

The Thirteenth Floor

BY FRANK GRUBER



Maybe all the many hotels and buildings that skip from the 12th to 14th floors have reasons as good as this!

THE motto of *The Bonanza Store* was: "If *The Bonanza* Hasn't Got It, It Isn't." Now and then, friends and an occasional rash employee suggested to Alf Orpington that the wording of the motto was a trifle ambiguous, but the owner of *The Bonanza* did not take kindly to criticism.

"Our store sells everything," he would snort, "and if we haven't got it, there just isn't such a thing. That's what the motto says."

It was a big store. It covered an entire block on State Street and towered eighteen stories into the sky. You could buy a spool of thread in *The Bonanza* and you could get

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

complete equipment for an eight months' safari into the Belgian Congo.

The Bonanza was Javelin's last hope; if he couldn't get what he wanted here, he would have to have it made, which meant putting off the trip at least another week. He didn't really expect to find it in a department store, but he had seen the motto in the store's newspaper advertisements that morning and it was worth a trial.

So he let the women buffet him along toward the elevators. There was a sale of print dresses on the third floor and you know what print dresses do to women.

There was an octagonal information booth in the center of the store and Javelin tried to get to it, but the sea of prospective print dress buyers was too strong and he was swept helplessly to the banks of elevators. There were two of six elevators each and the women poured into the cages and filled them to capacity. When the door of one closed, they attacked another. Javelin moved with the ladies, but he never quite got his foot into one of the elevators. The women somehow always managed to elbow him aside. He was left standing outside of Elevator No. 8, then No. 7 and finally No. 6 and No. 5.

"Strategy," he thought grimly. "I'll beat them by strategy."

And so he moved from Elevator No. 5 all the way back to No. 12. He planted himself squarely in front of the door. It would take a few minutes, but he'd be damned if they'd budge him from this door. When it opened he would step inside. And no wave of women would wash him aside.

... The door of Elevator No. 12 opened and a freckle-faced youth of nineteen or twenty grinned at him. "Going up?"

Javelin shot a quick look off to the right. Women were storming determinedly into Elevator No. 4.

"Up," he said and stepped nimbly into Elevator No. 12.

The operator let the door swing shut and looked at Javelin, an inquiry in his eyes.

Surprised, Javelin asked: "Nobody else?"
"Not this trip. . . . Floor?"

"I don't know," Javelin said. "As a matter of fact, I don't even know if the store carries what I'm looking for."

The freckle-faced youth chuckled. "The motto of *The Bonanza Store*, is . . ."

". . . 'If The Bonanza Hasn't Got It, It Isn't'. . . ."

"Right, sir."

"I'm looking for a distilling outfit. It's a copper tank, with coils of copper tubing. It's used for distilling water. . . ."

"Are you kidding?"

Javelin looked sharply at the elevator operator. "Not at all. Where I'm going you can't drink the water because it's always contaminated. . . ."

"Oh, sure. We have that trouble right here in Chicago. Lots of people can't drink Lake Michigan water. That's why they buy these, uh, distilling outfits. . . . Thirteenth floor. . . ."

The elevator operator pushed down his lever and the cage shot skywards. Javelin frowned at the black floor numbers as they shot past him—5, 6, 7, 8. . . .

The speed of the elevator began to decrease. No. 13 appeared and the car came to a halt. The elevator operator reached for the door, but did not open it at once.

"You know what I been thinking—all these people buying these, ah, distilling outfits. . . ." He leaned toward Javelin and closed one eye. "Could it be that *some* of them use them to make a little hooch?"

Javelin shrugged. "They were used for that in the old prohibition days, yes."

The boy swung open the door of the thirteenth floor. "Yeah, in the old prohibition days." He grunted. "Wise guy!"

JAVELIN stepped out of the elevator, turned to look back at the freckle-faced youth. But the door was already swinging shut. He shook his head and walked forward, through an aisle oddly deserted, and another, in which there wasn't even a salesgirl. It was then that Javelin stopped. The main floor of the store had been jammed with shoppers. Many of them had gone only to the third floor print dress sale, but this was the middle of the afternoon and it was only logical that shoppers should have penetrated to the upper floors.

