

*James Hulse Ausmus &  
Yvonne Patricia (Caviness) Ausmus*

[Henry Franklin Ausmus](#) and **Floy Eller (Ellison) Ausmus** took their two young children and brand-new camera to the 1918 California Liberty Fair in Los Angeles. The fair was a short drive from where they had been living in Huntington Beach. They took many photos of the kids and spent the day along the beach and riding the Ferris wheels and other attractions in celebration of the ending of the First World War.

California was a radical change from where Henry and Floy had grown up in the small town of Speedwell, Tennessee. However, Henry did spend a short time traveling abroad when he joined the Merchant Marines as a young man. Floy had only been exposed to the rural rolling hills of north eastern Tennessee and had moved with her parents as a teen to the arid plains of northern Texas in 1908.



Floy's parents were [Berry Ellison](#) (1863-1951) and **Anna C. Edwards** (pictured at left) who had moved from Speedwell, Tennessee to Crosbyton, Texas in 1908; Floy's real mother, and sister to Anna, was **Adeline J. Edwards** who died when Floy was too young to

remember.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of January 1920, The US Census was taken for Huntington Beach, Orange County, California. Henry can be seen listing his occupation as a sign painter with Floy taking care of the home and their two children, **Edward Otto Ausmus** and **Marguerite Anita Ausmus**.

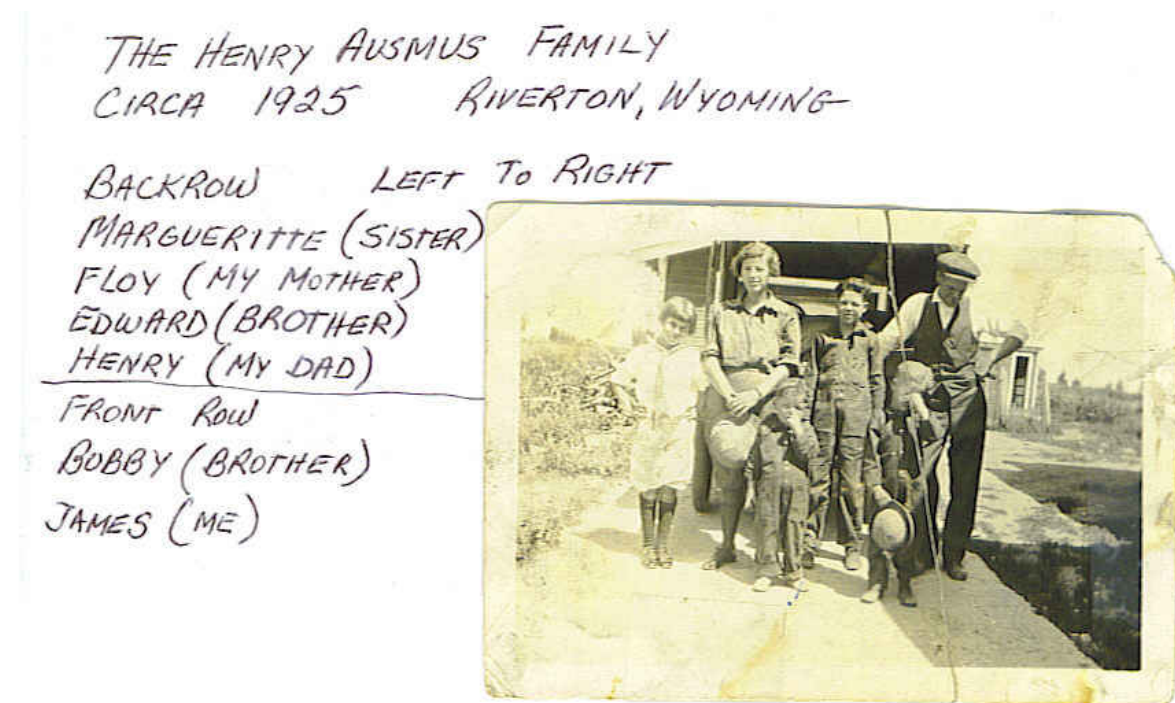
By the summer of that year, Floy let Henry know that she was pregnant with their third child. As with all their children, delivery would take place near the home of Floy's parents back in Texas. Henry did not like California and would never return.

On November 5, 1920 **James Hulse Ausmus** was born in Plainview, Texas. By 1925, the Ausmus family moved to Riverton, Wyoming where the kids attended school. Floy opened a hat and dress shop while Henry took odd jobs painting signs. By the summer of 1926, the Ausmus family moved once again to Belle Fourche, South Dakota where James continued his schooling.

The following is a fictional story based on true events of his James' journey. The story was probably written in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~eda70/the%20ellisons.pdf>

When James was in the second or third grade, the family moved to Cortez, Colorado but didn't stay too long. Floy was pregnant once again and Henry sent her and the kids home by train to Texas. Floy never made it to Texas and gave birth to **Robert Paul Ausmus** in Stafford, Arizona on Christmas Eve 1922.



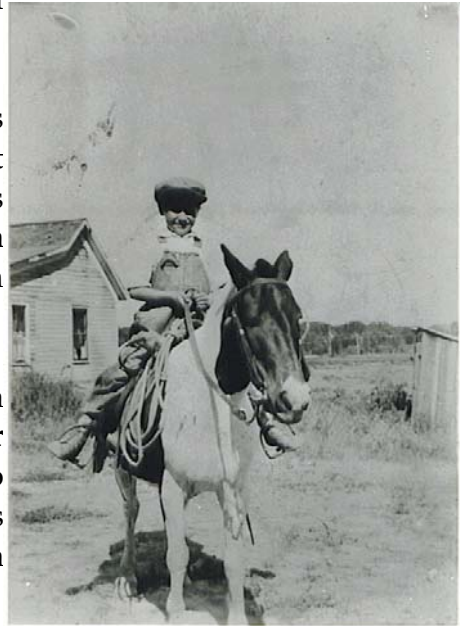
James' earliest and fondest memories were of picking cotton in the Texas fields with his school friends. They didn't work too hard and instead spent a lot of time visiting with each other; at their age, not a lot of work was expected, especially while working for penny candy at the local general store. When asked about his early memories of Texas, James recalled,

*"It was so cold, the only thing between Texas and the North-Pole was a barbed wire fence, and the fence was down."*

Prior to 1930, the Ausmus family moved once again to Belle Fourche, South Dakota and can be seen in the 1930 Census taken on April 18th of that year. James' father continued to look for odd jobs painting. He targeted grain silos that could be used as advertising billboards and solicited cigarette companies as potential clients. Floy stayed home with the kids as much as she could and mostly raised them by herself. She worked long hours as a waitress in restaurants to feed the family while Edward and Marguerite babysat.

On day while visiting relatives in Texas, James and his younger brother, Bobby got into a fist fight. Instead of getting in trouble by his parents after beating up Bobby, James decided to hitch hike back to Colorado. He showed up at home a few days later to very worried parents.

In 1934, Henry and Floy split ways, and on March 8, a friend of the family, **Walter Turner** took Floy and the Ausmus children west to Corvallis, Oregon in his Touring Car. James began his final year of Junior High School in Corvallis.



While attending Corvallis High School, James Ausmus joined the Army National Guard at age 16. The service only accepted men over the age of 18, but he stretched the truth and told them he was 18. He had a feeling that the service knew he was lying but also knew that they needed to fill positions. James was paid \$2 per week for his service. One week per year they went to Camp Placid where he later stated that they mostly worked for their cigarette money.

During his sophomore year of high school, James father past away in Crosbyton, Texas. As James recalled, his best memories was when his father was not around. Henry was not a drinker or abusive, he was just a vagabond and not a good



father. However, James said that his mother's love filled the void.

When James was on summer break during his senior year of high school, he traveled back to Texas to see his kin-folks – the Ellisons. Prior to leaving, James stated that his mother's parting words to him were, "*don't write home for money*" - They were very poor and he knew better anyway.

He hopped on a train that was headed back east and made it to Crosbyton where he had enough money to stay for two days. He spent his last nickel (literally) and rode on another train back west. The train stopped for a night in Colorado where he met a man that asked him if he needed a job that included room and board. He picked corn on a farm for a few weeks and saved nearly \$20. When summer break was over, James jumped backed on a train and headed home to Corvallis.

James graduated high school on May 31, 1939 and received his diploma shortly afterward. He was the only Ausmus in his family to ever graduate and took a lot of pride in his dedication. In those days, it was very easy to quit school for a job that paid decent wages for a young laborer.

During the Depression Era, James would get his extra money by public boxing at local Masonic, Elk and other types of public assembly buildings. According to his brother Bob, James was a good fighter. James, Edward and Bobby travel around together to different towns around the Corvallis area. The public would throw money into the circle created by the crowds. This type of fund raising was called "silver showers" because of the coins tossed in the ring. In his high school years, James' mother opened her own restaurant and worked as a waitress where she met and fell in love with **Henry King**. Henry was a dishwasher in the restaurant but his actual occupation was a painter who had lost work due to the depression. Coincidentally, Floy had now married two Henry's that were both painters.

During the War in Europe, James wanted to join the United States Air Force and was recruited by the Army Air Corp. He chose the Air Corp because he didn't care to be in the



infantry and wanted to be a pilot. He said that he couldn't stand sleeping in tents and wanted to be treated a little better than an infantry grunt. The Air Corp seemed to be the best choice for James but they wanted at least two years of college to enlist. The recruiter denied him, but told him to stick around until a position opened with qualifications requiring a high school diploma, so he did. And, when a position opened up, James was accepted and sent to the Vancouver Barracks in Washington State and then to Hamilton Field, California in Marin County. Due to his poor eyesight, James did not qualify to be a pilot but did have a chance to ride in several aircraft.

While stationed in Hamilton Field in 1940, James was sent to Moffet Field (south of SF) for additional training where crews were waiting to finish a base in Stockton, which finished construction in 1941. James was paid a dollar a day for his service as a crew chief and aircraft mechanic. None of the kids under James' direction had experience as mechanics, even with cars, so training the young men became quite a struggle as he recalled. During his service, many aircraft had arrived for repair. James was responsible for 3 North American AT6 planes, which were used as pilot trainers during that era.

During his stay in Sacramento, James owned an Indian motorcycle. One day he decided to ride it to see his mother in Oregon, traveling northbound on Old Highway 99 (prior to I-5). James later stated it was the worst trip in his life because he decided to drive in the winter and froze nearly to death. He hit snow over Grants Pass and slipped off the road once or twice.

In early 1941 while stationed at Mather Air Force Base, James and his GI friends decided to attend a public dance at Sacramento Auditorium. Public dances were very popular back then, recalled James. They had live jazz orchestras, loud music and attracted quite a lot of crowds. The soldiers at the dances congregated together asking the girls to dance after gathering enough nerve. The best way to gather additional nerve was to drink a little alcohol.

*"The GIs would collect funds and purchase a half pint of alcohol and drink it straight. The bottle would get passed around between them until they pitched in for another. It was amazing to see how many times new funds could be collected for more bottles as the night progressed on. Everyone loved to dance back then. The music was always a live*



*orchestra and it was the best way to meet new friends."*

James shined his shoes, ironed his uniform and visited the local Air Base barber; a gentleman that he later found out was a man by the name of **Bill Caviness**. While at the dance, James met a beautiful young woman named **Yvonne Patricia Caviness** who he later found out was the daughter of said Bill Caviness. Yvonne was the only daughter of [William "Bill" Lemuel Caviness](#) and [Beatrice Mae \(Case\) Caviness](#) and was attending the dance with her mother, Beatrice who also loved to dance. Yvonne was born in Sacramento on November 22, 1925.

The Caviness family had moved to Sacramento from Baker County, Oregon in the 1920's where Bill was able to find work in Sacramento harvesting rice using mules and horses. Bill met Beatrice in Sacramento while attended Barber school. Bill eventually got a job cutting hair for the GIs at Stockton Air Force Base. The Case family moved to Sacramento from Walla Walla, Washington in 1920 when Beatrice's mother, **Florence (Seachris) Case** contracted the Spanish Flu.



Yvonne's earliest recollection is when the Great Depression hit the United States, many people had trouble getting work. She could remember the displaced Oklahomans who left the Dust Bowl and wound up in California looking for work. Many California natives resented these "OKIES" because jobs were scarce and these people were willing to take any job for lower pay. She recalled the settlers camped along side the road sleeping in tents and in their cars sharing what little they had. James recalled the migrants but expressed that the newspapers exaggerated many of the stories that these people experienced, he said, *"Everyone had it tough back then."*

During one of James and Yvonne's early dates, the Japanese made a surprise attacked at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Upon returning to base after the date, a military officer stopped the car at the base's front gates with a sub-machine gun and a straight face asking for James' papers. James showed him his

identification and the man notified Jim that he needed need to return to the base now and without the girl because the United States had just been attacked.

During the war, James and Yvonne recalled food rationing. *"Even bacon grease was saved and bottled and reclaimed to the local meat market where they would be given credit for additional meat"* recalled Yvonne. She also said that no one questioned the rationing or other similar actions of the government in their pursuit to win the war. *"The public was glad to help back then- not like these days."*

In 1942, while stationed at Deming New Mexico, James and Yvonne shared a home with friends, **Wallace and Vira Logan**. Wallace was very kind and friendly and absolutely loved James and Yvonne's kids. James later (somewhat) jokingly accused Wallace of being a communist sympathizer during the McCarthy Era.

Jim and Yvonne moved to many different bases during his enlistment. At one point, James took additional schooling in Illinois for mechanic school and became instructor for the trainees on the flightlines.

James and Yvonne soon moved to Denver, Colorado, then on to Chandler, Arizona which was a training school for bombardiers. James became a bombsite attachment mechanic for the Norton Bombsite. It was in Arizona where their first child, **Ronald Burton Ausmus** was born in a Mesa, Arizona hospital on September 4, 1942. Later when Ron was older, his brothers would claim he was a wild child they recall him riding his bicycle on the roof of Corvallis elementary school in San Leandro, Ca.



James and Yvonne were sent to Deming, New Mexico where **Michael Danny Ausmus** was born in a Carlsbad hospital on June 16, 1944. Even in his teens, Mike was an excellent mechanic and had a 51 Ford. He charged his brothers 25 cents to ride in his car to teach him to drive. The money would be used to buy a gallon of gas.

