

He paused and swiftly crossed himself. "May God preserve and protect the office of sheriff."

"Amen," I repeated.

And so as I shuffled my way up the iron-shod jail stairs to see my client, I saw that Sheriff Wallenstein was already busily playing the little popularity game in releasing Walter Farrow so that he might attend his sister's funeral. I also hoped that by so quickly allowing me to visit Randall Kirk up in his cell he was also tacitly telling me that, however bad things might look for my client, he had not yet become a total community pariah. About then this was some comfort however small.

Randall Kirk was lying, fully dressed, on top of his made up cot. "Good morning," I said. "Here are some Sunday papers. Immortality is yours—you've made the front pages of the Chicago and Detroit Sunday papers."

"Ah, thank you and good morning," he said, rising and shaking my hand and taking the mound of newspapers. "Won't you

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sit down?" He gestured at his cot and the seatless toilet which between them exhausted the seating accommodations of the place.

"Be my guest."

I gingerly sat on the edge of the cot, where he joined me, and told him about talking with his stepmother and also about the sheriff agreeing to let me visit him in his cell. "He didn't even frisk me for hacksaw blades," I added.

Randall Kirk glanced appraisingly at the lone barred window of his cell. "Even without bars, jumping from the third floor window would be quite a feat," he said. "I might <sup>then</sup> even make the Milwaukee papers."

"The Sheriff also told me you don't want to press charges against Connie's brother, Walt Farrow. Is that so?"

"Why should I? He didn't hurt me. And even if he had I suppose he couldn't much be blamed." He paused. "That's if I killed his sister."

"Yes, that's if you killed his sister," I said.

"Actually it was really ~~nothing~~ but the actions of an excited drunk," he went on. "Drinking's long been Walt's problem, the only

thing he and Connie <sup>really</sup> ever quarreled about. I hope they drop the whole thing."

"Tomorrow you are to be arraigned in district court," I said, "and the next question <sup>to decide</sup> ~~before the house~~ is whether we <sup>should</sup> ask for or waive a preliminary examination."

"Tell me more," he said, and he listened gravely, occasionally stroking his silken mustache, as I explained that any person charged with a felony had first to be arraigned before a lower court magistrate to determine whether there was probable cause to believe that a crime had been committed and that he had committed it or, as it was usually more briefly put, whether there was probable cause to bind him over to stand trial in circuit court.

"This arraignment is in no sense a trial, and at it the accused can either demand a preliminary examination and put the People to their proofs or he can waive <sup>an examination</sup> ~~it~~ and automatically be bound over for trial." I paused, feeling a little like

Parnell declaiming one of his latest theories. "In other words, Kirk, the preliminary arraignment is an ancient ~~hard-won~~ legal device aimed at preventing the state from railroading a guy into jail on insufficient evidence and there letting him languish indefinitely awaiting a trial that may never come. It makes the cops put up or shut up."

"Bravo and two cheers for democracy," Randall Kirk said, *holding up and one* waving an ~~upright~~ *one* finger like a tiny flag. "And at my arraignment do we demand an examination or do we waive?"

"I recommend we waive," I said.

"Why?"

"For several reasons," *Kirk.* "One, because an examination would only arouse further publicity and accompanying community

resentment, which I'd guess you stand in no pressing need of.

*Further* "Because we already know they probably have enough to bind you over for trial, whatever we say or do. *Again* Because--and this is important--waiving will give you more time possibly to recover your memory. And finally because it will give my partner and

me more time to hit the law books."

<sup>And also</sup>  
"Or ~~possibly~~ to go fishing," he said, taking in my bush clothes with a smile.

<sup>And also</sup>  
"Or ~~possibly~~ to go fishing," I agreed. "In fact I'm going <sup>out</sup> this afternoon. After all I haven't been <sup>fishing</sup> ~~out~~ since yesterday. The undisturbed solitude will give me a good chance to

brood about your case. And I have an intuition it will take a bit of brooding. In all my <sup>fact in</sup> ~~umpte~~ years of messing <sup>around</sup> with ~~the~~ criminal law I've never seen anything like it."

"Wish I could join you out there."

"Before I go ~~brooding~~ I've got a couple of questions,"  
<sup>the cops say they found.</sup>  
I said. "Your wallet, Might you not have left it at Connie's ~~the~~ some other night?"

He shook his head. "No, I had it with me earlier Friday. I remember buying some trout flies."

"Memory," I went on. "Are the events of Friday evening coming back any clearer?"

He sat for quite a spell, occasionally lightly touching his blond mustache with the tip of his tongue. He widened his hands and shook his head. "Everything is still a blank wall."

"You mean, everything after you heard the little bell?"

He stirred uneasily. "Yes, yes. Everything after I heard the little bell."