But the floor was completely deserted. Merchandise there was, on the counters and on the shelves. But where were the buyers? And the salespeople?

Javelin reached a center aisle, turned right and passed into another department. And

still his own footsteps were the only sounds he heard.

He cleared his throat. "Hello," he called suddenly. "Is anybody here?"

There was no response. Not even an echo. Javelin stopped again. He looked up an aisle to the right, down one to the left and then turned clear around and looked back in the direction he had come. Not a living soul was in sight.

Javelin became aware suddenly of the chilliness of the air in the store. "That's the trouble with this air conditioning," he thought. "Either it doesn't work at all, or it works too well and you have to wear an overcoat indoors."

He drew a deep breath and essayed into another aisle. It was as deserted as the previous ones. Suddenly irked, Javelin wheeled and headed in the general direction of the elevators.

"Yes?" said a voice. "What can I do for you?"

Startled, Javelin whirled. A tall young man in a blue suit and wearing a white carnation smiled at him.

"What kind of a store do you call this?" Javelin exclaimed. "The place is like a morgue. No salespeople, no customers."

The man smiled pleasantly. "Is there anything special you wanted?"

"Yes," Javelin snapped. "A water distilling outfit."

"Of course, sir."

Javelin was surprised. "You have them?"

"*The Bonanza* carries everything. If you'll step this way. . . ."

The floorwalker turned, walked a few yards, then made a sharp right turn and led the way to another aisle, a department displaying kettles of all shapes and sizes and a vast amount of copper tubing, as well as all the paraphernalia that went with a distilling outfit; malt, hops, filters, bottles, caps and bottling machines.

A girl stood behind one of the counters writing in an order book.

"Miss Carmichael," the floorwalker said, smoothly. "Will you show this gentleman a distilling outfit?"

The girl looked up and Javelin had to resist an involuntary desire to whistle long and low. The girl was young, not more than twenty or twenty-one. She was tall and

slender, with finely chiseled features, hair like spun gold and the smoothest skin in all Chicago.

She smiled at Javelin, exposing teeth so white and even that they seemed to have been capped by a Hollywood dentist, yet could not have been.

"How large an outfit were you thinking of?" she asked. She came out from behind the counter and crossed to a display of copperware.

Javelin stared at her as open-mouthed as a Bremer County, Iowa, youth seeing Hedy Lamarr for the first time. She reached the distillers, turned and looked at Javelin, still standing on the spot from where he had first spied her.

"If you'll step over here, please. . . ."

Javelin came alive. He moved toward the girl. "I'll take it," he said.

"Which one?"

"Any one of them; it doesn't matter."

"But you must have had a certain size in mind."

"Yes, of course."

"Well. . . ?" Her lips parted in an amused smile.

Javelin blinked and shook his head to change the burning focus of his eyes. They lit upon a gleaming copper kettle. "This one's too small."

"It's five gallons."

"I'll need at least a ten-gallon size. You see, I'm going on a trip up the Amazon and there'll be eight or ten men in the party. We'll need a lot of water. . . ." He stopped, for Miss Carmichael's smile had reached great proportions. He looked at her in surprise. "I beg your pardon?"

The smile disappeared. "I'm sorry."

"Why should you be sorry?"

"Because of what I was—well, thinking. . . ."

"What were you thinking?"

SHE looked past him and a tiny frown creased her smooth forehead. Javelin glanced over his shoulder and met the look of the immaculate floorwalker, who was standing some twenty feet away, a disapproving expression on his face.

He turned back to the salesgirl.

She said: "There's no law against a man buying a distilling outfit; if he wants to say

that it's for the purpose of distilling water, why . . ."

"But it is!"

"Of course, it is."

Javelin frowned. It seemed suddenly very important to him that the salesgirl should believe him. "Look," he said, "I know what these outfits were used for in the old days. I suppose there are some thrifty souls who still use them for that. But I assure you, I never acquired a taste for home-made hooch. I much prefer to buy my Lord Calvert whiskey in the nearest liquor store."