While living in New Mexico, James and Yvonne lived in a very small trailer in the desert. *"Their trailer had a knee-high white picket fence around it,* recalled son, Ron. Yvonne was sent back to Sacramento on a troop-train with her newborn, Michael and her young son, Ron. James would



return after his transfer was approved.

After the Germans surrendered in Europe, the United States was still at war with Japan. James pleaded with his commanding officers to be sent to Japan but he was told that he had "too many points". Points were given to soldiers ranking them on availability for service. Because Jim had two children and had already been enlisted for many years, he was not drafted for Japan. *"I was really anxious to go and wanted to see some action"* recalled James.

After being discharged from the Service when the Japanese surrendered, James and Yvonne moved into the home of Yvonne's parents in Sacramento, CA. James went to work for Northern Motors for 90 cents per hour. He used his GI money and saved for his own personal tools. He was also given mechanics tools by the government to start his trade after discharge. As a mechanic, he bored motors



and degreased the engines in vats of Lye. New engines were not being built due to the war. To earn additional money to support his family, James took a second job driving a cab at night and a third job during weekends working for a private garage.

James had a great sense of humor, his humor was always more acute in the literary form rather than in oral. James' brother Bob recalled receiving one letter from James during Bob's service overseas, James explained that his body was confused from teaching night classes to the GIs. He complained in his letter that,

*"when I lay down to sleep I get hungry and when I set down at the table to eat, I get aroused."*

James quit his job at Northern Motors after reaching \$1.67 and one half cent per hour and took a cut in pay to work for McClelland Field AFB where he received better medical benefits for his family. He worked as an aircraft mechanic for the B17 and B24 and all aircrafts and worked on automatic pilot mechanism and bombsite mechanism.



*"When aircraft got near target the pilot put the plane on automatic pilot except for elevation. The bombardier then took manual control of the stabilizer that had knobs that controlled the plane through the autopilot. The Bombardier ran the scope out and adjusted speed of airplane until crosshairs of bombsite stayed on target. The bombs were automatically released as long as cross hairs were on the target. "*

James and Yvonne had finally saved enough money to move into their first home in the community of Dos Rios in Sacramento, CA where **Kenneth Douglas Ausmus** was born on October 8, 1946. The community was a subdivision of government subsidized housing (duplexes). Kenny was delivered in Mercy Hospital where Bill Caviness drove Yvonne to the hospital while James was at work. As a kid, Kenny loved to go to the movies with his siblings. His father would give them each a quarter and they'd watch cowboy movies and comedies such as Laurel and Hardy and the Marx bros.

On 24 Nov 1947, James and Yvonne gave birth to their last child and eagerly awaited first girl, **Judith Diane Ausmus**. As a kid, Judy loved to dance. Yvonne would make dresses for her and take her places to show off her dancing skills.

James soon moved laterally within the airbase to the planning field that was responsible for detecting Russian aircraft that could potentially attack the U.S. by traveling over the North Pole. On March 19, 1949, James received a training certificate from Sperry Gyroscope, Inc for his training in the maintenance of the A-1B Gun Bomb Rocket Sight. Ron can remember his father talking about the parts of the planes and how the guns would pop out of compartments - shoot - and then retract. James would say jokingly, "You know I can get in trouble for telling you this top secret information on the aircraft I'm



working on. Ron used to love hearing those stories.

By this time, Yvonne also took a job at McClelland AFB in building 640. James and Yvonne saved enough money to purchase a home at 829 Bell Avenue in Sacramento. The home was on a very narrow lot but held more than an acre. The man who built the home lived next door and sold it to the Ausmuses for \$3,500. The home was very small with knotty pine interior paneling on the un-insulated walls and lacked indoor plumbing. Behind the home was the outhouse and pump house. Yvonne had to wash the kids in a large portable wash tub and soon James began to dig his own septic system and installed leach lines and a new toilet in the rear porch area that he converted to a bathroom. He built a custom plastered bathtub because they couldn't afford to buy a new one. He performed all the work himself and was quite a handyman.

Also in the backyard was a chicken coop. To make a little extra money and feed the kids, the Ausmuses bought and sold chickens and at the eggs. Young Ron could remember plucking feathers and cooking the chickens.

It was during this time that James' older brother, Edward left his family and moved into the home. James and Ed converted the chicken coop into a room where Ed stayed for a year or so. Ed really loved James' kids but wasn't a very good father to his own kids who he left with their mother in Oregon.

Prior to working at McClellan AFB, Yvonne had taken a job working as a waitress and also performed clerical work at night for the Speed Boat Association. The building, as it still stands today, was converted to a river-side restaurant that is now called "Crawdads River Cantina".

It was while working for McClelland in the 1950s that James took on a job as a manager for a semi-professional baseball team called the Cellars. Young Ronny would act as bat-boy.

Later, James and Yvonne moved the family to Sierra View Lane in Sacramento. While attending school, young Kenny could remember having bomb raid drills in which the teacher would pull heavy curtains over the windows to prevent the glass from shattering into the children at their desks. After the war, the Russian communist threat of mutually assured destruction via nuclear weapons was ever-present in the American mind.

James and Yvonne moved once again. This time to San Leandro, CA where James worked as a purchasing agent for Air Co., in Oakland. Yvonne took a job working for Pacific Intermountain Express, the largest trucking company in the world at the time. Yvonne had to take an entrance test to work for the company.

The company didn't actually hire non-high school graduates (she passed 11<sup>th</sup> grade) but she scored so well on the test they hired her anyway. Later, when the kids had grown and moved away, they also lived for a time in Santa Rosa.

Yvonne was very intelligent woman and was the glue that held the family together. As an only child, she wasn't used to large families and was always hesitant to punish her young children. Sometimes when the kids would act up she'd scream and holler but rarely spanked the kids. One time recalled by her son, Kenny, *"She spanked me, but I just looked at her and laughed. She burst out in tears and that was all it took for me to straighten up."*

James and Yvonne loved the San Francisco Area and loved to take the kids to the parks. James had many allergies and suffered from the heat in Sacramento, so they moved to the Bay Area.

In the 1980S, James went into business with his younger brother, William Ausmus. The partnership was called **Ausmus**



**Trucking** but only lasted a few years. Instead of giving up, James purchased two of his own trucks and worked for several more years in the trucking business.

Later in life, James began his interest in genealogy and loved the game of golf. He is credited with having made two holes in one. James loved to take his son, Ron golfing and only gave up the game in his early seventies after a bout with vertigo.

James and Yvonne purchased a two story home in Milpitas, California in the early 1970s. Every year during Christmas, the Ausmus family would take their children and grandchildren to the house and would have football games in the cul de sac while James and Yvonne entertained their children on the rear porch. The office room in James' house always had a typewriter in it and a boxing or basketball game was always on the television next to a chess board. James' kids knew he loved golfing and always gave him memorabilia and knick-knacks for his shelves.



In the late 70s James and Yvonne were able to make a trip to Europe where they stayed at several Bed and Breakfasts and kept records of which place served the best food.

Long after retirement, James and Yvonne moved once again, this time to Mapleton, Oregon to enjoy the cooler climate. The house was right across the street from a river where Jim would occasionally go fishing. James and Yvonne also loved working on their house and tending the fruit trees in their back yard along with their favorite schnauzer's Tikey and Trudy.

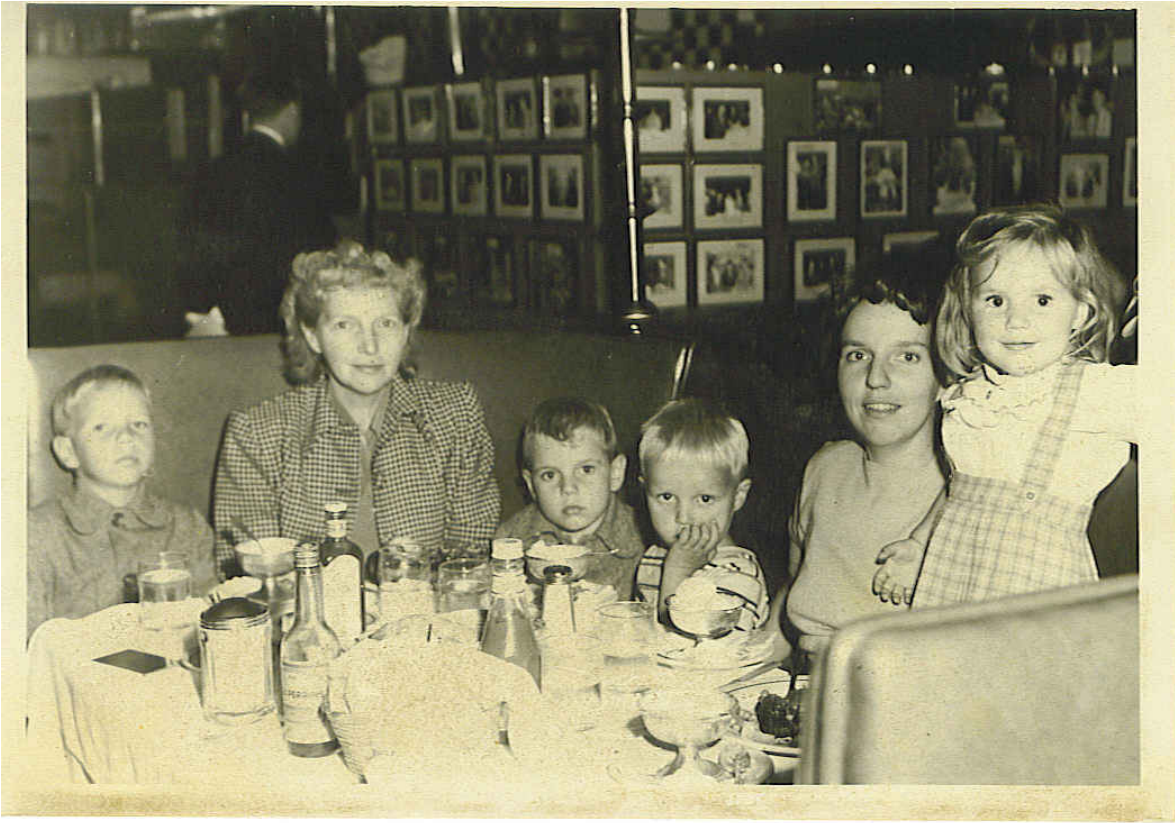
Yvonne past away on November 18, 1990 of cancer just prior to her 65th birthday. James decided to move to Springfield, Oregon to be closer to his daughter Judy. While taking night literature classes, James met and later married German born, **Irene** (Schlueter) **Hahn**.

Irene passed away on Thanksgiving Day, 2007. Seven days later at 1:00 AM James Hulse passed away in a local hospital. All of James' children were able to attend his bedside two days prior to his passing and when James awoke from a sleep and they handed him his glasses. He opened his eyes to see his family and he smiled one last time before falling back to sleep.

The following link is to a letter Jim wrote to his grandson, Eric Ausmus circa 1995.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~eda70/letterfromjim.pdf>

*Pictured below: Ron Ausmus, Beatrice (Case) Caviness, Mike Ausmus, Kenny Ausmus, Yvonne (Caviness) Ausmus, Judy Ausmus.*



*Pictured below: brothers, James, Bobby and Billie Ausmus*



*Pictured below: Ron, Mike, James and Kenny Ausmus*





## *Literary Works by James Hulse Ausmus*

### *Blood*

On the fifteenth fairway of the Blackthorne Golf and Country Club, Ponceford Whittington interrupted the tournament by taking a pistol from the pocket of his white linen duster and shooting Bill McCracken in the head. Bill rocked back on his heels, his eyes crossed and he tried to voice a complaint, and after a bit of jaw wagging he did mumble something.

Ponceford, five foot-two, cupped a hand to his ear, shook his head and asked Bill to speak up. Bill's head bobbed as if to indicate that he got the message, but try as he may, McCracken was just not able to raise the volume. He did, however, manage to shake an admonishing finger at the small gunman.

Ponceford, vexed at this silent dressing down, slipped another cartridge into the single shot firearm; but before he could draw a good bead, his target began a shambling dance, and in a tangle of arms and legs, flopped supine into the sandtrap

It might seem to some a humorous coincident, that under the same broad branches of the ancient chestnut tree where old Dexter Whittington, bludgeoned his first ram, to start the Whittington Soap and Tallow Works, his grandson would speed it's demise by using a hand tooled dueling pistol to drill a nine handy-capper.

But to most citizens of the community it would not be funny; it would be regarded rather as a calamity. More cracks in the foundation of Whittington Enterprises, and more sag in the economy of Blackthorne.

Under old Dexter's stern management, the foul knackerings yards produced candles, lard, laundry soaps and Whittington wealth. But the genius of his son,

Buffy, transformed WS&TW from a small company, to an enterprise of international prominence. Their fine products soon became renown, and was a blessing to all that, otherwise, might horrify the world with their puckered faces and goatish odors. As the company grew and prospered, the slaughterhouses were replaced with a cluster of gleaming buildings where summer breezes waft intoxicating fragrances over the land.

But sadly, Buffy died quite young, taking his genius with him, leaving the business to the whimsical management of Ponceford, his only heir.

Whereas Dexter had been shrewd, frugal and feared; Buffy, was ingenious, brilliant and respected. Ponceford, generous and indulgent, was indeed the prodigal heir, who lived on his pedigree, and whose fortunes were too often dictated by a toss of the dice, or possibly by the roll of a golf ball. A case in point being the property he once owned, and where he now stood looking down at the late, William P. McCracken.

At the time of the shooting, Steven Deadlock and Howard Porter, the other two members of the foursome, were in the underbrush looking for stray golfballs. Upon hearing the shot, they gathered around, bending over the sandy bed, looking closely at their associate for some sign of trickery, which Bill was forever up to. But Bill showed no sign of life even when prodded gently with a sand rake. Indeed the only discernable sign of mischief was a small hole in the very center of the Blackthorne Logo, on Bill's hat. Other wise, he looked so normal that it prompted his playing partner, Howard Porter, to venture. "Are you OK, Mac?"

But Bill McCracken replied only with a wide-eyed stare of astonishment at having been jerked so abruptly from Blackthorne's sunny meadows and slammed so violently into the infernal furnace room.

"My God, Ponthie," said Howard. "Wath that really nethethary?"

"Don't answer that, Poncie," said Stephen Deadlock, handing Ponceford his business card.

