

## *Business Deal*

FOR AN HOUR after his barber left him, Mr. Eugene Klingspiel, West Coast head of Gargantual Pictures, worked ceaselessly. First he read *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, and *The Film Daily*. Then he measured out two spoonfuls of bicarbonate and lay down on the couch to make decisions. Before long Mr. Klingspiel had fallen into what he called a gentle reverie. He saw Gargantual Pictures swallowing its competitors like a boa-constrictor, engulfing whole amusement chains. In a delicious half-doze, he found himself wondering whether to absorb Balaban & Katz; but finding no use for Katz, he absorbed only Balaban, and turned next to Spyros Skouras and his seven brothers. Perhaps at the outset he ought to absorb only three of them. But which three? The three in the middle or two on one end and one on the other? Finally he arranged the eight Skourases into a squad of tin soldiers and executed five at random. The repeated buzz of the dictograph cut short his delicious sport. He flipped the switch irritably.

“Who is it?”

“Hwonh hwonh hwonh hwonh hwonh.”

“I’ll see them later,” said Mr. Klingspiel. “Send in Charlie Baer.”

“Hwonh-hwonh.”

He lit a cigar, turned his back on the door, and set his features into a scowl which would have done credit to a Japanese print. No punk kid two years out of Columbia College could hold *him* up for money, no matter how many hit pictures he’d written. After a dignified interval, he swung around. Charlie Baer, moon-faced and unconcerned, was staring out of another window with his back to Mr. Klingspiel.

“Well, Charlie.” Mr. Klingspiel controlled his irritation at this breach of respect and essayed a kindly smile. “I sent for you yesterday.”

“Aha.” Charlie stared placidly at Mr. Klingspiel. His dewy innocence was positively revolting.

“My girl phoned you at the Writers’ Building, but they said you were working with Roy Zinsser in Malibu.” Mr. Kling-

spiel cleared his throat. Maybe a good joke would clear the atmosphere. "Vas you dere, Sharlie?" He regretted it immediately; Charlie's frigid stare made his remark almost indelicate. So this weasel thinks he can hijack me, Mr. Klingspiel reflected angrily.

"Charlie," he began, screwing his face into an expression of deep disapproval, "I dint like that last script. It lacked guts. It dint have the most important thing a good comedy script should have."

"What's that?" asked Charlie without curiosity.

"Spontinuity," replied Mr. Klingspiel gravely. "Now if I were you, Charlie, I'd take that idea home and maul it around in your mind over-night."

"Oke," said Charlie, reaching for his hat.

"Oh, just one more thing." Mr. Klingspiel made believe he was consulting some papers. "You expire on the fifteenth, am I right?"

"Yep."

"Well, Charlie, I'm gonna lay it on the line. You did some great pictures. I'm gonna extend you another year, but this time at two-fifty a week." Charlie's eyes remained fixed on his. Mr. Klingspiel was radiant. "In other words, double what you're getting now. How's that?"

"No good," said Charlie. "Five hundred a week or I don't work."

"Listen to me," said Klingspiel. "Answer me one thing. How many fellers do you know twenty-three years old that make two-fifty a week?"

"I've got to think about my old age," said Charlie.

"When I was twenty-three," went on Mr. Klingspiel, well into his Plowboy-to-President mood, "what was I? A green kid working for buttons. All I could afford was a bowl of milk and crackers. You don't know how lucky you are."

"Yes, I do," said Charlie. "I once tried a bowl of milk and crackers."

"Now, look here, Charlie," said Mr. Klingspiel patiently, "why don't you get wise to yourself? A single man like you in no time could bank——"

"Five hundred," interrupted Charlie bovinely. Mr. Klingspiel drummed softly on his desk.

"Listen, Charlie," he said after a moment, "let me tell you a story. It's a story about Adolph Rubens, the man who founded this great organization." Charlie's eyes drooped slightly. "Just picture to yourself that there ain't no Hollywood, no film business, nothing. It's twenty-eight years ago. A poor little furrier named Adolph Rubens is walking down a windy street in St. Louis. He's a little man, Charlie, but he's a fighter. He's cold and hungry, but in that man's brain is a dream. Everybody laughs at him and calls it Rubens' Folly, but he don't care. Why? Because in his brain he sees a picture of a mighty amusement ennaprise bringing entertainment and education to millions of people from coast to coast. And today that dream has come true. This ain't a business, Charlie; it's a monument created by the public to Adolph Rubens' ideals, and we're building all the time."

"Five hundred dollars or I stop building," said Charlie in the same metallic tone.

"Charlie," said Mr. Klingspiel after a moment, "I want you to do something. Come here. Not there—come around this side of the desk." He arose. "Now you sit down in my chair. That's right." He encircled the desk, then turned and faced Charlie. "Now put yourself in my place. You're Eugene Klingspiel, the head of Gargantual Pictures. You got a payroll of three hundred and forty-six thousand dollars a week. You got stars that are draining you dry. Nobody goes to pictures any more, they stay home and listen to the radio. You got a lot of dead-wood writers drawing their check like clockwork every Wednesday. Now, in walks a fella named Charlie Baer. He don't want much, only the shirt off your back. And what do you say to him?" He gripped the edges of the desk and stared into Charlie's face.

"Five hundred dollars or I turn in my badge," droned Charlie. Mr. Klingspiel's eyes glittered. The mongoose sat comfortably and waited for the cobra to strike again.

"Now let's be sensible," said Mr. Klingspiel. "I could buy four gagmen for what I'm paying you." Charles stood up. "But I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. Three hundred——"

"Mr. Klingspiel," said Charlie, "there's something I ought to tell you. Metro——"

"What?" Mr. Klingspiel quivered like a stag.

"Metro offered me four-fifty yesterday."

"So that's it," said Mr. Klingspiel. "That's how much loyalty you got. We pick you up from the gutter—four-twenty-five!"

"Listen," said Charlie coldly, "I'm a scenario-writer, not a peddler." He put on his hat.

"Just a minute," said Mr. Klingspiel. His face cleared suddenly. "I'm gonna teach that Metro crowd a lesson. Beginning the fifteenth Charlie Baer gets five hundred dollars a week from Gargantual—and Eugene Klingspiel *personally* guarantees that! And any time you got any problems I want you to come— Where you going?"

"Lunch," said Charlie, and smiled briefly. "You know, just a bowl of milk and crackers."

Mr. Klingspiel belched and grabbed for the bicarbonate.

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