

# DOUBLE

# BANG

# HEYWOOD GOULD

A NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF FORT APACHE, THE BRONX

# DOUBLE *BANG*

*The New York Times Book Review*

writes about the author of

*Fort Apache, The Bronx and Double Bang:*

“Heywood Gould is in

turn sharp, wacky, earthy and full

of felicitous phrases. Above all,

he celebrates one particular version of

New York—the New York that

is full of frustrations, competition, ethnic

tensions, bigots and militants.”

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03881645

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HEYWOOD  
GOULD

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Tolmitch Press  
Santa Monica, CA

# One

## HE'S ON THE SPOT

A little after two in the morning the phone began ringing.

Edmund was wide awake, watching the numbers flip on the digital clock – 2:08, 2:09. Raymond and the redhead were at war in the bathroom. They'd been in there since 1:06. "I'm gonna desecrate you, bitch," Raymond yelled. The chick yelped. There was a "thwap" like somebody slamming a wet fish against the wall.

The phone rang until 2:12. It stopped, then started at 2:13.

Edmund leaned over and put the ringing phone against the ear of the brown girl next to him. She didn't flinch. She had coked herself into a coma. Like traveling so far south you end up freezing. She was sleeping on one arm, while the other hung over the bed. One eye was half open, the sightless pupil gleaming from behind the lashes. Her lips had a gray rind around them, her nose looked like it was stuffed with plaster. She'd be out for hours, and when she finally woke up it would take another gram to get her out of bed.

At 2:20 the phone stopped ringing, but Edmund knew it would start again, He knew who it was and he knew what the guy was doing standing in a phone booth somewhere, checking the number in that little blue phone book of his.

Getting madder and madder because he knew what Edmund was doing to him.

Ring! This time Edmund picked it up right sway.

"Who's this?"

"Mr. Feinstein who the fuck do you think it is?"

"What's up?"

"The guy's on the spot."

"For when?"

"Now, man. Why do you think I'm callin', for Washington's Birthday?"

"It's late," Edmund said.

"I just got the thing set up."

Edmund struck a match and flipped it on the brown girl's back.

"You noddin' out or what, Edmund?"

"I'm here." The girl moaned in her sleep. Edmund flicked the burning match off her back.

"He's in room three thirteen at the River Royale, His name's Vinnie Crow. He's a big white dude with a big, square, ugly fuckin' head. You can't miss him. He'll be the only guy in the room."

"Then what?"

"There's a chick in there. She's with me. She's gonna wait ten minutes and split. She'll leave the door open. The guy's on the bed passed out."

"How do you know?"

"Look, the guy's a juicehead. He's already on his third quart."

"How do you know he's passed out? The chick has to call you when he's passed out. Then you call me."

"What do you think I'm runnin', a fuckin' telethon over here."

"You said he was passed out, so now he's gotta be passed out," Edmund said, "Call the chick back."

"I can't call the room, man. What if the guy answers?"

"If he's on his third quart he won't be answering telephones,"

"Okay, okay." Mr. Feinstein hung up.

Edmund shook the brown chick. She moaned and licked her sandpaper lips. He lifted her free arm and let it drop knuckle first onto the bed table. Nothing. He got up and knocked softly on the bathroom door. "I'm busy," Raymond said through the door.

Edmund opened the door. "You gotta go, man."

Raymond had the redhead kneeling in the bathtub, her breasts hanging over the side. He had her by the ears, her head pulled all the way back. One side of her face was blue and blotchy. There was a trail of bite marks from her neck down to her breasts.

"Can't get it up," Raymond said hoarsely.

Edmund remembered the old man on Manhattan Avenue. "Cocaine's about always goin' someplace and never gettin' there."

"I got some people coming over," Edmund said. You understand..."

"I've got to desecrate this bitch."

The phone rang in the bedroom, "I ain't got time for this," Edmund said. He kicked Raymond's legs out from under him. Raymond grabbed the air and knocked the glass shelf off the top of the sink. He went down hard, hitting his head against the toilet bowl.

Edmund went back into the bedroom and picked up the phone.

"Okay, he's out. Room three thirteen. The chick's gonna split in fifteen minutes. The door'll be open..."

The redhead staggered out of the bathroom and leaned against the wall, breathing hard. Raymond wobbled out after

her, holding a blood-soaked towel to his arm.

"I got some people coming over," Edmund said.

"Yeah, yeah, sure, I understand. Uh...can I...? He pointed out into the living room.

"Help yourself."

Raymond grabbed the redhead by the back of the neck. "C'mon, slave."

The redhead giggled and looked at Edmund. "Everybody's naked."

Raymond shoved her into the living room. "Get in there."

Edmund turned toward the brown girl, but she was already up, sitting on the edge of the bed, her eyes wide open.

"Can I take a shower?"

"Yeah."

The girl padded obediently into the bathroom.

"Watch out for the broken glass," Edmund said.

In the living room the redhead was bending over a line of coke, her hand trembling so much she could hardly keep the straw in her nose. Edmund stood in the doorway until Raymond noticed him. "C'mon, hurry up and get dressed," Raymond said, shoving the redhead. "My man's got some people comin' over."

"Take your time," Edmund said.

In fifteen minutes they were gone. He opened all the windows. Their odors faded, and it was like nobody had been there.

"Always show something a little cleaner than what you are," the old man on Manhattan Avenue had told him. "If you're a burglar, then you show booster, if you're peddling

reefer you show numbers You ain't never gonna get people to believe you're straight what with hangin' around all hours, what with your wardrobe and your wheels. But if you can get them acceptin' you're something you're not then you're cool because they'll always be lookin' to catch you doin' something you ain't never gonna do."