Ponceford hauled the card into the shade of his broad panama, looked it over carefully, and in his very precise manner, said, "Thank you very much Stephen, but I don't need your card. I've known you for twenty years."

"I know, Poncie. I know," but only socially. Now I'm offering you my services as an attorney."

Ponceford placed the card in his pocket. Then pointing a delicate finger at the bridge of his nose pushed his spectacles back into place. "Very well Stephen," he said, "you may represent me, but only on a contingency basis."

"What the hell do you mean, 'contingency basis?'" shouted Stephen. "You just killed a man. The only contingency now is whether or not you'll be hanged."

Ponceford shook with quiet giggles sending his glasses once more skidding lower on his nose. "Oh, no. They can't do that, Stephen," he said, shoving them back again. "Capital punishment is not allowed in this state. Remember?"

"Well," sputtered Stephen, "of course I was only speaking figuratively when I used the word, 'Hang', nevertheless, I shouldn't have to remind you, Mr. Whittington, that you could still get life in prison. So you had better let me handle everything for you from now on. Don't you agree Howard?"

Howard laced his fat fingers together over his paunch before saying, with considerable scorn: "Perthonally I don't think Ponthie was juthtified in thooting Mac. No thir. Not juthtified at all. I think he did it jutht to keep from loothing the game."

"Well," said Ponceford, "it sure is nice to know who your friends are."

"Quiet, Poncie," said Stephen. Just let me do the talking, and for Christ's sake, put that gun away. You've done enough shooting for today."

"Well I'm not so sure about that," replied Ponceford, taking aim at tree.

"Go ahead," screamed Howard. "Thoot a defenthleth thquirell. You murderer."



"Now wait a minute. There's no sense in you gentlemen getting into a fuss over this. It seems to me that we've got enough trouble as it is. Just how are we going to explain this to the club members? Not to mention Mr. Slyser. Oh boy! Is he going to be sore."

"Well it lookth like we'll jutht have to tell everybody the truth," screamed Howard, giving emphasis to his words with a shake of his massive head that sent a sympathetic quiver to his jowls.

"Sure," said Stephen. "Sure. But what is the truth?"

"The truth," said Howard, "is that Ponthie murdered thomeone jutht for thpите."

Ponceford looked fiercely at Howard and said, "Stephen, will you please inform Mr. Porter that he's beginning to irritate me?"

"Well Poncie, you surely can't blame him for getting a bit sore. After all, you did shoot his partner. And it's also true that they did have us down a hole."

"Three," shouted Howard. "We were dormie on the latht hole."

"OK. OK. Three then. But then on the other hand Howie, we really can't call it murder for spite, at least, not until we hear Poncie's side of the story."

"All right then Ponthie. Jutht why did you thoot him?"

Ponceford nudged his glasses back into place with the gun barrel. "Well if you must know . . ."

"Don't answer that," shouted Stephen. "You'll just have to wait for the trial to find that out, Howie. And I must say that I'm really surprised that you would be trying to give Poncie the third degree. My goodness, did you ever stop to consider that it just might have been an accident?"

"Bull thit," Howard said.

"Now. Now. Now." said Stephen. "There's no need for profanity. You know the club rules as well as I do, Mr. Porter. If we, and I'm not saying we would, but if we did, report you to Mr. Slyser, he'd be mighty disappointed with you."

"Threw Thlyther," screamed Howard.

"Well Poncie, it looks to me like you've kinda upset Howie. Now you certainly don't want to break up an old friendship over something like this, so why don't you just apologize?"

"No," said Ponceford. Bill McCracken was a bad person, and I won't apologize."

"By golly, Poncie, I'm ashamed of you. I always thought you were a good sport."

"Who says I'm not?" said Ponceford, twirling the pistol around on his finger.

"Come on now, Poncie, be a gentleman. Apologize for upsetting Howie and ruining his game."

"Oh, very well," said Ponceford I guess I can apologize for that."

"Good," said Stephen. "All friends again. Now let's go in and report this. I think we should just say that Poncie was aiming at a bird and that unfortunately Bill stepped in front of him. Everybody knows what great friends they were."

"They weren't friendth," shouted Howard. "They were enemith. Everybody knoth they have been fighting over Bonnie for yearth."

"Now, now, Howie. If I were you I wouldn't be starting any vicious rumors. Sure, maybe Bill and Poncie did have an argument now and again, but it was never anything very serious. Certainly, by the next day everything was all forgotten and no hard feelings. Right Poncie?"

Ponceford, who had returned the pistol in his pocket, and was now taking a few practice swings with his twelve wood, stopped and turned toward Stephen to describe McCracken, as an uncivilized sewer rat, and as such, he got just what he deserved.

"Oh? Well OK. I think I understand now. Of course," said Stephen, tacking quickly to catch the sudden change of wind. "Don't you see it Howie? McCracken, did something today to provoke Poncie, and in that case it could be

considered, as we say at Crocker, Walker, Wiggles and Deadlock, one of those,'Quid Pro Quo,' things"

Quiet," said Ponceford. "I'm going to hit."

"No," shouted Stephen, as Ponceford addressed the ball.

"Don't bother me," said Ponceford.

"Thtop!" yelled Howard.

But his warning was too late. Ponceford struck the ball and it went bouncing up the fairway.

"Good hit wasn't it?" smiled Ponceford.

"It thirtenly wath," said Howard. "You jutht hit McCrackenth ball. Tho you guyth looth thith hole too. Now you're four holth down with two holth left. That meanth I win the trophy."

"Oh God!" screamed Stephen.

"Now wait," shouted Ponceford. "This is a team match. You can't win the trophy by yourself. You can't win without McCracken."

"Oh yeth I can you little thquirt. You killed him, tho I win all by my thelf. Ithin't that right Thtephen?"

"Keeerist," wailed Stephen. "Now look what you've done. Can't you ever remember to check the ball before you hit it?"

"Thirvth him right. Thirvth him right," laughed Howard, bouncing from one foot to another. "Cheeterth never prothper. Cheeterth never prothper."

"Oh yeah," shouted Ponceford, drawing a putter from his bag. "We'll just see about that."

"No you don't," said Stephen, quickly grabbing the club. "This has gone far enough. I think it's time we stopped this nonsense and went in to report this little incident."

As they started in, Stephen wrapped an arm around Ponceford and moving him aside, whispered, "Just wait here a minute while I clear up a couple of things with Howard. I think I can bring him around to our point of view."



"Our point of view?" asked Ponceford. "And just what is our, "point of view?" asked Ponceford.

"Now just wait here a minute, Poncie and I'll tell you."

Stephen approached Howard who was trying to retrieve a ball from under a bush. Thee, thith ith Ponthie's ball," he said pointing to Ponceford's lavender logo.

"Yes, yes I see. Well now, Howie, you know what they say, 'finders keepers'. Right? So why don't you just slip it in your pocket, and we needn't mention it to Ponceford."

"Yeth, thath right Thtephen," said Howard, pocketing the ball, "Finderth keepers, though it'th mine. Thankth a lot Thephen."

"Now," said Stephen, I think there is a little matter we should discuss before we talk to Mr. Slyser. Don't you?"

"Oh?" said Howard. "And whath's that?"

"Why the murd - -, I mean, the accident, Howie." I think it's important that we come to a common understanding about this little incident before we see MR Slyser. My heavens, if we all go in there with all kinds of stories, what will he think?"

"I thupoth," said Howard, "he would think Ponthie murdered Mithter McCracken just for thpite," said Howard.

"Right. Exactly", said Stephen. See what I mean about vicious rumors?"

"But Thtephen," said Howard, we thaw him do it. Didn't we?"

"Oh my. Oh my. Oh my, said Stephen. "I guess I'll have to explain a few facts about good old American jurisprudence to you."

"About what?"

"Juris . . . what I mean is that you just may have thought you saw him. But whether we actually did see him shoot Bill is really for the jury to decide. And that, Howard, is what makes the great American court system what it is today. "

Howard turned to look at Ponceford who was quietly cleaning his pistol, and again at his golfing partner in the sand trap. He then swung around to again face Stephen who was now mopping sweat from his brow.

"Bull Thit!" said Howard.

From behind a damp handkerchief the junior law clerk's face, changed quickly from a look of painful forbearance to a benevolent smile. "Oh ho," he said. "Ho. ho, ho. Well, now I just betcha know just what your problem is Howard."

Howard eyed him suspiciously. "Oh yeah."

"Sure. Sure. I now know why you're so upset, Howie. Why heck I should have seen it right off. You, Howard Porter, are not sore because Poncie murdered that is, accidentally shot your playing partner."

"You don't thay," said Howard.

"Oh yes I do. I do indeed," declared Stephen "Oh, I realize you think that is the reason, but I say, the real reason you are angry is that you think Mr. McCracken's, uh, uh, . . . shall we say 'sudden demise', will prevent you from claiming the tournament trophy. Now look me in the eye, Howie and tell me that isn't true."

"Well, of courth . . . " began Howard.

"See, I told you so."

"But . . ."

"No buts, my friend. No buts. You did really want that trophy didn't you?"

"Well, yeth, of courth"

"Aha. At last, the truth," shouted Stephen, "by golly I think I have opened your mind. The truth will out, Howard. The truth will out. Now I think we can get somewhere because Howie, my friend, that is something I think I can help you with. Now listen close. I, Stephen Deadlock now give you my word that, uh well, that under certain conditions, I will support your claim to the trophy before

Mr. Slyser himself, as well as the entire club membership, and declare that you won this match fair and square. And if I, as an honored member of the bar, have anything to do with it that beautiful trophy will be yours. Now how's that?"

"Gee thankth, Thtstephen."

The sign on Marvin Slyser's door read:

MANAGER

LEAVE YOUR DIRTY SHOES AND LANGUAGE OUTSIDE

Stephen rapped lightly. From inside a voice called, "Entree."

They entered. Mr. Slyser was sitting behind a monstrous desk, uncluttered except for a book of scriptures and a chrome slaver containing religious tracts. Behind him hung a large painting of himself wearing plus fours and above this lank image was a silvery cloud that hovered above his figure like a halo. He unfolded from his chair when they entered and with a limp wristed wave motioned for them to be seated.

"Now gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Ponthie murdered Mithter McCracken jutht for spite," Howard said.

\* \* \* \* \*

The overhead fans mysteriously regained life and began stirring the sultry air as Miss Phoebe Snow left the witness stand. She walked away unsteadily, dabbing at her face with a handkerchief muddy with sweat, rouge and pancake. She brushed off Albert Crocker's assisting hand and repaid his smile with a ferocious glare. Albert's kindly gaze followed her until she was again seated then

swept on across the courtroom in the direction of the bailiff who was re-adjusting the jalousie blinds that had striped the face and figure of Phoebe during the stressful cross-examination.

The inquisitor was attorney Albert Crocker, of the law firm, Crocker, Walker, Wiggles and Deadlock, head council for Ponceford's defense. He and Ponceford appeared to be the only two in the room unaffected by the August heat. Judge Homer Knibble, mopping his brow, asked for a quiet word with the councilor before the next witness was called. Albert Crocker pushed his glasses up into the grey thatch of his head and leaned close.

"Damned if you weren't pretty hard on that little lady," the judge whispered.

"Well you know me, Homer. I always try to earn my pay. Besides I want to show my junior partner how to conduct a cross examination."

"Still using the old slash and burn technique, eh? Very effective, very effective. But look, that's not why I called you over here."

"Oh?" said Albert. "You want to up the anti on tonight's game?"

Homer Knibble bent farther over his bench and regarded his old schoolmate over the top of his glasses before drawling. "No, Slick. Not that either. I just want to know how long that fucking bailiff has been on your payroll? And, my God! Don't look now, but what in hell is your client doing?"

"Which answer do you want first, Homer?"

"Well you might tell me if that runt client of yours plans to hang himself with that twine he's playing with. If he is, I'll adjourn this circus early and retire to my chambers for an afternoon nap."

Albert lowered his glasses from the grey thatch of hair, glanced ascantly toward Ponceford. "Oh no your honor, he's in no danger. None at all."

"Do you have any idea what he's doing?"

"Yes. Yes I do." said Albert turning to leave.

A throat clearing rumble from the bench caused him to turn back. "Would the threat of a fifty dollar fine pry the secret from you?" asked Judge Knibble.



"Yes. I guess it would," said Albert, smiling brightly. "Ponceford, your honor, is making cats-cradles. He's probably the only one in the room that is enjoying himself."

"Cats cradle?" gritted Homer, "Don't tell me he's brought a fucking tom-cat into my court room."

"Oh no your honor. You don't need a cat to make cat's cradles. He just makes them for fun. Or maybe he sells them. I really don't know. But he's very good at it, isn't he? I understand he's starting a, Cats Cradle Club. Would you like to join? I can put your name in. Can't guarantee anything, but he is very liberal minded."

"He may be councilor, but I'm not. I'm responsible for the safety of that midget of yours as long as he's in my courtroom. What I'm telling you, Slick, is that I don't want him hanged until I give my permission. Is that clear?"

"Oh, yeah, sure. He won't hang himself but he just might wind up strangling my junior partner," Albert said as he watched Ponceford try to transfer the tangle of twine to Stephen Deadlocks hand.

"Now back to the court bailiff," said Homer. "You say he's not on your payroll."

"Oh heavens no," said Albert. Not on my payroll. Social security, health benefits and all that. No, I just hire people by the job. Piece work you know. Like fruit pickers."

"And the ceiling fans, councilor. How did you manage that? I mean to turn my courtroom into a furnace. You got another fruit picker at the fuse box?"

"Oh the fans. Yes. Well, I guess that was simply an act of providence your honor."

"Providence. My aunt Tillies tit. Tell me is there anybody in this building you haven't bought?"

"Just one," said Albert grinning widely. "But I'm working on him now."

"Albert," whispered the judge, "you're a slimy bastard, and I'm tired of looking at your ugly face so I suggest we get back to the hanging process."

"Two dollar ante tonight, Homer?"

"OK Slick. But none of your rubber checks or I.O.U.'s this time." Judge Homer Kibble then shot a thin wrist out of his robe and squinted at his watch. Oh my," he said, "if you and the esteemed D.A. have no objection I'd like to close shop in a half hour. Send him to me will you?" Albert bowed deeply and went to his table, stopping to pass the message on to Henry (the D.A.)1/6/2005

Ponceford's hands were now moving quickly, displaying one intricate web after another. He ignored his councilors and turned toward the jury box where his handiwork was catching on. He already had Tom Jason's full attention.