"Oh, yes, at the nearest liquor store." The salesgirl's eyes crinkled. "Now, here's a lovely ten-gallon still, distilling outfit. . ."

"How much is it?"

"Just the tank, or the complete outfit?"

"Complete."

"With condensing coils, \$49.75."

Javelin took out his wallet and extracted a fifty-dollar bill. "Could you have it sent to the Alonzo Apartments?"

"Just a moment." The girl went back to the counter and picked up her salesbook and pencil. "The Alonzo Apartments, Mr. . . ?"

"Dick, I mean Richard Javelin. Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio Street."

The girl wrote rapidly in her salesbook. Looking down at the top of her head, Javelin asked: "What time does the store close?"

"Six o'clock," she replied, without looking up.

Javelin cleared his throat, swallowed hard. "I, uh, was thinking, I mean, I wonder, would you go somewhere and have a drink with me, or perhaps dinner?"

She finished writing, took the fifty dollars from him and stepping to a cash register, rang up the sale. She returned with a quarter change.

"The employees' entrance," she said, "about five minutes after six." She handed him the duplicate sales slip.

"Great," he exulted. "I'll be waiting for you."

She smiled faintly, said, "Thank you, Mr. Javelin," in a clear tone and stooped to make a further notation in her salesbook.

Javelin turned away. At the end of the aisle, the floorwalker stood where he had been during Javelin's entire time in the department.

"Did you get what you wanted?" he asked.

"Everything," replied Javelin.

He passed the floorwalker, made a right turn and discovered that the elevators were straight ahead. He pushed the pearl button for "Down" and the door of Elevator No. 12 opened instantly, smoothly.

The freckle-faced young operator smiled at Javelin.

"Service, sir, that's my motto."

"I thought it was: 'If *The Bonanza* Hasn't Got it, It Isn't?'"

"That's the store's motto; my personal one is, 'Service, sir.'"

The elevator door slipped shut and the cage began descending swiftly. "Get what you wanted?" the operator asked, looking at Javelin over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Sorry? Why should you be sorry?"

The boy shook his head, smiled wanly and brought the elevator to a stop. "Main floor," he announced.

The door opened and Javelin stepped out into a yawning maw of women, still seeking print dresses. He struggled through the waves of femininity and at last reached the street.

AT FIVE minutes to six Javelin entered the alley between State and Wabash. He found a set of metal-sheathed doors on which was painted: "*The Bonanza Store, Employees' Entrance*" and lighting a cigarette, leaned against the wall.

A smile of anticipation played over his lips.

He threw away the cigarette when the doors were opened and women and girls began to pour into the alley. They came in a steady, hurrying stream, glad to leave the store, anxious to get to their homes, their trysts. Inside the doors the time clocks beat a steady ping, ping as the employees' cards were stamped.

Men came out, too; stock-clerks, floor-walkers, elevator operators, managers and assistant managers. But mostly there were girls and women, hundreds and hundreds of them.

Five minutes after six, ten minutes after. The stream became a trickle, diminished to

a drip. Twenty minutes after six and only a man or two came out.

Javelin stepped into the doorway. A uniformed watchman looked inquiringly at him.

"I'm waiting for a young lady."

The watchman shrugged. "About all out, I guess." He looked at the batteries of time cards, stuck in their metal slots on the wall. "Yep."

"But I've been waiting here since before six." Javelin frowned. "She couldn't have left early?"

"Not that I know of. What's her name?"

"Carmichael."

The watchman stepped up to the racks of time cards, ran a stubby finger down them. "A, B, C. . . . Carmen, Carpenter, Carter . . . no Carmichael."

Impulsively, Javelin exclaimed, "Carmichael. C-a-r-m-i-c-h-a-e-l."

"I can spell. Don't no Carmichael work here."

"But I met her upstairs. The floorwalker gave me her name."

"Sorry; if her name was Carmichael there'd be a card here." The watchman put his tongue into his cheek. "Maybe he was her boy-friend and gave you a bum steer on purpose. Could be."

Chagrined, Javelin turned away. He left the alley and walked slowly to State Street. He passed every one of the customers' doors, then retracted his steps. But it was no use. The store was tightly closed for the night. Only charwomen and watchmen were inside.

