently and he rolled over; his neck was broken!

ONE of the furniture-smashers nearest to the Frenchman floored him with a chair. Frenchy's skull cracked like someone had suddenly dropped and broken a dish!

Police sirens sounded! The hubbub, of course, had been heard in the crowded street and someone had called the cops. They arrived in force and began battering the door. Marge with hair scraggly and finger nails torn from battling with a couple of

Shiv's loyal chippies, opened the door for the cops.

All hands and the cooks were bundled into the black wagons. After a hearing, only the Pink Kitten crowd of regulars were held and the charge was murder! The service bartenders, who had seen every crime ever committed in the dump, turned state's evidence. They carried their right hands in slings, but they were much better off than Shiv, for when Shiv sat down in the electric chair, one midnight, his head was held in place by a strange brace of leather and steel which extended upward from his shoulders!