When he wasn't fishing, or on jury duty Tom Jason fixed lawn mowers and bicycles. Up to now he hadn't quite been able to get the drift of what was going on. He actually wasn't really positive who was on trial. The room was hot and his head hurt so he ignored the court proceedings and leaned heavily on the balustrade, propping up his jaw with a large hand. Mindless of the tobacco juice beginning to leak down his chin he watched drowsily as Ponceford's shuttling fingers spun one fancy frame after another.

Sophie Milquest sat in the front row next to Tom. She was a squat, sweating lady wearing a lavender dress with a stiff fluted collar that covered her fat neck up to her ears. At first she tried to ignore Ponceford, but was now beginning to show an interest in the intricacy of Ponceford's cats-cradle and the speed with which he could change patterns. As a finale Ponceford, using a fine dark twine, presented for her approval, a web whereon the semblance of a spider seemed to dart about in an apparent search for a juicy victim. This dark embroidery brought Sophie's short fluttering hands to her face in shock, but when with a quick flip of his finger the spider changed to a butterfly she parted

the full crimson lips of her rather large mouth and rewarded him with a glimpse of her gold bicuspid.

## *Danny*

### CHARACTERS:

D D - DANNY DARTFORTH, detective

H S - HECTOR SCHNITZZLEMAN, scofflaw

C C - CHARLIE CHIGGERS, police chief

Scene: Eugene Oregon

D D- Stop! Hold it right there.

H S- Are you talking to me?

D D- Do you see anyone else around?

H S- Well no. Not at the moment.

D D- Well then?

H S- Well then, what?

D D- Well then who else would I be talking to?

H S- How should I know? You could have been talking to yourself. Some people do you know. D D- Hey, what do you take me for anyway?

H S- Gee I don't know. Are you an elf?

D D- Oh. Oh! You know what you've just done Big Fella?

H S- Why no, I guess I don't. So why don't you tell me.

D D- OK OK. Since you've asked, I'll tell you what you've done. You' made me mad, that's what you've done. So hold your hands down here and let me slip these cuffs on you.

H S- Cuffs? What cuffs?

D D- These handcuffs, Big Guy.

H S- What are you doing with those things? You silly little man.

D D- So I'm a silly little man eh? Well, I guess I'll just start jotting down some of your remarks for my report.

H S- Report? What report?.

D D- What report? Why, the police report of course.

H S- Police report? Are you saying you're a cop?

D D- That's right fella, and you're now in the clutches of the Eugene Police.

H S- Ha. Ha. Don't make me laugh. You couldn't be a cop. Cops are big and tough. And why, you're just a puny little . . .

D D- OK fine. I'll add that to my report. Now, I gotta warn you, you can do big time for resisting arrest. So I suggest you just cooperate.

H S- No.

D D- Careful now big guy. I'm sure you know my reputation by now.

H S- No, I'm afraid you're a perfect stranger to me.

D D- Well, you're certainly not a stranger to me.

H S- Oh? So, you think you know me, eh?

D D- You bet I do.



H S- OK, then, what's my name?

D D- Well, I don't know what alias you're using today, but your rap sheet says your real name

is Schnitzzleman. Hector Schnitzzleman. So hold your hands down here Schnitzzzy and let me slip these cuffs on you.

H S- No

D D- What do you mean, no?

H S- I mean No. You just happen to have the wrong man, Tiny Tracy. You see, I am definitely not this Hector Schnitzzleman person. My name is Smith. Harry Smith. I'm just an innocent citizen.

D D- Don't give me that, Harry Smith innocent citizen story. That's what they all say. You'd better come along with me, and if you're smart you won't make me use force. Now hold your hands down here.

H S- Hey look, if I can prove I'm not this fellow Schnitzzleman will you stop pestering me and go play marbles with the kids.

D D- Sure. I'll be glad to Schnitzzzy. If you can prove it.

H S- OK. Now we're getting someplace. You see, copper, I just happen to know this Schnitzzleman fellow, and we don't look, at all alike. For one thing, Mr. Schnitzzleman is clean shaven. And as you can plainly see, I have a very nice mustache. That, you meddlesome little twerp, proves I'm not Schnitzzleman. Sorry for all your trouble, but I must say toodle-oo.

D D- Now just a dog-gone minute. There's something funny here. You're a redhead same as Schnitzzleman

H S- So? A lot of people have red hair.

D D- Yeah, But your mustache is green.

H S- Green? You mean it's not sorta reddish blond?

D D- No. I mean green. Green as grass.

H S- Oh. Oh. Green, eh? Really?

D D- That's right, big guy. Say, I think it's a fake. Now just bend down here, my friend, and let me give it a little tug, and we might see who you really are.

H S- No. I mean I can't. I mean you might tear it.

D D- Tear it?

H S- I mean damage it. I mean it'll hurt.

D D- Well Mr. Smith if that is really your own mustache, suppose you tell me why it turned green.

H S- OK. OK. Well you see I thought I'd just touch it up with a little red dye. Just to impress the girls. You know.

D D- Then how come it's green.

H S- Well you see, little copper, and it's the honest truth, I just happen to be color blind and. . .

D D- Hmmm. Color blind eh? Now that's a real coincidence, Mr. Smith. Our rap sheet says Hector Schnitzzleman is color blind too. Are you sure you're not Hector Schnitzzleman?

H S- Of course I'm sure. I told you my name is Smith. George Smith, and I've gotta go in this store before it closes.

D D- George Smith! Hey! You just told me your name was Harry Smith.

H S- Oh? - - Well, that's right. I'm George Harry Smith. So I've gotta go now. Ta ta, Tiny Tracy.

D D- Not so dad blamed hasty, Mr. George Harry Smith. Just why are you going back into that store. I saw you just came out of there.

H S- You did? Oh. Well if you must know I have to go back in to exchange something.

D D- Exchange something eh? Now what. . . Hey look there.

H S- Where?

D D- There. There in the window. Why, they sell disguises in there.

H S- They do?

D D- You darned right they do. And look, there's a mannequin wearing a green mustache.

H S- That's green?

D D- You bet it's green. Why it's just like the one you're wearing.

H S- It is?

D D- Absolutely! Now I'm positive you're Hector Schnitzzleman. And you want to go back in there to exchange that silly mustache. Why don't you just confess?

H S- Oh, no Danny. I'm not going to fall for that trick.

D D- Aha! There! I've caught you. By golly I've caught you.

H S- What do you mean, 'You've caught me'?

D D- I've caught you. Damn it, I've caught you. A minute ago you said you didn't know me, and just now you called me Danny.

H S- I did? Well you must have mentioned your name when you tried to arrest me.

D D- No, by damn. I didn't mention my name.

H S- Oh yes. I remember seeing your picture in the paper. Yes, that's it. They said you were

Detective Danny Dartforthe, the Dauntless Detective who solved the 'Missing Midget Mystery'.

D D- That's right Schnitzzy. And you're Hector Schnitzzleman the licentious libertine, wanted for pinching fat bottoms and flashing vulgar finger signs. You've sure had your fun my friend. And so far you've been lucky dancing around in the dark shadows of Eugene's society, but now it's time to pay the fiddler. So drop your hands down here and . . .

H S- Oh, no Little Copper. You can just cuff yourself. I'm walking.

D D- Just try it, Schnitzzy, and I'll put a bullet hole in your big carcass.

H S- You're bluffing Dartforthe. Hell, you know as well as I do that the City of Eugene is a 'Pistol Free Zone'.

D D- Oh. Oh. So you know about the 'Pistol Free Zone' thing eh?

H S- Damned right. And I also know about the Eugene City Civil Sentimentality Union. So, Tiny Tracy it looks like were at a standoff doesn't it?

D D- OK. OK. You're right. Heck, Schnitzzy might as well be a good sport about it. No hard feelings, eh?

H S- None here Little Copper.

D D- Hey! Why don't we just trot across the street to that cafe and have a cup of coffee. I'll buy.

H S- Oh, no you don't Copper. That cafe's in Springfield City. No 'Pistol Free Zone' over there. No Civil Sentimentality Union there either. You can get Nuked in Springfield. I'm not crossing the street with you, pal. I'm staying right here in good old Eugene where they know how to treat us unfortunate people. But, hey, Little Copper, why don't we just forget about all this incident and be friends. Here, have a bon bon.

D D-Forget it Schnitzzleman. I'm a Springfield cop. You can't bribe me with candy. You ought to know that by now.

H S- Pretty pictures?

D D-No, damn it. Not with those filthy photos you peddle either.

H S- Hey look, here's one you're gonna like fella. See here's this midget and a fat lady. . .

D D-No Schnitzzy. But hey! they tell me you like pretty girls, big fella.

H S- Damned right. I like girls with big bouncing boobs. I bet you coppers know a lot of 'em, eh Danny?

D D- Oh yeah. Sure. Say maybe I've got you all wrong. I bet underneath Schnitzzy, you're an all-right guy. Had a bad childhood, right? Sassy parents? Teachers that always picked on you. Right?

H S- Right, little buddy. Sure. That's it. Hell I just wanted people to love me. Especially pretty girls with big bouncing boobs. Know what I mean?

D D- Yeah, I got you. And hey, I'm sorry about all those silly charges. You know Schnitzzy, in spite of what you might think, I'm a real romantic at heart. Heck I never was one to stand in the way of a good romance. You just stand over here a minute while I step into this phone booth and make a call. Maybe I can fix you up with something hot.

H S- OK, sure and oh, do tell them about my mustache, Danny. Girls with big boobs just love guys with nice mustaches.

D D- Yeah. Sure. Quiet now, while I make this call.

\* \* \* \* \*

C C- This is Chief Chiggers speaking.

D D- Chief, this is Detective Dartforthe.

C C- Dartforthe eh. Say you didn't . . .

D D- Yes Chief. I ran outta gas.

C C- Damn it Dartforthe, have you been joy riding again?

D D- No. Honest. But Chief. A gallon of gas a day isn't very much. Can't you raise the allotment just a little?

C C- Stop whining Dartforthe and go back to work. Skulk around. Catch a criminal, damn it. That's what we pay you for.

D D- Yes Chief. OK Chief. But hey Chief, that's why I called. I've just collared Old SCHNITZZLEMAN, and he's giving me a lotta trouble. Can you send someone out to the corner of Possum and Fungus to help me bring him in?

C C- Schnitzzleman eh? Good work Darty old boy. By golly that'll sure be a feather in my hat. OK. Yeah. Sure. I'll send Max. He loves to handle those perverts .

D D- No Chief. Don't send Max. Send somebody else. Please!

C C- Hey what's wrong with Max. I thought you two were buddies. Why he was just telling me what a cute . . . I mean, a swell little guy you are.

D D- That's just the problem, Chief. Since he's been working as a female decoy, he's changed.. He says I should call him Maxine, and yesterday he hiked up his skirt and winked at me. Then he said it was all my fault for exciting him.

C C- Did you say Exciting or inciting?

D D- Exciting. Enciting. What's the difference Chief?

C C -About five years, Dartforthe. Now let's get back to Maxine . . . er I mean Max. You say he was winking and hiking up his skirt eh?. That sounds serious, my boy. Very serious. Now tell me, Dartforthe, did he ever just grab you , kinda sudden like, in those big strong arms, and give you one of his big wet kisses? Tell me Dartforthe, did he ever do that?

D D- What?

C C- Ah. . . Oh never mind. Sorry Dartforthe, Max is the only one we have available right now, so I'll have to send him. But if he tries any of that hiking, hugging and kissing why you let

me know. OK? I just may have to take him down to the basement and give him the old Charlie Chiggers third degree.

D D- OK Chief, G'by Chief

C C- So-long Dartforthe.



\* \* \* \* \*

H S- Want a gumdrop Danny?

D D- Yeah. OK Schnitzzy. I don't mind if I do.

H S- Well Little Copper, did you find me a live one?

D D- Yeah Schnitzzy, I think I did. And, by golly, this is one you won't forget.

## *Jefferey*

Near the billowing curtain, sustained by an aromatic breeze from the garden, they stood engarland in each other's arms. From her tiny slippered feet to her tawny tresses she was an effeminate delight. Her lith young body stretched taught and trimbling, eager for her lips to meet his. He, a stately Adonis in immaculate attire, held her tenderly in his strong arms.

Jeffery Furlong gently broke the embrace, stepped back, and with soft brown eyes, searched the passion haunted face of Emma Jenkins. "I must be going," he said.

"But Jeffery, you just got here."

"Oh, no my dearest," he replied, glancing at his ruby studded Rolex, I've been here for three hours and thirteen, make that fourteen, minutes."

Her hand flew in astonishment, to her ruby lips. "Oh, my. I had no idea," she said. "Let me offer you a chair."

"I'm afraid I won't have time, my pet. I have a rather important business meeting I simply cannot miss."

"The business meeting can wait Jeffery dear. Kiss me again."

"All right, my sweet, but it must be quick. Your husband is due home soon."

"Oh bother my husband precious, he's such a brute. It's you I love. If you don't give me some sugars this instant I shall die."

"Yes my honeysuckle, but first there is something I must ask you."

"I'll answer no questions until I've been kissed," she pouted.

Jeffery enfolds her again in a loving, but momentary, embrace and kisses her.

"Now, my Cup-cake . . ."

Emma stood back, her eyes misting. "Oh, Jeffery," she cried, through trimbling lips, "how cruel you are."

"Cruel, my kitten?"

"Yes. Cruel. That was not a kiss."

Jeffery gives her another kiss. Long and nibbling.

"That's more like it," she murmured. "Now let us sit on the love seat and talk."

"But Dumpling? . . . Casper? . . . Your husband?"

"Stop. Oh stop," she cried. "I can't stand to hear his name."

"But, my sugar-plum, you did marry him. You must have loved him at one time."

"Oh, I thought I did once my sweet," she wept. But I was only a child when we first met, and he . . . he . . ."

"Took advantage of your innocence my lamb?"

"Yes. Yes. Oh how naive I was, and how dearly I've paid letting him . . ."

"Have his wicked way with you, my Dove?"

"Oh, Yes. Yes," she sobbed. "Oh why do you torture me this way, my love?"