Javelin spent a miserable evening. He had several drinks in a bar, went to a movie and was so restless that he left within fifteen minutes. He returned to his apartment and went to bed. And then remained awake until long past two a.m.

AT NINE-THIRTY in the morning Javelin entered The Bonanza Store. The print dress sale was apparently over, at least the crush of women on the main floor was not as great as the day before. Javelin got to the elevator banks with only minor jostling. He entered a car. There were already several passengers inside and a half-dozen more got in after Javelin. Then a signal from the starter caused the operator, a chunky, uniformed girl, to close the doors.

"Second floor," she droned. "Ladies' millinery, gloves, handbags, accessories. . . ."

The elevator stopped at the second floor, let open a few women and took on some. It worked its way gradually upward, stopping at every floor. When it reached the tenth floor, there were only two passengers left besides Javelin. One got off on the eleventh floor and the other on the twelfth.

"Thirteen, please," Javelin said.

"Ain't no thirteenth floor," the operator said. "You want fourteen. . . ."

"No," Javelin said, promptly. "I want the thirteenth."

The girl looked around. "This building doesn't have a thirteenth floor. It jumps from twelve to fourteen. Some people are superstitious. . . ." She brought the car to a halt at the fourteenth floor. "This is really the thirteenth floor, only we call it the fourteenth. . . ."

Javelin looked out upon departments he had never seen before; a floor with salespeople and a sprinkling of customers, a floor that seemed to carry only furniture.

He shook his head. "I was in the store yesterday," he said patiently. "On the *thirteenth* floor. I purchased something here."

The girl shrugged. "Ain't this the floor?"

"It wasn't furniture I bought."

"All right, mister, I'll take you back to the twelfth floor." The girl let the door swing shut and dropped the elevator one floor. She opened the door. "Is this it?"

Javelin looked out upon a sea of curtains, drapes, window shades. "No, this isn't the floor. And it *was* the thirteenth!"

"It wasn't the twelfth floor and it wasn't the fourteenth," the operator said patiently. "It was the thirteenth . . . only we ain't got no thirteenth floor in the store. I oughtta know, mister. I work here. Believe it or not, I jockey this cage up and down all day long from nine-thirty to six. I been doing it for more'n a year. I've never seen no thirteenth floor. . . . Now, you wanna go down to the main floor and ask Information?"

"Yes."

The operator closed the door and descended to the main floor, taking on a few passengers as she went along. The car disgorged a full load on the first floor.

Still angry Javelin made his way to the

octagonal information booth in the center of the store. It was presided over by two middle-aged women.

"Can you tell me on what floor the distilling outfits are?" He asked one of the women.

"Dis-distilling, did you say?"

"Distilling. They're copper kettles, or tanks, with a coil of tubing. . . ."

"Mmm," said the woman, "that ought to be kitchenware, or hardware, maybe. Yes, try hardware, seventh floor."

"It's on the thirteenth floor," Javelin said, firmly.

"We have no thirteenth floor."

Smiling thinly, Javelin reached into his pocket and brought out a folded slip of paper. "Thirteen," he said, "See! I bought it. . . ." He stopped, his eyes on the sales slip.

The entry read: "*1 distil. complete—\$49.75.*" Above was his name and address: "*Richard Javelin, Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio St.*"

That was correct. But there was an error above the name. The date.

The information clerk's voice said: "If you'll let me see the sales slip. . . ."

She took it from Javelin's hand, glanced at it, then inhaled sharply. "You say you made this purchase *yesterday*?"

"Yes," said Javelin. "On the thirteenth floor."

The woman drew a deep breath and raised her head. "Mr. Ungerman!" she called in a loud voice.

A heavy-set, balding man with a red carnation in his coat lapel, came up. "Yes, Miss Sundstrom?"

"This gentleman," began the information woman, then frowning, thrust the sales slip into Mr. Ungerman's hand. "Just take a look at this!"

Mr. Ungerman looked at the sales slip and looked at Javelin. "One of our old-type sales slips. What did you want to know about it?"

"I bought that merchandise yesterday," Javelin said. "I want to see the salesclerk who sold it to me."

