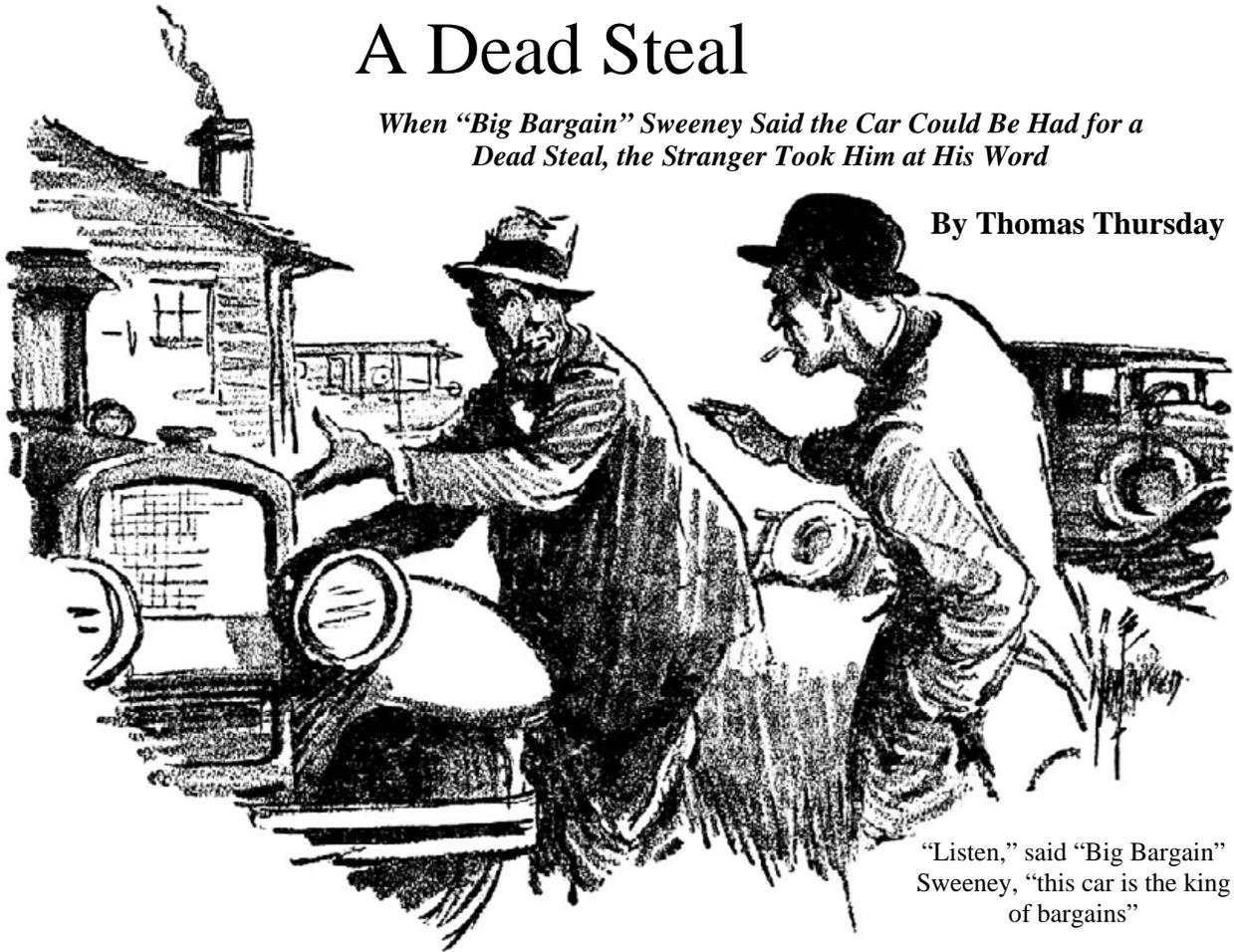


# A Dead Steal

When "Big Bargain" Sweeney Said the Car Could Be Had for a Dead Steal, the Stranger Took Him at His Word

By Thomas Thursday



"Listen," said "Big Bargain" Sweeney, "this car is the king of bargains"

THE stranger had studied the six motors on the fly-by-night used car lot for two minutes before "Big Bargain" Sweeney, sole owner and salesman, roused himself from a semi-doze and waddled out of the coupe. Noting that the prospect was well-dressed and dapper, Mr. Sweeney felt that business was about to net him some cash.