## *Little*

At the embracing turn of a river that wanders down from the Black Hills of South Dakota, lies a town of exceptional charm. Through the radiance of summer and the gold of autumn, its citizens happily live, sheltered under the protection and blessings of The Almighty. Then winter, with winds that howl down from the north, brings snow and an arctic chill that seeps through windows, doors and planking, and into every flaw and fissure of their Christian souls. With plunging spirits, and thoughts that tempt the devil, they brood the days away with little to mark the hours but an occasional dash to the wood pile, or quick trot to the outhouse, there to sit on a frosted seat dreaming of spring.

Sunday morning. Hope returns, and hearts gladden as they bundle their cares, defy the fleecing gales and creep toward the caroling bells. Their quest for Grace, and hunger for joyous Christian fraternity drives them from their blazing hearths and into the open arms of Reverend Joseph Little.

A dash from the rectory along an icy path brought the good Reverend and his son to the church basement.

"Get the kindling, Stanley," Joseph said, as his numbed fingers searched for the light switch.

The boy raced for the bin of twigs and shavings and brought out a small handful as dim light flooded the room.

"You'll need more than that," his father said, swinging wide the furnace door. "There ain't no more, Father."

"No more! Good gracious, Stanley, I've told you a hundred times . . . Oh well, get the ax and make some more. And hurry!"

He drew his watch from his vest pocket and turned it toward the light.

"Gosh, we're running late this morning," he said. "We'll never get the church warm in time."

He stood anxiously over his son who continued to chip feebly away at a log. Joseph reached for the first few splinters, but jerked his hand back to avoid the glancing ax.

"Sorry, Father."

"Sorry! Well I'm sorry too. If you'd keep some kindling on hand we wouldn't have to go through this every Sunday."

Joseph lit a small cone of paper and chips in the fire box, and watched the timid  
blaze slowly grow.

Good Gracious, you didn't clean the furnace either. I remember telling you on Thursday . . . "

Stanley, drew a sleeve across his dripping nose, and through thick glasses, blinked up at his father. "I guess I forgot," he said.

"Thunderation! What's the matter with you lately? You seem to forget everything I tell you." Stanley bent to his work without reply.

Joseph added larger pieces, drawing some of the chill from the room. He stood back a moment and studied his offspring. "The lad did indeed, favor his mother's family," he mused. "Oh, there was simply no doubt of it. His frailties, the pale rheumy eyes and weak chin, all indisputable markings of the Purcell clan." Genetics, he knew, had a way of tossing in an odd titman from time to time regardless of the sound lineage of the sire. In spite of his contempt for all

Catholics, he really had to hand it to that old Monk Mendel for his crazy pea experiment. It seemed to explain certain obscurities of the Bible. Besides it didn't seem to dispute the, begets and begats of Genesis. Joseph again reviewed the *Little* family tree, and found only good solid produce adorning those branches. Oh, some might want to mention his Aunt Bessie, but now that could easily be explained. Why, that drunkard she married was quite enough to send anyone to the asylum.

Joseph's face began to mellow. A supernal glow shown in his blue eyes. He simply must remember that everyone had a cross to bear, and that Christians should carry their load

cheerfully, with love and forbearance for the weak and less fortunate. That tenet, he felt, should apply most certainly to himself, a strong ordained servant of the Lord.

Joseph shoved another log into the fire. He felt ashamed of his outburst. The boy, no doubt, missed his mother, gone now more than a year. He must remember that, and in the future, be more considerate. Yes, he would spend more time with the lad, take him fishing, and they could have nice long talks. He would buy him a baseball glove when spring came round. Joseph also vowed to pray for the boy more often, and much more earnestly. He silently declared that he would do all these things. Indeed he would. Starting soon. Maybe Monday.

"Goodness," he said, suddenly mindful of the time. "Stanley, when the fire gets going good, just load it full, and come on in. I'll have your breakfast ready."

Joseph hummed happily as he worked in the kitchen. Maybe things were beginning to get back to normal. He had noticed lately the return of some of the enthusiasm and vigor of his earlier years. He was quite satisfied with the sermon



that he had prepared for today. He considered it one of the best he had ever written. It was fresh and stimulating, and if given properly, would be a sure sign of his full recovery from Dora's disappearance. A cloud of mystery still hung over that tragic affair. The police were unable to find a single clue, and had apparently given up the search. Of course the congregation, indeed the entire town, was stunned by her strange disappearance. She had simply vanished without a trace. "The Ministers wife," they had said. "How shocking!"

Everyone had been most sympathetic and helpful. Joseph realized that the congregation had made certain allowances for his 'less than standard,' performance since then. They had been most kind. But pity, he knew, would carry him just so far, and God knows that he didn't want their pity. It made him feel weak and impotent. It placed him in the pews instead of behind the pulpit where he belonged. He was delighted that the old evangelical spirit was beginning to return. He'd give them a sermon today they'd not soon forget, the kind that had once made him the most popular preacher in the county. "The soldier of the Sabbath," they had called him. But that was a couple of years back. Before . . . well before Dora had started

acting kind of funny. He was now determined to reclaim that title, so that he could once again wear, with honor, the Mantle of the Cross.

Reveling in the feeling of being born again, again. He went to call Stanley. He stood on the porch and yelled. No answer. He called again. Shortly the basement door opened and a huge cloud of smoke rolled out, and from that murky haze staggered his son, coughing and gasping for air. Joseph's heart stopped.

"My God! My church! It's on fire!" he bellowed.

He rushed through the smoke with crotch splitting strides. Ignoring the sputtering Stanley, he entered the basement. The fire was still contained within the furnace. But from its open door flames poured forth as if the Devil with all of his demons, had tunneled up from below, and had opened a local office just to heckle this lonely Christian Outpost.

"Thunderation!" he shouted, as he charged forward to slam the door on the fiends. But, sadly the firebox was choked with wood and would not close. Fiery tentacles reached far out into the room, bending upward toward the ceiling. Joseph stood for a moment frozen in fear with the odious smell of brimstone burning his nostrils. It appeared all was lost, and that he and his church would surely be consumed by fire. For a moment he stared hypnotically into the blazing maw, his vision penetrating far into the inferno and into the very dungeons of hell where demonic figures danced and swayed in evil frenzy. Inviting. Beckoning.

In this tragic moment of despair  
With evil apparitions everywhere  
He opened wide the armory of his faith  
And loosed the fearsome Calvinistic wraith

Fortified by the palpable presence of the Apostles, Joseph was roughly booted into action. If this was to be the end, well so be it, but he would not go meekly into a martyr's grave as a Christian cinder. No indeed! Not, Joseph T. Little.

Salvation seemed at hand as he raced for the fire bucket hanging on the basement spigot. Unfortunately the frozen pipes would give only a trickle. Undaunted, he dashed outside to the snow banks and brought in buckets of snow to throw at the hellish blaze. With Herculean effort he finally subdued the fire.

Dirty rivulets of water ran down the furnace, puddling in pools of ashy mush on the floor. Exhausted and dirty, Joseph sat on the basement stairs and looked at the terrible mess. Then from above, there came the merry clang of church bells. Through watering eyes he looked at his watch. Eight o'clock. Stanley was right on time.

"Strange," he sighed, wearily, "that's the only damned thing he never forgets."

Joseph mucked out the furnace. He opened the windows to clear out the smoke; then built another fire. When he entered the house, Stanley was just finishing breakfast.

"Father," he said, "the eggs were cold. I hate cold eggs."

When compassion dies, Satan vies  
Now evil gleamed in Joseph's  
eyes

Shaking with rage, Joseph started to pounce on the lad, but stopped short remembering his recent vow of mercy, the ink, of which, was not yet dry on the heavenly journal. He quickly turned and walked out the back door.

High on a shelf in the woodshed, behind crocks and canning jars, Joseph found what he desperately needed. There was a jug, stoppered with a cork, which he removed with trembling fingers. He pulled heavily at the scalding liquid, and soon felt somewhat calmer. Before replacing it on the shelf he took another swig and smacked his lips in sapid delight. He loved the stuff. He really

did. From the first breath-taking jolt to the final period of its sleepy caresses, he loved every drop and every moment. He readily admitted that, but for the constraints of his Christian calling, he would probably become hopelessly, 'entangled in the vine.' Unwilling to stop drinking entirely, he maintained firm control against its abuse, and reasoned, as a great bard had centuries before:

"Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin  
Beset the road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round  
Inmesh, and then impute my fall to sin!"

Thus having declared his case fairly won by quoting as precedence, The Lord v/s Mr. O. Khayyam, he graciously gave himself absolution. Before he left, he took a little envelope from his pocket, shook a few small brown pellets from it and popped them into his mouth.

"Stanley," he said on returning, "hurry and get yourself cleaned up! I want you to unlock the front door and greet the people as they arrive. Help them with their wraps, and tell them I'll be there soon."

"Yes, Father."

"And Stanley, if they mention the schmell to . . ."

"Do you mean smell, Father?"

"Of course I mean schmell."

"What smell, Father?"

"Why the schmell of schmoke, damn it," Joseph shouted. He quickly regained composure and continued. "Well anyway, if they do, why you just remind them of what I have been shaying for months, about the shorry condition of that furnish."

"Yes, Father."

"Well hurry up and get over there and unlock the door. I don't want them freeshing out in the cold."

"All right father," he replied. Then as he turned toward the bathroom he stopped to

say: "Father, you smell like, Sen-Sen. I don't like the smell of Sen-Sen."

"Go!" screamed Joseph, pointing a trembling finger at his son.

\* \* \* \* \*

Joseph sat on the sofa in a pensive mood, idly winding his watch, while trying to stem

the rush of gloom, and recapture the jubilance of the previous hour. He tried a short prayer, but his mind wandered, and he was surprised to hear "Damnation!" coming from his own lips. He hated the thought of going before his flock today, and he wondered why he had ever chosen such a thankless profession. It offered nothing but poverty and aggravation. For the first time since his ordination, he thought of resigning from the church. He considered sending a telegram to his father saying that he was giving up the pastorate, and would be returning to Cleveland, and to the furniture business just as soon as arrangements could be made.

Strangely, he discovered that he was now in the bathroom. He was shaving, but he couldn't remember leaving the front room. He wanted to go back to bed. But people were already arriving. He must go on. He would never let his personal annoyances keep him from his Christian mission. He simply must be there to provide the strength and guidance they would need to help them through the week.

"Oh Lord," he sighed. He suddenly felt as if he were a monstrous pap, willing to wet-nurse anyone who would cuddle up to him, and noted, not for the

first time, the semblance of his profession to an older one. A happier, more lucrative business by far. He often envied their carefree life with their paint and feathers living a jolly life of sin. And they, he reflected sadly, they didn't have to stand up and sell their product before an audience like a carnival barker. Hell no! Or pass around a tin plate trusting their customers to be charitable. Theirs was an older profession. They were too smart for that. By God, they got their money first if you didn't like the performance, well that was just too bad.

The notion of leaving the ministry became more appealing as he shaved. By the time he had finished, his mind was well set on the idea. He realized that it would take a while for the synod to send in a replacement. One, he might suggest, with a large udder simply oozing Christian compassion. Then, by golly, Joseph T. Little, would be dealing in sofas and chairs.

Moments later he stopped before the long mirror to inspect his appearance. "My God," he sighed, as he stared at the reflection. His thoughts tumbled and his heart sank. The grisly specter gawking back at him from the cheval glass couldn't possibly be that of, *The* Reverend Joseph Little, who had once stood proud, tall, and radiant with health and vigor. What had

happened to the handsome minister with the ready smile and noble presence? Where was that bright smile? And the, happy eyes which sparkled with just a slight hint of mischief that the ladies so adored? Surely this decrepit character was not a robust man in his prime, but rather that of a feeble old slump in his sixties. Dorian Grey incarnate.

How long had the insidious ravages of age been going on? And why hadn't he noticed the change before? He shuddered at the foul sight and turned sadly away.

He thought of the gallon jug and its wonderful elixir. Was there time for another quick one? Yes, by Heavens, he would make time. He couldn't face the



congregation today without it. No. Not today. Not the way he was now feeling. As he hurried toward the backdoor, he faltered, then stood motionless as the faint sweet sounds of music seeped into the quiet house. It was Miss Mary Stone at the organ. She was playing his favorite hymn. He remained for a moment entranced by the soothing strains. Slowly his weary depression began to fade and a

powerful surge of euphoria rushed in to fill the void replacing the festering angst and melancholy. He felt newly christened.

"Thish afternoon," he declared, squaring his shoulders, "I'll go out to the woodshed and smash that jug." With that he snatched his Bible from the table and marched smartly out the door, wondering how he ever could have doubted the healing power of his faith.

Joseph left the rectory mesmerized by an epiphany of Michael, the Archangel, hovering before him, drawing him on toward his pulpit.

Suddenly the Angel spoke, freezing Joseph in mid-stride. "Father," it said in a whining voice, "I don't feel well. May I go back to bed? " It took a moment for the stunned preacher to stammer: "W, W, Why, Y, Y, Yes. Yes certainly, Michael."

A raspy cough clouded the floating image. Joseph refocused his vision and through the haze saw the form of Stanley emerge. "Who's Michael?" said his son.

"Michael? Michael who? Oh. Oh, yes. Well, uh- - son- - uh never mind. Yes. Yes, my son, you may go back to bed. I'll see you there later and rub you down with some Vicks."

"Thanks Father," Stanley croaked, as he slid past.

"Oh. And Stanley," Joseph called after him. "There are some ginger cookies in the pantry,

you may have one."

Joseph watched the youth slouch on toward the house, then called after him.

"Two, son. You

may have two."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ruby Clark entered the church vestibule, flushed and glowing. "Good morning Mrs. Clark," Joseph beamed. "How brave of you to venture out in such weather. Joseph helped her with her wraps, and saw the door close behind her. "The Judge is not with you this morning?"

"No. We couldn't bring the car and he just didn't feel up to the long walk."

Melting snow glistened like jewels on her delicate features.

"Yes, I'm sure that was wise," he agreed, in a voice saturate with understanding and compassion.

He hung her coat on a peg. Ruby shook her head and tawny ringlets sprang softly around her glowing face.

My, how attractive she is this morning, Joseph mused. A beautiful rose in the snow.

She offered her hand in greeting. He graciously accepted it and was suddenly swept by a courtly desire to raise it to his lips. He felt flushed and somewhat giddy. "Please give your husband my warmest regards and tell him that I look forward to seeing him when the weather improves."

