SPEAKEASY NIGHTS

THE Rheingold Speakeasy isn't a speakeasy but a middle-class German family hotel, the kind you might stay at in Hamburg or Munich or Baden if you wanted to save money. A New Jersey town that is a ten-minute ferry-ride from your office. It is called Zukor's Rheingold Hotel.

You go in through the bar. It is true that Zukor's Hotel has two other entrances, but I never heard of anyone using them. The bar is what attracts you in the first place—the long mahogany bar, curved in the middle like the stern of a ship, with three brass taps ready to spout beer; the first tap good light beer for the ladies, the second tap good dark beer for the gentlemen, the third tap near-beer for the Federal agents. You can get a glass of Rhine wine or an old-fashioned cocktail only if you know August Zukor, the round-headed, barrel-bellied man who inherited the hotel from his father, Peter Zukor.

Green denim curtains, hung on polished rings and rods, are drawn each evening across the big plate glass windows of the bar. In summer they are drawn at six, in winter at four. If you have been sitting at one of the wooden tables and looking out through the window you are sorry when the green curtain cuts off your view of the cobblestoned street with its line of irregular, low roofs, its bent iron lamp-posts, and the square shape of the Imperial Hotel, Zukor's competitor, bulking in the twilight on the opposite corner.

"*Zwei Seidel*" is the usual order. The bartender sets the glasses down on round felt pads which are piled in stacks on every table. They are stamped with hearts, harps, butterflies and angels and with mottoes and poetry in fancy letters: "A Man Works His Day, but Money-Interest Works All Day and All Night and Sundays." . . . "Today Your Sweetheart, Tomorrow Your Pain, and Still You Do It Again and Again." . . . "God Made the World and Rested. God Made Man and Rested. Then God Made Woman. Since Then, Neither God nor Man has Rested."

Emil Moos, for thirty years August Zukor's bartender, a baldheaded man with a long, clever nose, a horseshoe stickpin, and a slight halt in his step, brightens up after the curtains are drawn. The whole atmosphere quickens. The bar-lights sparkle in the brown glass eyes of the three stuffed moose and the one buffalo on the wall over your head. Some officers from a German boat come in. The thin-faced waiter comes in with beer orders from the dining-room; some gray-headed, prosperous-looking Germans come in; a newsboy comes in; and then, with dragging steps, carrying a bulging canvas gripsack with a rope handle, an old, stooping, slack-faced man comes in. He hesitates near the door, looking at the bright lights and the faces. He has on a derby hat and a long black frock coat. He opens his bag, takes out a small prayer rug and tries to sell it to someone at the nearest table. Emil Moos sees him, straightens up and calls harshly, "*Raus*—" waving his hand. The old man smiles a twitching smile. Clumsily pushing the piece of cloth back into his bag, he goes out with his slow shuffling step. . . .

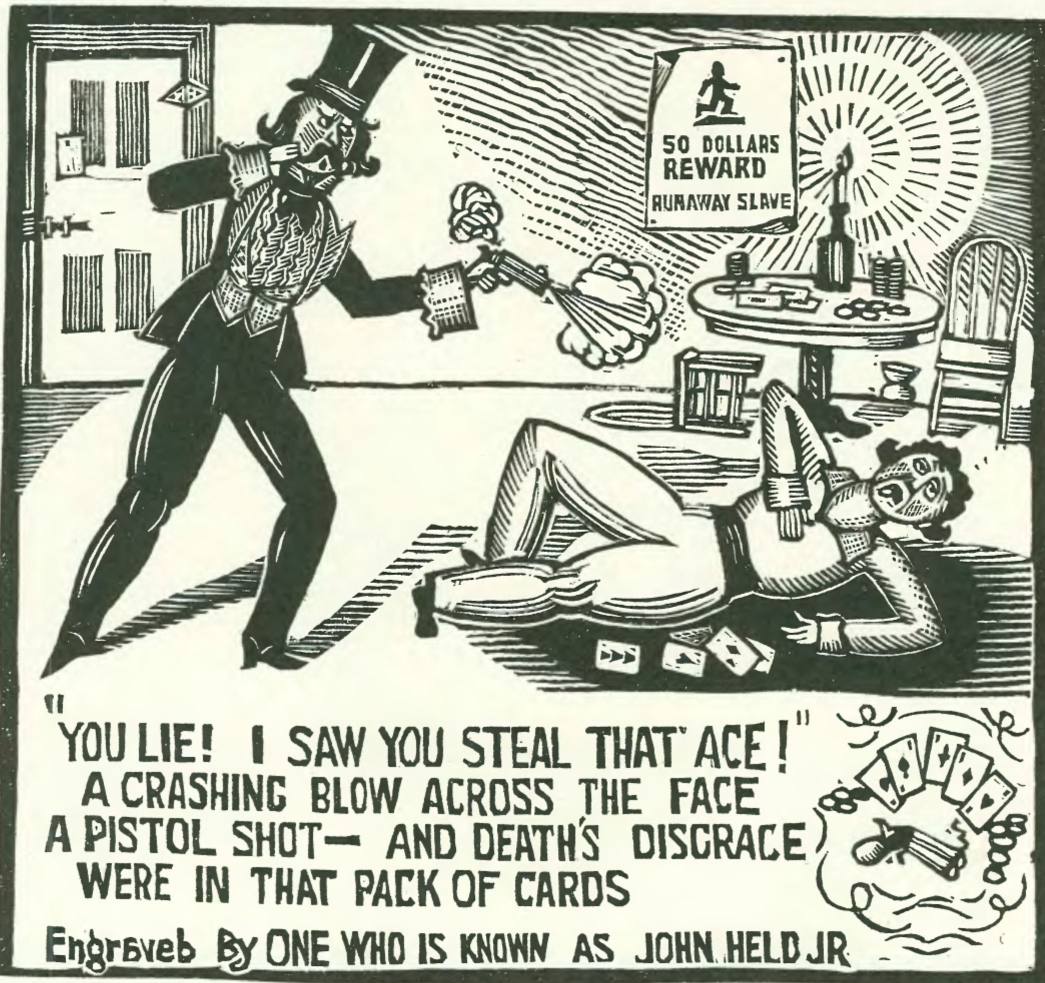
The atmosphere of Zukor's bar doesn't leave you even when you leave. As you walk down to the ferry, you are sure to see at least a dozen drunks weaving along the street or sitting on the curbstone talking to themselves. Boys ride bicycles on the sidewalks; sailors have arguments on the street corners; from the cafés down by the docks come sounds of broken glass and pianolas playing. Manhattan looks a long way off.

