



## from "Layaways"

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### Stephen Dixon

"So what's a man with sneakers buying or looking at a suit for?"

"To buy for later. If he buys a suit from us, he'll go to Clyde's or Hazlitt's and buy a pair of shoes to match. He's in a buying mood. These guys, they get a paycheck Friday, they spend it all at once the next day and mostly on liquor and clothes. What do you think you're here for? Leave me alone with your being paranoid. One robbery this month—"

"Two."

"One. That second one we didn't know was a robbery."

"The one last week? Call Joe out and let him tell you how much a robbery it wasn't. That was a knife that man pulled out of his newspaper on Joe, big as your head."

"But he was crazy. He carries the knife and makes threats so he can feel like a big man. He does it to lots of stores around here and they just tell him 'Sure, here's a penny, all we got, it was a slow day,' and show him the door."

"Okay, that one doesn't count. But what does? When they stick it in your heart?"

"Shush, will you? They'll hear. You're going to the girls' room, go like I said, but don't worry about bringing out Joe."

"No, I'll stay here. I don't want to leave you alone with them."

"Do what you want."

"At least say thanks."

"Why should I? I don't think you're right."

"My heart's in the right place."

"Okay, your heart. You're a dream. You saved my life. You made me live twenty years younger, oh boy am I lucky. But scare these two away with your knife talk just before my antennas say I'm going to make a big sale with them and I'll be mad as hell at your heart because we need every cent we can get. — That one's a good buy and a beauty. Want to try it on?"

"Yeah, that's a good idea, where can I?" shorter man says. They come over to the counter Edna's behind and where I've been talking to her and he holds out a suit to me. "How much?"

"Tag's right on the arm cuff. Sometimes they're hard to find. Size forty-four? This for you? I say that because it's more a size for him. You can't be more than a thirty-six, and besides, this one's a long and you're a regular."

"I'm a regular, thirty-six, you're right, you really know your line," and from under the suit he's still holding he points a pistol at me. Other one opens his jacket and aims a sawed-off shotgun at Edna and cocks it.

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