"Thank you. I will." Then she whispered: "There is something I would like to discuss with you."

It's strange, he thought, that I never noticed before just what a lovely woman she is. What a lucky old rascal that Judge is. Wonder how he ever managed to . . . it then it occurred to him that he hadn't understood what she had said.

"Oh, I'm sorry Ruby . . . 'er Mrs. Clark. Would you repeat that?"

"Yes. I just wanted to know if I might have a word with you after today's service?"

She stood very near, her face upturned to his. Both were oblivious to the flurry of chattering people moving about them.

"Why y- yes. Yes of c-c- course."

The witchery of her gaze cast upon him a paralytic spell that left him wide-eyed and gaping. The color drained from his handsome features then rushed back in a violent blush as he began to decode an astonishing message flashing between her long lashes. It appeared to be a personal message for Reverend Little, a private message just for Joseph. Oh! My-- yes. There could be no doubt of it. Ruby was sending a message of adoration and love for her Joey. It was indeed a love letter in large type, written in flowery prose, clear and well punctuated. Joseph tried to speak, but she was gone, sashaying down the aisle to her pew. He followed her movements, utterly enthralled by the undulations of her beautiful bottom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Joseph gripped firmly the sloping sides of the pulpit. He cast a thin smile over the attentive faces shining with absolute faith in "*The Word*." He bravely attempted to convey an indomitable presence to his flock, while trying to ignore the trembling aftershocks of the day's earlier eruptions. His mouth had the warm fetid taste of an old mackinaw, but his words rang clear and with conviction.

"Welcome my fellow Christians. Welcome to another Christian communion with God. And bless you for braving this weather in order to come and worship today. I doubt that I have to bring to your attention the fact that it's a might chilly in here. I had a little trouble with the furnace this morning, but it'll be warming up shortly. Now while we're on the subject of the weather, let me just say that it shouldn't be difficult to defeat that old Devil today. No indeed. No, my good brothers and sisters. I think our difficulty today," he said, with rising passion, "will be trying to find that old rascal. I seriously doubt, my friends, that he will venture out on a day like this. I suspect he's sitting down there right now just toasting his feet by the fire." Scattered laughter rattled across the pews.

Joseph's vision locked momentarily on, Sarah Booth, in the second row looking more frigid than usual. Her very presence, this morning, seemed to intensify the chilly atmosphere and cool response of the congregation. Joseph tried to picture this sour, faced person as the mother of Lucy, surely an icon of vestal innocence, who sat beside her. Try as he may the photograph just wouldn't develop.

At the sight of Sarah's clamped and wizened features a sour bubble burned it's way up his throat and silently escaped. He took a sip of water. "Well let him keep his fire," Joseph, continued. "We can start a fire of our own. A Christian fire," he said, with an awkward flourish of his Bible. His declaration was rewarded with a nervous shuffling of feet, more polite laughter and an anonymous, "Amen."

"But before we begin our services," he urged, "let us turn to page one hundred and sixty-three in our hymnals: *Onward Christian Soldiers*. And Miss Stone," he said, with a nod toward the organ, "will you please repeat your earlier perform . . .?" But, Miss Stone, was not seated at the organ. People looked around for the organist. She was nowhere in the room. Sarah, cast a sanctimonious smile at her daughter. Lucy responded by raising a perplexed

eyebrow. "Well," Joseph, said quickly, "Mary, must have stepped out for a moment. Let us go on then and sing, *a capella*."

Immediately his fine baritone rolled out over their heads. They were reticent, responding weakly, their words lagging. He sang louder. They followed yet timidly. On the second chorus Joseph was in opera, as his voice boomed and bounced off the walls. His face, now radiant with Christian fervor, forcefully declaring: At the sign of tri-umph Satins host doth flee-. They could no longer stand aside. They could no longer remain only spectators in this righteous conflict. They now surged forward in full array to join in the fight that their General had so far carried alone, and with joyous Christian resolve, soon vanquished the evil horde. They finished flushed and breathless, ready to do further battle if he would only ask. They waited, hushed. Joseph stood silent for a moment basking in divine power. He had returned. He looked at Ruby. She was aglow. Smiling. Eyes adoring. Sending messages encipher. He glanced at the text of his sermon. The one his earlier conceit had praised. It now seemed filled with angry bombast.

"I have a sermon prepared for today," he said, "but somehow it doesn't seem quite appropriate now. Why don't we all just gather around up here in front and simply talk about love. Christian love. Love for Christ, and love for one another." He left the pulpit and sat on the altar steps. The congregation gathered round, huddled close in a small tight knot of bowed heads. They talked quietly, unloading their cares and worries to Joseph and to each other. They were family now, sharing tears and sympathies, each dedicating themselves anew to Christ and to the church. Joseph felt Ruby's presence, but he was fearful of meeting her gaze.

Finally they rose and said their good-byes. Some shook Joseph's hand and thanked him for the wonderful experience. They quietly put on their wraps.

Joseph stood by the door and gave each one a special blessing. They left, bowing against the driving storm.

"Now Mrs. Clark," he said, affecting again the tone of a pastor, "how may I help you?"

"Can we have more privacy?" she asked, shyly.

"Well let's see. Yes, there's a changing room," he replied, motioning toward the back. "We can go in there if you like."

They entered the windowless room. They stood in the dim light of the open door. She closed the door and turned the latch.

"Well now, Mrs. Clark, you simply must tell me what this is about. How can I help you?" Her hands found his and she leaned her head gently on his shoulder and began to cry. "Now, now, Ruby . . . er Mrs. Clark. Oh, I mean . . . really. Surely there's no need . . . If you w-w- would just tell me . . . I'm sure . . ."

Ruby sighed deeply, threw her arms around his neck, and between sobs, blurted out her dark secret.

It was a sad tale of a young healthy woman married to an old and impotent grouch; one who had for some long time shamefully shunned her bedchamber. And who, when discrete inquiries were made as to the reason, replied with vile, curses. Of course this put the poor, suffering woman in such great fear of physical harm that she dared not broach the subject to him again. Finally in desperation she thought of turning to the kind Reverend, hoping he might have a solution for her agonizing dilemma.

The warm fragrance of her hair as she pressed against his breast sent his senses reeling and clouded his mind, but he quickly gathered his wits and recommended prayer. She promptly assured him she had already tried that, unfortunately every time she closed her eyes in earnest supplication, she saw the handsome face of the good pastor; then her prayers took a detour.



His mind quickly searched the curriculum of his seminary studies, but he was unable to recall any counseling on this particular topic, and he sadly told her so. Ruby then made a suggestion. Joseph considered her proposal briefly and replied that, if she thought it would ease her anguish, it certainly was worth a try. As a matter of fact, he assured her, he felt duty bound, as a minister, to provide whatever service he could for any member of his congregation.

There was joy beneath the snow.

Far below. Far, far below

With cloven hoof and swishing tail

They danced to joyous madrigal,

while chanting, "We will reign there yet.

On Olivet. On Olivet."

## *Mary*

-

PRIVATE They were both beginning to get on her nerves. The fly and the song. The fly had been pestering the kitchen window for several minutes, demanding entrance, demanding his share of the breakfast bacon, now rind remnants cold on the checkered table top.

"Romona," had seeped gently into her dreams sometime during the night and had refused to leave. The pesky tune had accompanied her to the back

porch rocker where she was now pumping her slippered feet to it's aggravating tempo.

Her practiced fingers moved stiffly hooking the yarn to create the field of yellow poppies. She was getting anxious to finish the quilt.

"Good morning Mary." Mary stopped rocking and turned to greet her neighbor. Carol Samson had been hanging out her wash and was now standing at the fence. Buffy was at her feet poking his nose through the gap of a missing paling, looking cautiously for Matilda. Some dog. Mary thought cats were supposed to fear dogs, not the other way around. "How do you get your clothes so bright?" she asked.

"Lots of bleach," replied Mrs. Samson. "Oh yes, and I started using that new brand of detergent too. That 'Sudsy Dudsy'. You know that one they're always singing on the radio. How are you feeling today Mary?"

"Oh, fine. Just fine. Are you baking again?"

"Yes. How'd you know?"

"The smell. It's heavenly.

"Darn you Mary. I wanted it to be a surprise. Oh well I guess I can bring you some hot buns when they come out of the oven. But you're going to have to say please for the pie. It's rhubarb. From your garden last year."

"Please. And pretty please," sang Mary.

Carol, turned away laughing. She finished hanging her clothes and entered her house, Buffy at her heels. Mary returned to her work. What a blessing to have a neighbor like Carol. She had rounded out the supper menu very nicely.

Fred was always hungry when he came home from work, and if there was anything he liked it was rhubarb pie. Then she would fix a nice meat loaf, and potatoes. Yes baked. And then for a vegetable she would have beans. Those string beans she put up last year surely were blue ribbon winners. No doubt about it. Fix them with onions and a little bacon. Then with those fresh

buns. Wouldn't Fred be pleased? Don't want him too pleased though. Probably trap me at the sink while I'm washing up. Hands all wet so I can't defend myself. Start playing around. She smiled. The old fool would start getting romantic ideas.

Well it just wouldn't work. Not tonight. He'd simply have to wait. She had to do some more work on that quilt. Should be able to finish it in a couple of weeks if she just stays with it. A lot of hard work, but it would be worth it. The color patches of her old wool coat matched those of Fred's old suit quite well. At least now they would get some use out of the suit. He'd never wear it. Didn't like it at all. He said it just didn't fit properly, though she thought it turned him out handsomely. So did that salesman at Grimley's Men Store. Mr. . . . now what was his name? Oh yes. It was Nelson. Or was it Nielsen. Well anyway, the one that sang in the church choir. He had just the most beautiful tenor voice. Sweet enough to charm the birds out of the trees, and certainly sweet enough to charm that young music teacher. And him a married man too.

The Spring Street church was now a road house. It backed up against Beaver Creek. Not much water in the old creek anymore. Nothing like it was when she and Bonnie Tennyson used to walk along it's banks picking wildflowers, and enjoying girlish gossip. What they found there one day was certainly more than wild flowers. Oh, indeed!

They heard voices as they walked along the bank that day, but thought it was just someone fishing. Well, when they came round the bend, my gracious, what a shock! There stood Steven Whiteside and Melvin Turner. They were standing right there, not ten feet away. Naked as jaybirds, they were. Melvin at least had the decency to jump in the water and hide. Oh, but not that Steven. He just stood right there, bold as could be. Well, the girls were so surprised they couldn't speak. Then that rude Steven just laughed and said: "Want to go

swimming girls? The water's great." He was standing right in their path so they couldn't pass, so she and Bonnie had to turn around and go back.

Afterwards at school, whenever Steven saw them, why he would say: "Want to go swimming?" Well, she would give him a dirty look and walk right on by without saying a word, but Bonnie would always start giggling and say how naughty he was. Of course that only encouraged him.

Mary stopped rocking to sip some cold coffee from a cup that sat on the porch railing. Overhead three bamboo spokes clacked in the gentle breeze while the tie string for their lost companion whipped about in frightened confusion. She looked out across a tract of uncut grass at the sagging tangle of vines and stalks that had been last year's passion. She would soon have to start all over again. She wouldn't have to put up so many tomatoes this year. They were just too acidic for Fred. But maybe a bit more corn. Corn was Fred's favorite anyway. Well, there was that bird again, hopping about in the garden, scratching among the weeds, looking for seeds no doubt. A finch. She was sure. Yes. But no. Maybe not. No splash of red about the head and breast. Fred said that most finches . . . Lord, Fred could tell in a second. He knew them all. Too bad he wasn't home yet. She would go look it up in his bird book when she went in, just to show him when he came home. She liked birds. Maybe not enough to study them like Fred. But she liked them. She helped him build a bird feeder once. Put it on top of a tall metal pole. Matilda proof.

Sunshine. Oh, the memory. The flash of yellow feathers buffeting against her face as her pet canary flew to the open window, perched a moment as if undecided, then gave the ten year old Mary a parting trill before flying off into the summer air.

"Good Heavens girl, I thought you had sense enough to close the window, while cleaning her cage," her mother had scolded.

For a day or so, Sunshine flitted about in the maple tree, singing like crazy. Then it was gone, leaving only a single feather near her swing. She cried,

fearing it was taken by a cat. After that she didn't want another. Sunshine's cage was still in the attic, all covered with dust. She should find some child to give it to. Some little girl who liked birds, and would take care of them.

There was certainly nothing special about this one. Just plain gray. Probably couldn't sing a lick. Not worth the price of birdseed. Besides it was better left alone, free as nature meant. But look sharp little birdie, Matilda's around, hiding someplace. He's fast and he's always hungry. Oh my! There. Right there, stalking in the garden stubble.

"Shoo you hateful thing." Her cry sent the little bird flying away. Matilda stood motionless, her tail swishing and yellow eyes flashing. "You don't scare me you yellow devil you," yelled Mary as Matilda slinked away through the stubble.

Matilda, Strange name for a cat. Especially a tom. Fred named him. Boy was he fooled. Of course the darned thing was wild, and you couldn't get close enough to tell at first. It just showed up one day and took up residence in the toolshed. Now he thinks he owns it. Hisses at her when she goes near there.

Mary swung a hoe at it once. Just missed. Too darned bad. Fred says, leave it alone. It's a good mouser. She'd leave it alone, one of these fine days. She'd send it to cat heaven. "Catch a mouse," she yelled. "If you're hungry, catch a mouse."

She busied herself again with the rug, scattering the yellow poppies over her lap. She stopped a moment to admire her work, and to mark the progress of the sun across the worn planking. It was now squeezing the shade into her corner of the porch. The heat felt good on her legs and lap, and that was fine because they were protected by the rug, but before long she would have to move.

"For heavens sake Mary, come in out of the sun. Do you want to look like a field hand?" The echo of her mother's scold across the years brought a rankled

smile as she quietly recited her petulant reply: "Don't worry about me mother. I'm not a baby."

Mary was not a fool. She had no intention of allowing the harsh sunrays mar her beauty. But she assured her mother that she was quite capable of being the best judge of such things. She loved her mother dearly, but was never intimidated by her when she was alive and would not now be bullied by her ghost. So she decided that she would retreat inside precisely when, and not before, she was ready. And that would be. . . would be . . . let's see. Yes. She would move inside when the sun's rays reached the potted geranium. That was her decision.