Mr. Ungerman's lips formed a great pout, which moved in and out. "Umm, yes, I see. You say you, ah, made this purchase *yesterday*?"

"That's right."

"Umm, and what is wrong with it?"

"Nothing. I haven't even received it yet. It's just—"

Mr. Ungerman reached out and touched Javelin's sleeve—lightly. "Would you mind stepping this way, please."

He smiled unctuously and moved off swiftly, looking over his shoulder to see that Javelin was following. Javelin trailed him to the elevators, then into a narrow aisle that led to a paneled office door.

MR. UNGERMAN opened the office door and stood aside for Javelin to enter. The room contained a mahogany desk and a battery of steel files. A heavy-set man with a cigar in his mouth sat behind the desk.

"Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman said, "an unusual, shall we say, situation has arisen. This gentleman has one of our old sales slips here—one which we haven't used for years—and maintains that he made the purchase only yesterday. He asks for a refund. . . ."

"I'm not asking for any refund," Javelin snapped.

"No?" asked Mr. Bailey. "Then what's the beef?"

Javelin's eyes narrowed. "Store dick, eh?"

"Store protection service," Mr. Bailey said, smoothly. He held out a meaty hand and Mr. Ungerman, pressing forward, put the sales slip into it.

Mr. Bailey took one look at the piece of paper. "Nineteen thirty-two!" he grunted. "That's a heluva long time ago."

"The clerk made a mistake," Javelin said, savagely. "I got that slip yesterday."

". . . And one of our old-time sales slips," Mr. Bailey went on. "What's this? '*1 distil. complete, \$49.75*?' " He looked up at Mr. Ungerman.

Mr. Ungerman raised his shoulders expressively.

"It's a distilling outfit," Javelin said.

Mr. Bailey's eyes gleamed. "An old prohibition still?" He appealed to Mr. Ungerman. "Do we still sell them?"

"I haven't seen one in years."

"They went out with repeal. I thought so." The store detective got to his feet. "Just what's the game, Mister?"

"There isn't any game," Javelin said, tautly. "I'm not trying to get a refund. I'm not trying to swindle the store. I want to see the sales clerk who sold me this outfit. Is there any law against that?"

"Why do you want to see her?"

"I made a date with her. She didn't show up. They tell me it happens right along, but it's never happened to me before. I want to ask her why she stood me up."

"Oh, do you, now? And you figure the store should help you, eh? 'The customer's always right.' Well, Mr. Jav'lin, or whatever your name is, The Bonanza Store has a rule—salesgirls can't make dates with customers and visy-versy. I mean, salesmen can't make dates with customers."

"You're quite right, Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman interposed. "But this matter is, ah, shall we say, beside the point. That sales slip is sixteen years old. I would like to know how Mr. Javelin got it."

"I told you," Javelin said, through bared teeth. "I got it yesterday. 'On the thirteenth floor, where I—'"

"There is no thirteenth floor in this store."

"So I've been told. Nevertheless . . ." Javelin stopped. The store detective was tapping his forehead and winking.

"You think I'm crazy?" Javelin asked, suddenly sober.

"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as that, Mr., uh, Javelin. But if I were you, I'd just run along quietly and not cause no more trouble." Bailey beamed at Javelin. "That's a good fella, huh?"

Javelin looked at him then turned slowly and looked at Mr. Ungerman. The floor manager's face was set in firm lines.

"All right," Javelin said. "Give me the sales slip and—"

"Better leave it here," Mr. Bailey said, smiling wolfishly. "Just so we don't have no trouble, eh?"

Javelin turned on his heel and walked out of the office. But he did not leave the store. There was a staircase beside the bank of elevators. He climbed the stairs to the second floor.

It was quite obviously devoted to feminine wearing apparel, but Javelin roamed it from one end to the other, then crossed it back and forth, going down each aisle.

When he finished he climbed to the third

floor. He searched every nook, boldly looked at the faces of the salesgirls—and floorwalkers. From the third floor he went to the fourth and on up. Shortly before noon he reached the eighteenth and top floor and discovered that it was devoted entirely to the offices of the store. The general offices.

