



# Broadway Ticket Scandal

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

**Clipped for as much as \$60 for hard-to-get tickets to hit shows, out-of-town visitors to New York are getting a bitter taste of scalping. Police, reputable theater men and some brokers have declared war on the "ticket thieves" but the slippery gougers are hard to nail**

**I**T'S summer again on Broadway, and showtown is flooded with vacationers who have a few brief days to see the sights, the wonders and, of course, the hit shows. Perhaps you are planning a jaunt to New York and will want to go to the theater. This may even be the primary reason for your trip. If so, here is a piece of sound advice.

Bring a lot of money. You are not going to get yourself and the missus into any of the real hits without spending just about an average week's salary on a pair of tickets for something you can write home about. Be prepared to pay up to \$60 each—the exorbitancy of the price will depend on your luck, the day of the week (Saturday nights are the worst) and just how quickly you want in.

Ticket gouging reached such proportions recently that New York City is waging a new cam-

paign to stamp it out. At the risk of sounding cynical the writer predicts this campaign will not be any more successful in rectifying the basic problem than were those of the past. Even New York's Commissioner of Investigation, John Murtagh, who is sponsoring the probe, doesn't sound too hopeful.

"It's always difficult to get evidence of this kind of overcharging," he admits.

And why is it difficult, if not actually impossible, to stop ticket scalping? Because you, dear reader, make it so. Every time you buy a pasteboard from a scalper you are not only aiding and abetting a malpractice, but you are also an accessory before the fact in breaking a state law. Ticket gouging is absolutely illegal, but it takes two to make it as popular as it is today—you and the scalper. If you want to see the best plays and musicals

Ticket scalping didn't come in with the great surge for seats at South Pacific. It's an old, old problem that plagued even Mr. Charles Dickens during his second American tour in the sixties. Five-dollar seats for the Dickens readings were bringing \$50. Scalping of tickets for popular Broadway shows has long been a New York headache and, as it has before, the city is again trying to put a stop to it

badly enough, you usually pay the prices demanded.

The simple truth is that, so far as offering reasonably quick entrance to the top Broadway shows is concerned, the box offices might just as well close their windows. The only way to get a ticket quickly is through the offices of a broker. It is only those who are willing to purchase months ahead who can gain admittance at list price, plus tax.

It is doubtful that \$30, or even \$40, would buy you a ticket for a Saturday night at *Death of a Salesman*, *Detective Story*, or the musicals, *South Pacific* and *Kiss Me, Kate*. There have been any number of \$60 payments for *South Pacific* tickets which were supposed to retail at \$6 each. A film producer got a pair for \$200. But he was probably unusually impatient.

A ticket broker is licensed by the City of New York to provide additional service to the theater-going public. He is allowed to charge 75 cents (plus tax) more than the box-office price on each orchestra ticket, and under the industry code 50 cents (plus tax) for balcony seats. There are 68 licensed ticket brokers in New York. Some of these were operating within the law when the investigation started. In fact, representatives of eleven of the largest agencies have declared at this time of writing, that they will take steps to organize and police the industry against scalping.

The inquiry got off to a flying start when the box-office treasurer of *South Pacific* was suspended by the Majestic Theater owners because he steadfastly refused to answer any questions about how and why Pacific tickets reached speculators—and hardly anybody else. This disciplinary move was followed by the Investigation Commissioner's temporary impounding for study of the books and records of Pacific and those of *Kiss Me, Kate*. The *Kate* treasurer was on the commissioner's carpet.

If theater books and records offer any information on ticket scalping, all Broadway will be greatly surprised. Ticket gouging is not a matter which is entered in the books.

Commissioner Murtagh called for the suspension of at least two licensed brokers, and said he expected to close ten agencies or more before he is through. He was also doing his best to catch and chastise unlicensed ticket peddlers. In this latter connection, he demanded the books and records of several of New York's most staid and substantial men's clubs. A ticket broker, licensed or unlicensed, is practically a member of the staff at many clubs and flossy restaurants in the city. Dealing with a wealthy class of patrons, these club and restaurant ticket peddlers demand and get some fairly frightening prices.

The theater owners and producers have also decided to do something about ticket scalping. But this coalition of showmen who think they can change the situation by making new rules is reminiscent of another coalition nine years ago, which thought that speculation could be outlawed by creating rules under which ticket thieves operate today.

That is why the more hard-headed showmen and observers in that business aren't very hopeful. Many ticket brokers, honest and otherwise, are laughing at the probe. While the city's investigation may nail and outlaw a few thieves in the end everybody expects that the theatergoing public, a

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ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY DEVLIN

# July

By **ROBERT MACLEOD**

**The adventures of Nancy, a small, pathetic heroine who lived dangerously in a world of beautiful lies**

HE just walked in when I was doing the dishes and said, "Can I help you?" She was about six. Her eyes looked older, but I didn't catch that then. I just thought they looked big and brown.

"No, thanks," I said, wondering what she wanted. It gets pretty hot in Vets Village during the summer months, so we leave the door open.

"I could dry the dishes."

"We don't dry the dishes here. We just let them stand and let the water—" "Evaporate" was probably a little beyond her, so I said, "Dry up."

"Do you go to summer school, too?" she asked.

"Yes."

"So does my father."

"That's nice." The suds had all gone out of the water, so I turned the faucet on hard.

She waited until I had turned it off. "Are you married?"

"Sure. I wouldn't be living here if I weren't."

"Where would you live?"

"Oh, up in the dormitories. Excuse me." I put some dry dishes back on the shelf.

"Where's your wife?"

"Downtown shopping. And what's your name?"

"Nancy. My birthday's in July."

"That's nice. Mine's in April." When I turned around, she was already out the front door.

I mentioned the meeting with Nancy to my wife when she got home.

"Oh, Nancy," she said. "That's the Herrills. They live over in 28. Haven't you ever seen him in classes? No, I guess you wouldn't. He's taking pre-engineering. Can you imagine? He's thirty years old, and he's just a freshman. They've got three children. Nancy's the oldest."

"What's he doing in college?"

"I don't know. I heard he was a mechanic, and a very good one. Guess when the G.I. Bill came along he took advantage of it."

"Well," I said, "you can't blame him for that."

"No, but I wonder how they make it with three children. Look at all the time he has to go yet. But isn't Nancy pretty, though? She's very bright."

"Yeah, I guess so," I said. "What's for supper?"

Nancy came in the next morning when we were having breakfast. She had a magazine under her arm, and stood silent, bright-eyed, watching us eat. It made me feel uncomfortable.

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On Nancy's birthday it rained miserably. She stood outside, watching the drops fall into a puddle



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