

want to talk, you talk to yourself." And he picked up a blanket and went to the sofa in the living room.

Oh, it had been a wonderful evening, all right. She snapped the car into the driveway and was delighted at the sound of the bumper ripping the side of the garage door.

Joe got off the six-fifty-seven feeling fine. The car was in its customary place. He walked toward it with a light stride, then he remembered. Well, if she was still in that same mood, he'd have to spend the evening talking her out of it. He opened the door. "Hello, baby," he said, and got in behind the wheel.

"Darling," she said timidly, "I stopped at Druding's for gas today, and Ted told me all about the trouble you had last night. You poor lamb, you."

Joe knew enough not to smile. "Women," he thought, "you just can't figure them."

## Jules Kessler

Ian D. Mitchell

"LET me speak to Charley Swan."

"One moment, please, I'll see if he is here."

"He's there all right. Tell him that Jules Kessler is on the phone."

"Yes sir, Mr. Kessler . . ."

"Hello, Charley, wipe your chin and pull up a chair."

"What do you want, Jules? I'm entertaining a few guests right now. Why don't you call back later?"

"Can't, Charley, I'm going right down to the theater. Why guests at the Variety Club, Annunziata not paying off?"

"We're getting good reviews."

"Georgia Fain's the only one they're talking about."

"Gassner seems to think it's pretty good theater."

"Yeah, and Gassner would purr for Rumplestilskin if it satisfied the 'ah't and theatah' crowd. Don't kid me, Charley, Annunziata won't last more than a week and all you'll have to show for it will be a couple of squibs in your scrapbook."

"You're wrong about the show, Jules; it's booked ahead for three months. You're also wrong about Georgia Fain. They're not talking about her, they're raving about her. But you didn't call me to discuss the success of the show. What is it you want?"

"Georgia Fain's contract."

"What!"

"I can do for her in a week what would take her ten years playing in those East Lynnes of yours."

"Is this another Kessler party stunt? You must be kidding."

"Serious as hell."

"Well, don't be, Jules. I'm not giving up Georgia's contract to anyone. Why if she heard this one, she'd laugh her head off. By the way, what new show would you star her in?"

"No new show, the one we're running now."

"*Burleskapades?*"

"Of course."

"Are you crazy? Ha, ha, some gag. Listen, my steak is getting cold. What do you really want?"

"Her contract."

O. K., Jules . . . for two million in cash, the Belasco Theater, and parking rights on Times Square."

"Don't play with me, Swan. I want Georgia Fain for my show. I'm not joking. This is strictly business."

"Take it somewhere else, Jules. If this isn't a comedy then you'd better scratch the act because it's not going over."

"The act stays, Swan, and I'm going to finish it center stage front. Bring Georgia to my office at eleven tomorrow and we'll settle it then."

"And if we don't show up I suppose you'll burn down our theater. The melodrama is tiresome, Jules. I can listen to Lawyer Cribbs for two bits, musical background, free beer and pretzels."

"You had better show up, Swan, or the two bits and free lunch will be the only things you'll have left after Annunziata folds."

"A threat? This begins to sound like the old Jules Kessler. Winchell was right. 'Kessler back on Broadway . . . Drive slowly, Juley, we love our kids.' Well, what's the fraud this time?"

"No fraud, Charley. Just drop in tomorrow. Bring the star and her contract. I pay well. Ten thousand to you and I double her salary. You're both making money."

"While you get the greatest star since Bernhardt and cripple the finest show we've had here in years. You're either drunk or crazy to think you can call me up and demand my actress. Forget this nonsense and I'll forget you ever mentioned it. Good-bye, Jules."

"Be there, Swan, or I'll ruin you."

"*Georgia Fain's not eating husks with you and the rest of the swine!*"

. . . "Charley . . . did you ever hear of the A. Y. D.?"

"What do you mean?"

"They have a Georgia Fain on their books."

"You wouldn't dare . . ."

"McCarthy's boys are in town and they're licking their chops."

"You lousy . . ."