

[Fatso, the Slickster]

TALES - Anecdotes

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FATSO, THE SLICKSTER

Some guys are too smart for their own good. But you couldn't tell Fatso that. He believed that a sucker was not only born every minute, but that he was born to be taken by Fatso, himself, in person. He also figured the world owed him a living...a soft living. No other kind would do. And so, with only these simple rules to go by, Fatso constantly kept his eyes peeled for a "square"; a soft-touch on the loose.

Repeal hadn't come in yet and the porters in our crew were running between New York and Chicago. One week-end we laid over in Chi, the next we spent in New York. Fatso let no grass grow under his feet in either place. He got himself a beat-up apartment in

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both towns and opened up a corn joint; one of those places where porters, taxicab drivers, occasional strays and local luses hang out during their spare time. In short, a clip joint.

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He did a good business in both places, too. What with corn selling at fifty cents a pint and him being able to make five or six gallons in one of his home-made stills for less than a buck a batch. He also carted a good supply along with him on the trains and was able to clean up when we ran into a bunch of traveling salesmen or good-time-Charlies who used to need a quick one to wake up with. Once in awhile he would make a pretty good sale to a group of chorus girls, jittery from a long trek on the road and in need of a little something to celebrate their homecoming. Yes sir, it was fatso's theory to catch every living human.

"I misses nobody!" he was fond of saying. "When dem quartahs start jingling in mah jeans, I don' know duh diff'ence. Dey all makes de same kinda sof', sweet music tuh mah yeahs."

But what I started to tell you about was Fatso's joint up in Harlem. Be had a cute little coffee-colored chick in there who had his chops to the right turn and waiting for him on the back of the stove whenever he hit town, and who had the week's receipts totalled down to the last sheckle. She was hip too. Whenever any of the plainclothes boys came gum-shoeing around, the kid knew what to do. She could look as innocent as a M.G.M. starlet an' they never got to first base with her. No sir, nary a drink could they get from that baby.

One Sunday night some of us went up to Fatso's, got to fooling around playing tonk and pinnochle and it was seven o'clock in the morning before we knew it. Well, we were due at the yards by ten, so we decided to make a night of it. Some guy dressed in overalls and looking pretty down in the mouth came in. He was a stranger to us but he wanted to take a hand in the game, so we let him. Especially since 3 Emma, Fatso's old lady, didn't seem to mind. We decided he must be one of the boys from the block.

Not long afterwards, Big Tom, the collector, for the music company, (you know, those nickel machines they have in the back of gin-mills) came in. He fumbled around for awhile

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taking the back off the box and collecting his change from the box. Then he played us a few free records.

Pretty soon, the guy in overalls said: "Hows about a drink, boys?"

"Don't care if I do." Blue-Jay answers him.

"O.K. with me too," I says. "We may as well go in right this morning."

So the guy calls Emma.

"Knock us a little drink of King Kong, Babe." he tells her.

Emma don't make a move. She just stands there looking at him with a queer sort of expression on her face. Then I figures something must be wrong. Maybe the guy's a flatfoot.

"I'm sorry, Mister." Emma opines. "I ain't got no King Kong."

"Sure you have, girlie." the guy insists. "I'm all right. Don't you remember me? I was up here th' other night with Steve an' Eddie an' some uh th' boys."

"Naw suh. " Emma says, backing away. "You all mus' be thinkin' 'bout some otha place. 'Twont hyeah."

Fatso is laying in bed in the other room with tie door open and hears the conversation. He raises up on one elbow and we hears the bed groan under the weight of his 265 pounds.

"Emma!" he calls out, "What you mean sayin' we ain't got nuthin' tuh drink? Hyeah 'tis Monday mo'nin' an' I ain' broke duh ice yet, an' you sayin' we ain' got nuthin'? Gi'e dat man a drink!"

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Emma always did what Fatso told her without question but this was once when she stood her ground.

“Ef’n you all wants him tuh have one, Fatso, you be’er come an’ gi’e it to ‘im yo’se’f.”

The next minute Fatso came paddling out of the bed room with his pajama shirt flapping over his big belly and looking for all the world like a flannel horse-blanket, shuffled over to the ice box and pulled out a jug of corn. He set it on the table, gave each of us a glass, and said:

“Go fo yo’ se’f, boys.”

To the man in overalls he said: “Ten cents a drink, brother.”

The guy filled all our glasses, tasted the stuff, spat it out on the floor and stood up.

“All right, Big Boy” he drawled, “Git your pants on. We’re gonna take a little walk.”

“Well, you should a seen Fatso’s face. I’ll never forget it. It was a sight to remember.