Mary worked quietly on, racing the sun. The warm air made her drowsy. She yawned and closed her eyes a moment to rest. The bamboo wind-spokes hung motionless. "Ramona," was in siesta. The fly lay quiet in the spider's web. The little bird, again scratching in the garden was now defenseless and Matilda, Poised. A beckoning breeze whispered through the leaves of the giant oak that shaded Fred's quiet resting place as Carol came through the gate with a warm rhubarb pie to find Mary's waxened features abake in the glaring sun, with a, hissing Matilda lying in a field of yellow poppies.

## *Minnow*

-

One long ago summer day the sun, focusing its rays on our prairie town, sent us hopping on naked feet and onto the cool quenching grass in Sop's yard. While we were idling in the shade of a large Maple, his mother came out with refreshments and a large book. She sat on a lawn glider near a trellis of exploding blossoms, while Freddie, Bruce, Bobby and I and of course her son

Aesop sprawled about her feet. We ate sugar cookies and sipped lemonade while she read to us the tales of King Arthur of Camelot and his Knights of the Round Table.

That was our introduction to the stories of Howard Pyle, which drew us into the exciting romance of Old England. It was of an enchanted land where Christian Kings were in ceaseless strife with dark forces. It spoke of chivalrous knights who fought with sword and lance to rescue beautiful damsels. We learned of castle intrigues, of magic and strange riddles. Of mystic maidens in forest glades. Of sorcerers in the bowels of ancient castles who hatched plots against godly realms, cast spells, practiced wizardry, and brewed strange potions. It was also, at the feet of Mrs. Dunsford, that we joined the brave knights-errant in their quest of the Holy Grail.

One day the five of us, small companions in daring, sat on the banks of Hay Creek comparing the merits of our new heroes with those of the western movie stars. Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson and Buck Jones were still admired, but somehow capturing cattle rustlers and bandits with fists and six-guns seemed to pale considerably when compared to the bright pageantry of Camelot, where knights in shining raiment jousted with barbarous adversaries amid colorful heraldic banners. Not to mention Sir Gawain or Saintly Galahad, astride beautiful chargers, contending with a fierce pagan for the honor of a beautiful princess.

We were so engrossed with helping Howard Pyle put a higher gloss on the images of the gallant knights that at first we failed to notice an older boy who came wading up to us in the shallow creek

Water. He said his name was Marvin and that he was fifteen years old. He spoke in a strange manner and carried a large jar wherein swam a golden minnow. We asked him where he found it. He said it was a secret. Next he showed us his jack-knife. He said it was once used to scalp an Indian chief. We thought he was just bragging but he pointed to some stains near the handle. It looked like rust, but it could have been Indian blood. We weren't sure.



"My cousin is in the hospital," he said.

Bruce said, "So what? So is my Grandma." He replied that his cousin was not an old granny, but a young girl with golden hair. Bobby asked if her name was Goldilocks. Marvin said no, that her name was Phyllis and that the doctor said she must have pigeon eggs or she would die.

Bobby said, "Well why don't you just go to the store and buy some."

Sop looked disgusted. "You can't buy pigeon eggs at a store." Then looking doubtfully around, "Can you?"

"No," said Marvin, "and that's the problem. Someone has to find some."

"How many?" said Freddie.

"What?" said Marvin scratching his head. "Oh yes, how many. Well let me see." He muttered to himself for a moment and counted on his fingers. Finally he said, "Six. Yes, six will do. The doctor told me six would probably be enough."

Whether Phyllis would have these pigeon eggs scrambled or prepared as sort of an egg-nog was something we failed to ask him, nor did we bother to question him on their curative power. After all, we knew of the strange ingredients used by Wizard Merlin when whipping up his various elixirs and potions. Sop's mother schooled us well in all kinds of miracles. And hadn't we learned at Sunday

School of Jesus' increasing the loaves of bread and fish at the shores of Galilee?  
And how about

Moses at the Red Sea? Now, this boy, as if by divine appointment, had strangely appeared offering us the chance to be part of our own miracle by helping this young golden haired girl. It was as a clarion call. It was as if King Arthur himself had touched each of us on the shoulder with his Excalibur and charged us with a mission. A fair maiden was in distress, and we, as young aspiring knights, must find, if not the divine goblet, (a sup from which would cure all ails) but just a few pigeon eggs.

We had all seen pigeons. They were all over town. We had but to follow them to their nest in order to quickly come up with a good half dozen.

"Haywire's livery stable!" Bruce and I shouted it together, and started on a run. Bobbie, Freddie and Sop followed. We looked back for Marvin. He was waving to us. "Hurry back," he yelled, "I'll wait here for you."

Mr. Hayward's livery stable was attached to his feed store. He was somewhat lame with arthritis and when not bothered by customers he could usually be seen on the loading dock under the broad awning, carving himself another walking stick.

We had been there before, but only on Sunday afternoons when no one was around. Sometimes we would just play in the hay. On other occasions we would ride Rocket holding on to his mane and halter. He was the only rental horse left in Mr. Hayward's stable. The last time we were there we put a bridle on him, but then we couldn't get it off so we just left him that way. The next time we saw Mr. Hayward he gave us a mean look like he knew we had done it. So now we had to be careful, especially with him sitting just a few yards away.

We circled around in back and quietly slipped in through the corral. Old Rocket, standing Outside in the shade of the barn eyed us suspiciously as we entered the rear door.

There seemed to be a strange friendship between the old horse and my brother, probably because Bobby would never ride him, but rather would talk to him, pet his muzzle or feed him. Whereas the rest of us would pile on the old bay, two or three at a time, and scream and yell like mad to get him to amble around inside the barn.

The air was cool and pungent with the odors of hay, old leather and manure. We grouped closer together in the cathedral silence listening for bird sounds, our eyes scanning the rafters over the haymow. Bobby's searching hand found mine. I frowned, but his eyes reminded me of our mother's command to

watch after him. Sop held up his hand as a signal to listen. We heard nothing. Then he pointed toward the upper loft. We started up the ladder and soon stood knee deep in loose hay. Bruce spotted the first nest in the corner. We waded toward it; our eyes getting more accustomed to the dim light. We remembered too late, Aesop's allergic fits whenever we visited the barn. The first sneeze brought a sudden flutter followed by a flash of wings that whipped past our heads and out the open mow hatch. Sop's spasms continued until the only trace of a bird was a floating feather that settled somewhere in the hay. Sop bravely held his sneezing until we could tie his cowboy bandanna around his face, highwayman style. This helped, but his watery eyes were now useless in spotting the nests, so we left him and Bobby below in the upper loft to catch our find.

Soon Freddie, Bruce and I were clambering among the rafters and roof braces jabbering and laughing, tossing our finds into the hay below where Sop and Bobby would gather them up. Each nest would reward us with one or two eggs. We soon had our half-dozen not counting the one that Sop stepped on and one that was lost in the deep hay.

As we were preparing to leave we heard a noise below. In our excitement we had forgotten that we were trespassers and that our chatter could have alerted Mr. Hayward. Immediately we fell silent and crept to the edge of the mow to peer below. It was only old Rocket. He had entered the barn and was walking into his stall. Satisfied that all was clear we climbed down the ladder and moved cautiously toward the rear door. Bruce was leading. Suddenly he held up his hand as signal for us to stop and listen. A sound like the flapping of a loose board sent us scurrying into Rocket's stall.

The hand that snatched Bobbie came from the empty stall adjacent to the one we were in. It had simply reached over the waist high divider and grabbed

my brother by his overall straps. One moment he was standing close, our hands clasped, the next moment we were separated, and I was watching him wriggling in the air like a fish, held tight by the huge boney claws of Mr. Hayward. We were petrified.

"Well look at what I ketched hyere," he croaked. "I do b'leeve I just captured a bunch of horse thieves. Young-uns too. Come to horse thief old Rocket away, did ye?"

Horse thief, to us was worse than a curse. Western movies had convinced us that it was a crime beyond all others, one deserving a fast bullet from a six-gun or a rope slung over a limb. We were innocent! Innocent! I wanted to shout, but I couldn't speak. Indeed, King Arthur's brave squires were all suddenly mute.

I stood there atrimble watching Bobbie swimming helplessly in the air. "L-L- Let him go," I managed to stutter. "We weren't going to s-steal Old Rocket. Honest."

Here Mr. Hayward, cane in one hand and Bobbie in the other, hobbled quickly around to confront us.

I could feel my fellow knights begin to back toward the door.

"If you didn't be intending to horse thief Old Rocket, then why be you in his stall?"

"Eggs," I said.

Mr. Hayward looked from me to my companions. "Eggs?" he croaked.

They all nodded.

"Eggs?" he croaked again. "What sort of story is that anyways? I don't raise chickens hyere."

His voice and manner sorta lost their edge. He lowered Bobbie, but kept a firm hold of his suspenders. I could now feel my friends gather behind me.

"Not chicken eggs sir," said Sop. "Pigeon eggs."

I turned and was relieved to see that, true to our code they were all nodding their heads again.

Bruce unfolded the neckerchief to display our find. "We done it to save a life," he said proudly.

Mr. Hayward looked perplexed, but he released Bobbie, and raised his arthritic hand to rub his brow. "What the deuce," he said, after a moment. "Will you just tell me how in heaven's name pigeon eggs is gonna save a life?"

We all started jabbering at once, telling him about Marvin and his cousin Phyllis and how we wanted to help her. Mr. Hayward slowly massaged his stubbled chin for a moment and looked at us over the top of his huge hand. Sometimes he would sorta turn his head a bit but he always kept a keen eye on us to keep us from escaping.

"Well, if that don't beat all," when we finished. Though he squinted at us through slotted eyes, his gnarled hand never left his face. "You mean you weren't aim'in to steal Old Rocket and sell him to some circus bare-back rider?"

"No," said Bobbie, speaking up for the first time. "We want you to keep him here for us."

Mr. Hayward looked hard at my brother. "What do you mean by that, young feller? He ain't yourn."

"He don't mean nothing," said Freddie. "He's only six years old."

"By golly I don't know," said Mr. Hayward, turning Bobbie's face up with his free hand. "He sorta looks like a sure enough horse thief to me."

"Well I ain't," said Bobbie, stoutly. We all quickly agreed with him, but Mr. Hayward still looked doubtful. "Well I can't rightly say," he finally drawled, "if egg rustlin is a hang'n offense anymore or not. Besides I don't b'lieve any of you weigh enough for a proper hang'n anyway, so I reckon I'll have to let ya go this time."

We ran from the barn, without even asking Mr. Hayward if we could keep the eggs.

We found Marvin sitting under a tree smoking a pipe. He looked surprised to see us, and more surprised when Freddie unfolded his neckerchief and showed him our find.

He put the eggs in his hat, carefully put the hat on his head, and while we were telling him about our experience with Mr. Hayward he loaded up his pipe. He didn't say anything. He just nodded and smiled and began to puff and puff and puff. He puffed until the smoke from his pipe was so dense we couldn't see anything. When the smoke lifted, Marvin was nowhere in sight. We looked up the tree and searched along the creek but never saw Marvin or the eggs again. The only thing he left behind was the large jar with the minnow, only now the fish wasn't golden. It was just a common gray color so we put it back into Hay Creek.

Of course we told our families about the strange experience, but I don't think they believed us. Except maybe Sop's mother. When we told her about it she looked kinda funny, like she realized we were just too young to be trying out miracles. I guess that's why she stopped reading to us about the Knights and started reading another book. One about the Rover Boys. Because it was safer.

The next time Bruce's mother went to the hospital to see his Grandmother Bruce went with her. And when they asked about Phyllis, the nurse said she had recovered very nicely and had been taken home just the day before by her grandson.

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*Oasis*

He had been walking over the desert wasteland for days. Now he stopped near the crest of a dune to rest. He peered from the shade of his hooded robe at the long blue ridge of mountains. They had grown perceptively larger during the day, but they still lay some distance away on the eastern horizon. He struggled up the few steps to the summit and stood for a moment bent low in labored breathing. As he raised his eyes to scan the near terrain he saw before him, an oasis, spouting like an emerald eruption from the barren earth. He rubbed his eyes, shading them closely with his hand. Another mirage, he thought. But no, the image remained shimmering green against the arid land. Hurrying down the shifting sand, he stumbled at last into the protective cluster of trees. He leaned gasping against a palm, before sinking to the ground. He unslung a skin of water and threw back the hood of his robe to drink.

He was young with levantine features and dark hair. His pale blue eyes now quickly inspected the surroundings. But for a breeze that played softly through the higher fronds, all was quiet. However, he cautiously placed his blade on his lap, just under a fold of his robe. After a time he began to relax. Fatigue settled heavily upon him and he was soon asleep.

When he awoke it was morning, and he was thirsty. He gathered up his belongings and, as if directed by some vague instinct, walked directly to a spring of fresh water. It bubbled crystalline in a sizable pool that channeled out to feed a stream. He drank and bathed his face. The cautions and the fears of the previous day were fading. He now longed to see another human. Maybe they could help each other. Perhaps a traveling companion, someone to talk to. Share some food. He removed the crust of bread, all that remained of his provisions, from beneath his cloak and was startled to find it so small. Deep concern clouded his features as he thought of the long, hungry distances that yet lay before him. He thought of foregoing food for a while longer but he had not eaten

since early the day before and was now beginning to feel weak, so he finally pinched off a few crumbs. He chewed slowly and set what was left of the meager ration on the water skin beside him.

He reclined on the bank of the stream, bathing his swollen feet. His eyes soon grew heavy again and he dozed off once more. He slept fitfully for some time before waking suddenly with a cry. In a foggy delirium he scrambled to his feet, drew his blade and chopped frantically in all directions. The objects of his wild flurries, he soon realized, were only the fading phantoms of his strange dream. The sudden exertion left him exhausted, and although the specters had vanished he remained crouched and ready to strike.

Eventually, reason returned and he began to assemble his few belongings. He placed his sword in the strap around his waist. His water skin was now empty, but that was of no concern as he had intended to fill it afresh anyway before leaving. But the bread that he had placed so carefully on the water skin was no longer there. He searched himself and the ground carefully but there was not a crumb to be found. He could only assume that in thrashing about in his sleep, he had accidentally knocked it into the stream and it had been swept away in the fast moving water.

