The Man Who Sold the Eiffel Tower

Victor Lustig was born in 1890 in what is now the Czech Republic. As a **youngster** he studied languages. He also studied people: their habits, mannerisms, and especially their weaknesses, and decided to do something in that field instead. By the age of twenty he was a **confirmed conman**. By the age of thirty he was a confirmed wanted man **on the run** from police in several European countries.

He started over again in the United States and called himself 'Count' because it sounded important. One **dupe** he conned was Al Capone; the most dangerous criminal in America at that time. The Count knew that the crime lord couldn't be **taken in** like the others; he would get **revenge**.

Lustig planned something different for the **underworld boss**. The count asked Capone to invest $50,000 in a **swindle** that he said was working on. Lustig promised to **double his money** in sixty days. The **homicidal** Capone gave the cash - and a warning of what would happen to Lustig if there was a **double-cross**. Lustig let the money **sit in the bank** for sixty days. At the end of that time he went back to Capone with a look of disappointment. He told his investor that the deal **feel through**. Just before Capone was about to explode, Lustig handed back the $50,000. The crime boss was so impressed with Lustig's honesty (?)! that he rewarded the conman with a thousand dollars. Which is what Lustig expected Capone to do.

In 1925 Lustig was back in Paris with his new friend Dapper Dan, **relaxing** at an outside café. They were in need of money just as they read in the newspaper that the Eiffel Tower was **in need of repairs**. While others said what was really needed was to **tear down** the 985 foot structure. Almost immediately, the Count thought up a scheme; he would sell Paris' most famous landmark to a scrap metal dealer.

He gave himself the title 'Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Mail and Telegraphs'. Dapper Dan would be his secretary. They typed-up letters with Lustig's title printed on them and mailed them out to the five leading **scrap metals dealers** in Paris. They were asked to come meet with Lustig and his secretary at their room in the **fashionable** Hotel Crillon.

The buyers were told that it had become too **costly** to repair the Eiffel Tower and that the 7,000 ton steel structure would be sold to the highest **bidder** to be torn down. They were also told to **keep the meeting secret**; if the public found out too soon there would be an **outcry**. The secret bids meant nothing to Lustig. He talked to each client and **picked out** the man **most likely to fall for the scam**; the one who seemed most anxious to get ahead. A week later, the chosen victim, Monsieur Poisson, showed up. The Count and Dapper Dan quickly cashed their **earnings** and just as quickly **fled** France for Austria. Lustig never did say how much he got paid for France's top tourist attraction.

Resting in Vienna they **scanned** the newspapers to see if Poisson went to the police; he didn't. Poisson was too embarrassed to tell anyone what happened. After a month's **vacation** Lustig and Dapper Dan decided to do it again. This time they used the same techniques but with different results. The scrap metal dealer who was **fleeced** reported his loss of $100,000 to the police. Once again the Count fled to America. **The law caught up with Lustig** when he tried to **pass off counterfeit dollars**. In 1935 he was sentenced to twenty years in Alcatraz prison where he died of pneumonia in 1947. While in prison he was protected from **harm** by orders from another prisoner... Al Capone.

**WORDS**

1. habit
2. conman
3. con
4. take in
5. homicidal
6. fall through
7. outcry
8. phoney
9. counterfeit
10. confirm
11. claim
12. to hand
13. flee
14. tear down
15. bid

a) demolish
b) state, declare
c) fake, forged
d) run away
e) cheat
f) custom
g) give
h) protest

**Vocabulary**
counterfeit money is not real money
bid means to offer, propose (like offer money in an auction)
flee - fled - fled means to run away from something