Grimly, he approached a reception desk. "I'd like to see the owner of the store."

"Mr. Orpington is the owner," the girl behind the desk smiled. "But naturally, you don't want to see him."

"Oh, but I do."

"You have an appointment?"

"No, but I want to see him, just the same."

"You'll have to make an appointment."

"All right, make one."

"You'll have to see Mr. Clemson about that. Mr. Clemson is his private secretary."

"And how do I see him?"

"I'll call Mr. Clemson's assistant, if you insist, but I don't think it'll really do you any good. . . ."

"Call him."

The girl hesitated then picked up the phone. "Mr. Myers." She looked up at Javelin. "What is your name?"

Javelin told her. The girl said into the phone: "Mr. Myers, there's a Mr. Richard Javelin here would like to make an appointment with Mr. Orpington. . . . Yes, Mr. Myers." The girl winced a little, then addressed Javelin. "About what did you want to see Mr. Myers?"

"I don't want to see Myers. I want to see Mr. Orpington. On a personal matter." Then Javelin added hastily, "Of vital importance."

The girl spoke into the phone. "He says it's a matter of vital importance. . . . Very well, sir."

She hung up. "Mr. Myers will see you. Straight down the aisle, Number Three."

JAVELIN nodded thanks and passing the receptionist's desk, walked down a corridor between pine-paneled offices until he came to one with the number "3" painted on it in gold paint.

He opened the door and stepped into a sumptuously furnished office. A bald, shriveled little man sat behind a great mahogany desk.

"You're the man wanted to see Mr. Orpington? About what?"

"A personal matter."

"Could you give me a general idea of what it's about?"

"No," Javelin said, bluntly. "It's personal."

Mr. Myers drummed lean claws upon the polished surface of his desk. "This is very irregular, if you don't mind my saying so. Mr. Orpington *never* sees anyone without an appointment. . . ."

"I was told that his private secretary makes the appointments."

"Mr. Clemson? So he does." Mr. Myers smiled thinly. "But it's my job to, well, sort of screen the calls before . . . what did you say your name was? Javelin. . . ?"

"Yes. Richard Javelin."

"Richard Javelin!" Mr. Myers brightened. "You wouldn't by any chance be the noted anthropologist?"

"I'm an anthropologist, yes."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Myers. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance. My hobby is natural science. As a matter of fact, I subscribe to *Current Geography* and I read your article on the Amazonian tribes of the Upper Amazon . . . a very interesting piece, if I may say so."

"Thank you, Mr. Myers."

Mr. Myers got nimbly to his feet. "Oh, it's a pleasure, Mr. Javelin, a real pleasure, I assure you. I understand, from your article, that you're contemplating another trip up the Amazon, to study the culture of the . . ."

"That's why I'm here."

Myers blinked at Javelin. "Indeed? You want to see Mr. Orpington about your Amazon trip?"

Javelin nodded.

"But Mr. Orpington isn't interested in that sort of thing. I know a great deal about his tastes and—"

"Just the same, could I see him?"

Mr. Myers hesitated, then suddenly came around his desk and stepped to a door leading to an inner office. With his hand on the knob he stopped. "I'd like to talk to you again, Mr. Javelin."

"—After I see Mr. Orpington."

Mr. Myers opened the door and popped into an office twice the size of his own. A

white-haired man of over seventy sat slumped in a huge leather chair, behind a tremendous desk.

"Mr. Clemson, this is a friend of mine," Myers said. "He'd like very much to talk to Mr. Orpington about an exploring trip he's going to make, to the Upper Amazon. . . ." He stopped.

A DOOR at the side of Clemson's office opened and a fierce-eyed old man stepped out. He was probably near eighty, but had the vigor of a man many years younger. He was slightly stooped, but even so, towered well over six feet.

His eagle eyes fixed upon Javelin. "You want to see me about an *exploring* trip?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Orpington," Javelin said, quickly. "Mr. Myers got it a little wrong. I want to see you about a purchase I made here yesterday. . . ."

"What's that?" Orpington roared. "You want to see *me* about something you bought here?"

"A distilling outfit—on the thirteenth floor. . . ."