THE Garibaldi Speakeasy is owned by Bartolomeo Marti, a tall soldierly man who stands all evening like a sentry on the front steps between his potted boxwood bushes. In the middle of his mouth he holds a black cigar the lighted end of which throws a glow on his chin and nose. As you go in he lifts his hat, takes out the cigar and says, "Good evenink . . . nice evenink . . ." As you go out he lifts his hat, takes out the cigar and says, "Good evenink . . . Thang you. . . ."

Inside you meet his wife Maria and his daughter Lucrezia, who calls herself Lucy, and three Tonys—Tony Scapo, the red-haired waiter; Tony Amato, the chef; and Tony Zelli, the boy-friend of Lucrezia. They run the place together. The room, a long, cream-colored dining-room on the ground floor of a made-over house, is furnished with white tables, a victrola, a player-piano, and twenty-four canaries in brass cages.

Food, of course, is served here, but the main thing is the liquor. Bartolomeo Marti has a special cocktail made of brandy and Angostura bitters. He claims that none of his stuff has been cut. The best drink he has is a liqueur called by an Italian name that means a thousand flowers. It is a clear amber color like a grape and has a perfume like pine-needles. It comes in a long-necked bottle through which a wire runs and on the wire the sugar precipitated out of the liqueur hardens in snow-colored lumps and crystals.

Over the victrola which is such an important feature of the place hangs a picture of General Garibaldi, with the Italian flag nailed over it and two holy palms underneath. The stern face of the old liberator presides over everything, as if the music and drink-



ing that go on here were part of a perpetual fiesta appointed in his honor. Certain other faces recur often enough to be fixtures. One is an elegant old man with black eyebrows and long white hair, who comes in with an old, dark-eyed woman who looks like a gypsy. Another is a young Italian with a scarred cheek and Broadway clothes, who eats and drinks by himself, scowling. Marti's uptown customers call him the Gunman.

Late one evening, when only these people and one other couple were left in the place, Bartolomeo Marti came in and closed the doors. He explained that Lucrezia, his daughter, was seventeen years old that evening—he was giving a party for her—he wanted everyone to stay. Tony the waiter carried in a tray with glasses of "A Thousand Flowers." Tony the chef brought in a cake made of cheese and almonds. Tony the boy friend jumped up and danced with his girl. The man with the white hair and the dark-eyed woman danced to a tune played by Marti on the pianola—a dance made up of slow whirls and sudden pauses, of many elegant steps taken on tiptoe to the right and to the left. Lucrezia clapped, but because of the visitors she was a little embarrassed; she wanted to show that she was modern and American.

"This gets my goat. Let's put on a jazz record," she cried.

"My brudder will sing," said Marti, waving her back. . . .

It was the Gunman. Nobody could play, so he sang to the pianola; he cleared his throat nervously, but he could sing. "He sell booze," Marti explained as his guests left. "He make heem good money. He's gotta car, he's gotta fine car. I tell heem he give you a ride home."

—Niven Busch, Jr.

THE FIVE O'CLOCK GIRL

Above the flame the kettle sings,
A nervous waitress passes tea,
The talk is of a thousand things
That matter not at all to me.

If I should suddenly arise
And absolutely speak my mind,
It might, for me, not be so wise,
But what a bomb to leave behind!