So Edmund showed coke dealer, which was something cleaner than what he was. He worked the outfit, the black leather pants, African gold bracelet lying smooth on his brown wrist top-of-the-line Rolex. The white boys in the elevator whispered about him when he got off. The potbellied Puerto Rican super gave him a wink when he paid his rent in cash. The old Jewish ladies in the laundry room pursed their lips and looked away when he came in.

It was a good front, but it had its problems, and Raymond was one of them. Raymond had grown up on the block, 107th and Manhattan Avenue, and he had hung out in Cathedral Park with Edmund and the other guys in their crew, the Jokers. But unlike the others, Raymond had stayed out of trouble and concentrated on basketball. He had gotten a scholarship to Duke. Now he was hooked into a Wall Street investment firm. He wore three-piece suits and Johnston and Murphy shoes. He was smart and ambitious, but his nose still came around the block five minutes before his head showed up. So when he heard Edmund was dealing blow he began knocking on the door at all hours. Edmund had to let him in. He had to keep enough of the goods around to make it look like he was a "sho 'nu'" gram dealer. He had to hang out with Raymond. That was the worst part. Edmund didn't like hanging out with anybody.

The doorman knew Raymond so well he didn't bother calling up when he came. There was just a knock, and there was Raymond in the fisheye of the peephole. Giggling and

waving money. He had a fistful of hundred-dollar bills and smelled of sour wine, "Hey, bro, can you tighten me up?"

Edmund had been waiting all day for Sally's call, but he had to deal with Raymond. Raymond marched in and set up his gram scale and his "Tiffany kit," as he called it, which consisted of a stone, a gold-plated razor, a gold straw and a mirror in a leather bag. Edmund couldn't stand cocaine. It made him sick watching Raymond woof on it, starting out up and happy, then after an hour getting that mean look and nonstop rapping about politics and women and white people and whatnot. A little of this powder and he thought he knew everything and could do everything. And Edmund had to put up with it because he had to maintain the front.

But this night had been a little easier. Raymond got restless after a couple of toots. "Let's go out and get some pussy, man," he said.

They went to the Crossroads, a bar across the street from Edmund's building on Seventy-second Street. "It's convenient, livin' on the West Side, man," Raymond said, looking around at all the loose women. "I've got to get out of the Village. Too many faggots."

After a few drinks Raymond forgot about women. "What do you do with your bread, anyway, Edmund? I mean you're in a cash business..."

I give it to the United Negro College Fund," Edmund said.

"Bearer bonds," Raymond said. "It's like they were invented for dudes like you. No name, no way to trace ownership and no tax. All you do is clip the coupons. I can hook you into some gilt-edged motherfuckers, too..."

Then the chicks appeared in the mirror behind them, talking real loud to the bartender about could he get them two seats because they had been standing all day. Working girls on

their night off looking to get as high as possible without paying for it. The brown chick was dressed down in a red ribbed sweater and jeans real tight in the crotch. "The redhead had on black silk pants and a sheer white blouse that showed her nipples.

Raymond gripped Edmund's knee. "You ladies can have our seats." He said getting up.

"Thanks."

"That is if you let us buy you a round."

The redhead giggled and looked from Raymond to Edmund. They were just what she had come out for, "That's no hardship to me."

The redhead's name was Eloise. The brown chick's name was Arlene. She was short and trim with the cat's oval face and slightly bulging eyes. Eloise was all made up, rouge and lipstick and a beauty mark under one eye. Arlene was wearing black lipstick.

Raymond flipped a coin, and Edmund called "heads." It ended up heads and Edmund moved next to Arlene.

"What are you drinkin'?" Eloise didn't know what had happened but Arlene knew Edmund had chosen her and it cheered her up to know she had beaten out a white chick.

They said they worked for the telephone company "in personnel." Edmund said he owned a shoe store in Brooklyn. Raymond was the only one who told the truth about what he did, and they didn't believe him either. After a few trips to the bathroom, and the promise of a lot more, they went back to Edmund's apartment.

Eloise settled herself on the couch right next to Raymond and his Tiffany set, but Arlene walked around the living room looking behind the chairs as if she expected to find a dead body.

"This a sublet?" she asked Edmund.

"Why do you say that?"

She pointed to the books in the bookcase. "You read all of these?"

"They're all hollow," Raymond said from the couch. "He keeps his money in them."

"Raymond thinks he's the only nigger in the world can read, Edmund said. "Actually, they're my brother Thomas's books."

"What's he do?"

"He was an electro physicist working on the space program."

"He committed suicide, didn't he, Edmund?" Raymond said.

Edmund ignored him. It was either that or throw him out, and he just couldn't do that...yet. "If you're lookin' for the stash," he said to Arlene.

She pointed to the photos on the wall. "Who's that?"

"My father. He had a septet that played around New York in the thirties and forties."

"Is that him with the saxophone?"

"Yeah."

"Looks like you."

Gotta speed this shit up, Edmund thought, suddenly remembering the call. "Let's try it out," he said.

Arlene's hand was soft. He liked the docile way she followed him into the bedroom. Liked the way she stood quietly while he took her clothes off, slipped the sweater over her head, eased her back on the bed, slid off the soft suede boots. Pulled the jeans over her knees.

But then she dove between his legs before he had time to get into bed, and started in on him like a windup doll, and he realized she was doing what she thought was expected of her, that she was really in a hurry to get back to the drugs. Nobody's

a whore by accident.

So he lay in bed a few hours later, after she had knocked herself out, and watched the clock - one minute less, one minute less – and then Raymond came in dragging the redhead by the hair, and slammed the bathroom door.

One minute less...one minute less.

And then the phone rang.

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