He realized now what a fool he had been for not placing it in the pocket of his robe where it would be safe. The enormity of his terrible blunder set him weeping and cursing himself for being so thoughtless. But what was done was done. Now he must either find food at this oasis or face almost certain starvation. He wiped his eyes and began eagerly exploring the bushes and trees for anything edible, but his search proved as fruitless as the sparse undergrowth and the stately palms.

It was as if there had recently been a thorough harvest by some previous inhabitants, followed a careful gleaning of the entire area, for not a single leaf remained on the ground as a witness to life of either man or animal. Indeed the stamp of genesis seemed still fresh upon this barren Eden. His heart sank.



Fighting despair, he continued searching, following the stream until at the far edge of the tree line it disappeared, and ending as suddenly as it had begun, plunging back into the sand. He wailed loud and frantically, hoping to rouse some fellow sojourner, but his cries were whispers in an ocean of silence.

This small sprout of vegetation that had yesterday appeared so verdant, he now found quite sterile and foreboding. His aversion was such, that in spite of the frightening prospects that lay ahead, he was anxious to be away from this odious place and move on toward the distant blue hills. He hoped that once on the march again he would find a helpful companion, or another, more hospitable, oasis. One, whose trees hung heavy with lush fruit.

He returned to the spring, washed his clothes, hung them on a bush to dry and quickly plunged naked into the pool. The cool water was refreshing to both mind and body, and he splashed about for several minutes before climbing out. He ran dripping for his clothes but stopped short, petrified with fearful expectancy. Someone had stolen them. His old robe and sandals were nowhere to be seen, but his cry of alarm froze in his throat when he realized that his old rags, though now gone, had simply been exchanged for newer ones. For a moment his trembling legs refused to carry him forward. However curiosity soon replaced his trepidation and looking fearfully about, he cautiously approached the new wardrobe.

He first noticed the vestment; it was the grandest garment he had ever seen. It shone radiantly in the shaft of light that played upon it through the branches. He again looked quickly about, but saw no one. He called, at first timorously then in echoing shouts, but as before there was no response. He snatched up the robe with trembling hands, holding it out at arm's length. It was beautifully cut, and garnished with a red and gold emblem embroidered over the left breast. He slipped it on and strutted about. The fit was as if some master weaver had carefully taken his measurements.

He was so taken by it, that at first, he failed to notice the rest of the ensemble. The considerate stranger had also exchanged his old sandals for new ones, the cobbler of which must have been on some king's commission for he stinted not on materials. The fine, soft leather was studded with precious stones and the clasps were buckles of gold. He also found a bundle of food; a new water skin and a walking staff.

The splendid robe and the priceless sandals both proclaimed the richness of his new treasure. And how thankful the young man was that his benefactor did not forget to provide plenty of food. Now he was sure he would safely reach his destination.

But of all the items of his newfound trove, he was most intrigued by the staff. In most respects it was but a stout, highly polished, walking stick. However, the artisan had banded the hilt with a ferrule of gold on top of which he had secured a bulb of amber. Imbedded inside the pale lucent knob was a giant scarab.

The Egyptians exalted this particular beetle as a self begetting deity because of the mysterious way it had of springing abruptly from the earth and shooting immediately heavenward, as if summoned and resurrected by the almighty sun god, Ra. This, the young man realized, was the paradigm for the emblem on the robe. He hefted his prize and began strutting about briskly. The very feel of it produced a strange animate sensation giving spring and spirit to his stride. His delight was such that he suddenly stopped his promenade, threw back his dark handsome head and laughed heartily. The echoes dying away in the stillness.

"Sayyid! Sayyid!" he called, "Please, do not hide! Come, show yourself. I must see you. Let me thank you properly for the wonderful gifts. Come, show yourself. Please!"

He was now certain his beneficent friend was yet nearby, so he hurried about calling and declaring his gratitude and thanks. He was most anxious to see what manner of person would barter in such a way.

His answer was only a freshening breeze in the palms.

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He was soon on his way, and as he moved swiftly over smooth hard ground he smiled at the thought of his princely image. However, the smile faded somewhat when he realized what a tantalizing spectacle his splendid attire would present to bandits. He reached for his yataghan, only to realize that his trusty blade was one item that his mysterious friend didn't replace. However he was strong and agile, and felt confident that with his stout staff, he could protect himself very well.

Sometime later, after he had finished his noon meal, he noticed he had changed course. He was no longer walking toward the blue mountains. They were now on his left and he was moving south. Strangely, this fact concerned him little, because he could no longer remember what mission had sent him toward the blue mountains in the first place. His attention was now focused on a new landmark, a distant snow capped peak that somehow had escaped his earlier notice. He reckoned that was because it appeared so vague, almost diaphanous in the bright clear air.

He walked tirelessly through the day and well into the evening before stopping. He ate another hasty meal, and then, wrapped himself snugly in his new warm robe. He slept warm and peaceful that night, in spite of the frigid desert nights that usually chilled his bones and gave him long restless hours. He rose with the sun and was surprised to see, by morning light; the white capped mountain now so near. It looked so splendid; he could hardly wait to be on his way. He ate quickly and started off again.

Scattered tracks on the desert began to merge, and soon formed a trail. By late afternoon he came to a bridge that spanned a quiet river. Lush fields and orchards began to appear along the way. He saw people working, but when he approached they ran away. The land began to rise sharply. He continued moving swiftly, drawn urgently on by the impatient staff. The mountain now loomed majestic overhead, the rays of the setting sun striking its peak with blinding effect. Finally a raging river barred his path and he stopped for the night. He ate, then curled in his robe and lulled by the symphony of the rushing water, he slept soundly.

He awoke abruptly, startled by the stillness. The crashing, surging stream was now a trickle. As he started to cross, he saw six huge men coming toward him, over the stone-paved river bed. They all wore fine garments, and carried, by means of stout poles, a sizable cushioned chair. An aged man, who wore an elaborate cope and hat, both bearing the scarab emblem led them. The old man appeared to be a priest. He carried an ankh, the ansate cross, which the traveler recognized as the ancient Egyptian symbol of life. The men all greeted him with deep bows and beckoned him onto the cushioned chair. After he was properly seated they retraced their steps across the river. When they were safely across the stream again became a torrent of turbulent and swirling water.

They moved slowly upward, along a narrow winding path that led eventually to a broad valley of fertile fields, near the center of which rose a splendid temple. Carillon bells greeted them as they approached the gates. But once inside the compound, the gates were closed and the tolling ceased. The young traveler was then allowed the freedom to walk about.

"Welcome home," the old priest, said, escorting him into the temple. The youth entered and gazed in astonishment at its size and grandeur. The tour ended at his living quarters on the top floor. The rooms were furnished in arabesque splendor. Ornate tapestries adorned the walls, and plush carpets with intricate designs covered the floor. The huge bath glistened with colorful

tile and mosaics. A wide balcony girded the entire suite offering spectacular views of the valley and the glistening mountaintop.

For years he lived an isolated, but happy life. He was never permitted to leave the temple; however, the Old Priest, who was always in attendance, quickly granted all other wishes. Quiet music thumbed on whispering strings seemed ever present, and beautiful dancing girls performed and sang at his pleasure.

One day a deep rumble coming from his mountain disturbed his peaceful stroll on the balcony. He ran trembling to the old priest.

"What does it mean?" he asked. "Why does my mountain roar at me and send forth his hot breath? Please have it stopped. It frightens me."

"The mountain has been sleeping. That is just his yawn," the Old Priest replied. "Perhaps he will soon go back to sleep."

But the mountain didn't sleep again. Its fearsome voice thundered daily, shaking the earth and sending out smoke and ashes that soiled the snowy crown. A dark forbidding blanket soon spread over the temple and the land. He would no longer look at the mountain and closed the drapes against the ugly sight.

One day, when the rumbling mountain seemed most angry, the old priest handed him a robe. It was a simple garment of coarse material. It was clean but much mended, as were the sandals he was given. He immediately recognized them as those that were stolen from him at the oasis. He asked how the priest had come to have them.

The old priest would not answer his questions, but said: "Come, bathe quickly, and put these on. We must hurry."

As usual he did as he was told. When he was ready he asked: "But where are we going, and why do we hurry?"

"The time has come," the Old Priest replied. "The mountain is calling us. We must go to it."

"No! No!" he cried, "I'm afraid of the mountain. I fear that if I go I may never return."

"You need not worry," replied the old priest, hurrying him away, "you always return."

\* \* \* \* \*

Again he was at the small oasis, freshly bathed and wearing the beautiful robe and sandals, and carrying the magic staff. For a long while he stood at the edge of the palms, his features clouded with strange incertitude, staring first at the vague sparkle of the far peak to the south, and then at the blue ridge of mountains to the east. Finally he dropped the staff and walked quickly toward the blue mountains.

## *THE TIP*

Joe Thorpe eased his car to a stop, turned off the headlights and sat quietly for a moment before switching off the engine. He glanced at his watch, squinting in the cast of the streetlight. It was eleven twenty. The movie theater across the street was now dark and the last customer had disappeared down the silent street

They met at the door. "I'm locking up," she said.

"Damn," he muttered, half turning to scan the quiet street.

"No other place around here open?"

I doubt it," she replied. "We're usually the last to close."

"Sure could use a cup of coffee."

"Sorry, I've got everything cleaned up."

"Just a cup of coffee," he coaxed. "Give you a nice tip."

She started to shut the door, but stopped to snatch a handkerchief from her apron pocket, which she raised in time to catch most of the spray. God Bless," he said, grinning broadly.

Damned allergy," she sniffled, dabbing at her nose.

He offered her a neatly folded linen from his breast pocket. She shook her head wearily and continued to mop with hers. He turned as if to leave, but paused. "Do you believe in signs?" he asked, with a flashing smile.

"What?"

"Signs. Do you believe in them?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"The sign on your door. It says you stay open till eleven-thirty."

She turned to frown at the faded letters. "Yeah, well our menu says we serve fine food too."

"With friendly service?" he chuckled.

"Oh, of course. Of course."

"How's your coffee?"

A phlegmy cackle rattled from her throat. "Excuse me," she sputtered, "it's been a long day. I'm."

"You needn't apologize, we're all that way at times."

A sudden breeze whipped a candy wrapper by his polished oxfords and slammed it against her ankle. They both smiled as it freed itself and slid across the floor.

"Oh, all right," she said, stepping aside. "I guess I can wait for a few more minutes."

He entered. She locked the door. He followed her twisting shuffle across the scarred linoleum.

"I'll be on my way pronto," he promised, swinging onto a stool.

She turned to face him across the counter. "J-Just coffee?" she asked, avoiding his gaze by focusing her attention on the faint scar that staggered upward from his left eyebrow. It faded, and then disappeared into a thatch of tawney hair. She blushed.

"Yes. Just coffee."

"Now that you're here . . . well if you're hungry I guess I could fix you a sandwich."

"No. You needn't bother."

"No great bother," she said, feigning indifference.

"Been to the movie?"

"No."

She watched the thick liquid trickle into the cup. "Hope you like it strong," she called over her shoulder. I usually make a fresh batch about five o'clock, but I was just too busy today. If you can't drink it I won't charge you," she said, scooting the cup toward him.

Joe raised the cup, and with a napkin, wiped the counter before taking a sip. "Wow!" he said, looking suspiciously at the black brew.

"Sorry," she said, "would cream and sugar help?"

"No. No. It's fine. It's just that first sip. It's sort'a like jumping into cold water, you know. It really isn't so bad once you're in."

She laughed and hid her rough hands beneath her apron.



"You're not from around here," she said.

"No, I'm not,"

"Didn't think so. I know most of the local guys," she said, forgetting her hands in a fit of nervous primping.

"Now that wasn't bad at all," he declared, setting the empty cup on the counter.

"Really? Would you like a re-fill? There's plenty. I'll just have to throw it out."

"Throw it out," he laughed.

"Oh, gosh," she said, a flush rising to her cheeks. "I'm sorry. I really should have made that fresh batch."

"Now don't feel bad. After all you did warn me."

"I could give you some pie. There is a piece of lemon pie . . . I'll just have to . . .""Throw out?" he grinned.

"Well yes. Oh damn!," she said, biting her lip.

"All right," he said decisively, "bring it on. And anything else you might, 'just have to throw out'."

"I'm beginning to hate you," she giggled, tripping lightly to the pie case.

"Oh, my," she cried, wrinkling her nose at the stale scramble of lemon and meringue. "It don't look very appetizing." She shoved it back in the case, and closed the door.

"No, no, bring it. I'll try anything tonight."

"Really? You really want it?"

"Of course. Sure. I'll just wash it down with another cup of that very excellent coffee."

"I . . . oh you! I think you're being mean . . . Are you teasing me?"

"No. Not at all."

"Well . . . all right." She handed him a fork after carefully wiping it on the clean inside of her apron.

"Hmm," he nodded, swallowing the first bite. "Not bad."

She leaned over the counter, watching him intently, her chin propped on her fist. She pushed a strand of hair back over her ear. "You know why I knew you weren't from around here?"

He stopped eating momentarily to attend her closely over his fork. "No. I've no idea."

"Oh, I forgot your coffee," she said, darting away to get a refill. She carefully wiped the counter before setting the cup down.

"Well, the way you dress, for one thing. You're a real fancy dresser. I don't mean too fancy though. You know . . . most guys around here are just working men."

"Just working men?"

"Yeah. But," she said hurriedly, "I don't mean it like that. I mean there is nothing wrong with that . . . I mean working. Gosh. We all have to work. What I mean is . . ."

"I know what you mean," he said pleasantly.

"And what do you do for a living?" she blurted out. "That is, if you don't mind my asking."

Joe slowly sipped his coffee. "Well," he said, smiling.

"No! No! Don't tell me," she said. "Let me guess. I'm good at guessing about people, you know, what they do and all."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yeah, I really am. You're . . . you're . . . First let me see your hands." He held them out. "Very nice," she said turning them over. "Oh. I mean your ring," she said, another flush rising to her face. "Is it a real ruby?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "It must be worth a fortune."

"Yes. I've been told it is," he said.

Well that sure eliminates, "Poor man, and Beggerman," she said. So you must be: Doctor.

Lawyer, or an Indian Chief. Eenie, meenie, minie, moe," she mumbled playfully. "I say you're a lawyer."

"Oh. No, lady I'm the Thief," he said, pushing the empty pie dish aside and drawing a gun. Joe casually counted the money from the till, and before leaving, he gave her a nice tip, just as he had promised.