"Evenin' brother. What d'yer think of the sweet-lookin' babies?"

"What are you asking for that wreck over there?"

"Brother, you're mistaken. That boat looks and runs like new!"

"Why did George Washington turn it in?"

"Ha ha," said Mr. Sweeney. "I appreciate wisecracks, brother, but you shouldn't make fun out of a first class bus like that. And it's a bargain!"

"That's what I'm looking for—a bargain. Er, what's that steam car over there?"

"Steam car! Say, brother, can't you tell a Twin Six Lansinger when you see it?"

"Will it run—without being towed?"

"Positively. I got the whole history of that car. Listen, now, this is just between us. It was originally bought new from the dealer by a guy named Pete Saab, see? Well, this feller Saab got caught toying with a little likker business, see? So we bought the car for a dead steal, see?"

"What's your idea of a dead steal?"

"Well, just you make an offer for it, and you'll be surprised at what I'll take!"

"If she's really got a motor under the hood, and the tires are good for at least ten miles, I might offer you a hundred bucks for it."

"A hundred bucks! Say, brother, where d'yer think you are, hey?"

"In the U.S.A. I can tell by the number of bootleggers passing by."

"Ha ha," cackled Mr. Sweeney. "But, listen, that boat is almost brand new."

"So's your great-grandpop's first bib and rattle."

"She's a 1929 special custom-built job, and there ain't another like it in town."

"The mayor ought to buy it. Er, what's that

thing standing next to it?"

"You mean that nifty Detroit coupe? Say, there's a pip!"

"Get in your right mind for a moment, and tell me what you want for it."

"Listen, brother, if you are really ready to do business, there's the king of bargains. It'll go for a dead steal, if there ever was one."

"I'm ready to do business, don't worry about that."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Shoot—you're faded."

"Listen, I think that boat is what they call 'hot.' D'yer know what that means?"

"You mean that it isn't on the up-and-up?"

"Check. Of course, I don't do business like that, understand, but a feller come in here a few days ago, broke and hungry, and asked me to buy the car at a very small price. I asked him if it was his, and he says it belonged to his old man, and that he had run away account of some trouble over a dame he was in love with. But I got the feelin' that maybe it ain't the truth, see? Of course, I can't trace everything, but I give him the dough. What d'yer think she's worth to you? Runs like a top and can beat anything on the road. She's a sweet-purrin' baby, I'll tell the world!"

"Sweet-purrin' baby is right. I ought to know—I bought it new six months ago!"

"You—what?"

"Guess you didn't hear me. I said I bought it new six months ago. Some crook stole it last Saturday night while she was parked in front of a theater. I see you gave it a new flash coat of paint,

but I could tell that car if she was daubed red, pink and yellow."

Big Bargain Sweeney did some quick hysterical thinking. His odor in the nostrils of the law was not so sweet.

"Say, brother," he said whisper-like. "I hope you don't think I had anything to do with it? I admit I lied to you when I said I paid the young feller a little money for it, but the rest of the story is true, honest. But he just left it on consignment, and says he'd give me half of what I got for it. That's the truth!"

"So's your Aunt Kate. I think I'll take you around to the station house."

"Listen, brother, please listen! I gotta wife and family, and I didn't steal the car. Why don't you just take her away, hey? She's okay, except the new paint, and no harm's done. And—no fooling, mister—I'm glad you found your car. Be a good feller, and just take it away!"

"Well, it's lucky for you that I'm a busy man, and have no time to fool around in courts. But—watch your step next time! Er, any oil and gas in it?"

"She's full up with gas and I changed the oil yesterday mornin'. She's all primed to go!"

"Okay. And—and I hope this will be a lesson to you—you crook!"

The stranger started the motor and drove off the lot.

"A sweet-purrin' baby is right!" he mused as the motor hummed perfectly. "*I wonder whose car this is!*"