"You have the nerve to come to me about a trifling purchase? With a complaint department downstairs, a return department and one hundred and forty-seven other departments, you brazen your way . . ." Orpington's voice did a sudden change. "You say, *on the thirteenth floor*?"

"On the thirteenth floor," Javelin repeated firmly. "A floor that apparently does not exist in this building. Yet—"

"A distilling outfit?" Orpington cut in. He whirled on his private secretary, Clemson. "Do we carry distilling outfits?"

"No, Mr. Orpington," the private secretary said, tonelessly.

"Did we ever carry them?"

A full second passed before the secretary answered. "Yes."

Orpington's eyes were fierce once more as they fixed themselves upon Javelin. "Let me get this straight; you say you bought a distilling outfit here—in my store—yesterday? On the thirteenth floor?"

"That's right. I had a sales slip, but it was taken from me by the store detective. And a Mr. Ungerman."

"Shall I call them up?" Mr. Myers asked.

Old Alf Orpington brushed away the

suggestion. His eyes still remained on Javelin. "Go on!"

"That's about all. Except that the salesclerk made a mistake and used an old sales book. A least that's what the men downstairs claim. Also, she wrote in the wrong date . . . 1932. . . ."

"What day in 1932?"

"October 14th. . . ."

THE light went out of Orpington's fierce eagle eyes. A film seemed to sheath the orbs. And Javelin would have sworn that a shudder ran through the gaunt old body.

Orpington said: "The salesgirl . . . what was her name?"

"Miss Carmichael. As a matter of fact, I, well, I made a date with her and when she didn't show up . . ." He smiled wanly. "I haven't been in Chicago very long. I returned from South America only a short time ago and Miss Carmichael . . ."

"Miss Carmichael," Orpington said in an odd tone. "When you talked to her, was she . . . alone?"

"Not exactly. That's what struck me as odd. There was only one other person on the floor, a floorwalker. . . ."

"His name?"

"I don't know."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall, rather handsome; maybe twenty-eight or thirty. . . ."

"Dark hair?"

"Why, yes. All the time I was buying this distilling outfit, he stood there, watching us . . . me. . . ." Javelin stopped abruptly, for Orpington had suddenly turned away from him and walked back into his office. The door swung shut.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Javelin. "If this isn't the . . ."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Javelin," said the aged private secretary. "Mr. Orpington isn't feeling very well. . . ."

"Neither am I," retorted Javelin. He whirled on his heel and stalked out of Clemson's office, through Mr. Myers' and down the corridor between the paneled offices.

In Clemson's office, Mr. Myers and Mr. Clemson looked uneasily at one another. Neither said a word. Then the door of Orpington's office was jerked open and the store owner popped out. "That man who was here—"

"He's gone, sir," said Myers.

"Call him back. I want to know how he got to the thirteenth floor—what elevator he took. . . .?"

On the eighteenth floor, Javelin pushed the pearl button for an elevator. The door of No. 12 opened and the familiar freckle-faced operator grinned out at him.

"Going down, sir!"

Javelin stepped into the elevator. The door closed . . . and Javelin plummeted eighteen floors, to his death.

STORY IN CHICAGO BULLETIN:

MAN KILLED IN MYSTERY

DEPARTMENT STORE

ELEVATOR PLUNGE

Chicago, October 14, 1948: Richard Javelin, noted Amazon explorer, today plunged to his death down an elevator shaft in the Bonanza Store. Mystery surrounds the death of Javelin as his death was caused by falling down the shaft of an elevator that has not been in use for 16 years. Odd angle is that the elevator, No. 12, was sealed and locked from public use exactly sixteen years ago today, when it crashed, carrying to death three persons, the youthful elevator operator, Mickey Brown, a salesgirl, Elaine Carmichael and Henry Orpington, son of the Bonanza Store owner, Alfred Orpington, who at the time was learning the business and working in capacity of floorwalker on the thirteenth floor. After his son's death, Alfred Orpington sealed up the elevator and changed the numbering of the thirteenth floor, to fourteen.

How Richard Javelin got into Elevator No. 12 today is being probed by police and store officials. . . .