I arose from the cot. "After I leave I want you to ask the sheriff something when he gets back from his patrol." *making the highways safe for his constituents.* <sup>^</sup>

"Yes?"

"I want you to ask him to let you take a lie detector test on your 'loss-of-memory' story you told the police."

"Why can't you ask him <sup>that?</sup>" he countered.

"For one reason, I won't be here <sup>to ask him because</sup> I'm going out fishing and brooding, remember? For another, I don't expect to testify at your trial."

"But I thought--guess I read it somewhere--that the

results of these lie detector tests aren't admissable anyway."

"You read right, Kirk, but you neglected <sup>to</sup> <sup>further</sup> read that, with luck, the fact that you asked for such a test might be <sup>still</sup> admissable even though the results aren't. Now be a good

~~doc~~ client and ask the sheriff like I told you."

"Will do," he said, bowing his head.

I arose and rummaged in my briefcase and handed him a brown paper bag. "Here's a toothbrush I picked up and some shaving soap and assorted things. Also a spare electric razor for your Castro look. Though the Sheriff is <sup>mighty</sup> tolerant he still frowns on visitors bringing razor blades <sup>in</sup> ~~to his guests~~. Also a mirror so you <sup>will harm not a hair of your</sup> ~~won't accidentally~~ ~~now off that~~ blond mustache.

The lady jurors will love it."

I had touched him <sup>with the bangles I had brought</sup> and for a moment I thought he was going to <sup>sub.</sup> ~~break down~~. "Oh thank you, Paul," he said, arising and clasping my hand. "My friends call me Randy."

"Fine, fine. I'll see you over in district court tomorrow at nine. I must go now, <sup>Randy.</sup>"

The nearby churches were letting out and there was the clang and tumble of distant bells as I turned away and left him standing in his cell door holding the wrinkled paper bag. "Good luck, Paul," he called after me, and I waved back and ran downstairs into freedom and <sup>fresh</sup> ~~undefiled~~ air, reflecting on the ~~exquisite~~ irony of him wishing me good luck.

I was glad the patrolling sheriff did not see me as in a sort of subdued panic I fairly burst out of the jail, breathing deeply, and headed for my mud-spattered coupe in the parking lot, still brooding over life's little ironies. I reeled down the window of the stuffy car and was reaching out to put the key in the ignition when a hand came through the open window and closed firmly over mine. "May I talk with you a moment, Mr. Biegler?" a woman's voice said.

Startled, I tried to wrench my hand away, but could not, and I wheeled to face a tall dark woman leaning in my car window faintly smiling. "Who are you?" I blurted, once again trying to free my hand, but still I could not, ~~a double defeat for any fly fisherman, who inclines to pride himself on the strength~~



~~repetitive fly-casting develops in his hands.~~

"I'm Viola Axholm," she went on in a low voice, releasing my hand, "and I merely wanted a brief word with you."

"You mean you were Mrs. Spurrier's housekeeper?" I said, flexing my aching fingers. "The person who found her dead body?"

"Of course," she answered, glancing furtively left and right, and it suddenly swept over me that Viola Axholm was one of those mortals who, viewed from whatever angle, give the impression of being all profile, something like the Barry-<sup>late</sup> 75 <sub>^</sub>mores.

"What can I do for you?" I said, gesturing at the empty seat beside me--empty, that is, except for the handle of a landing net protruding from a <sup>canoe fishing</sup> flat creel.

"No, thank you," she said, again smiling her frosty smile.

"I don't want to keep you from your fishing. What I want is to talk with you about your lawyering for <sup>poor</sup> Randall."

"Yes?" I said, wondering how the woman who was said to have adored the deceased Connie could bring herself to refer to her accused murderer as 'poor Randall'. "How did you know I was representing him?"

"I phoned the jail early this morning and asked," she said.

"Asked Kirk, you mean?"

"No, asked the jailer," she replied. "I didn't want to disturb poor Randall."

"Oh," I said, feeling relieved that this enigmatic creature was not sitting beside me.

"Do you think Randall really did it?" she asked suddenly in a low voice.

"I don't know," I answered, honestly enough, my mind racing. "Do you?"

"You lawyers are terribly unimaginative," she continued enigmatically, "when not downright stupid."

"What do you mean?" I said, trying to ignore her air of studied insult.

"Hasn't it occurred to you that someone else may have killed poor Constance?" she went on with cold sarcasm.

"Vaguely," I said, "but there's so little to go on." What was this strange creature trying to tell me? What do mean?" I repeated inanely.

"Just what I said," she said harshly, contemptuously tossing her head and stalking off toward the jail. I resisted an impulse to follow her and question her more closely--almost surely that would have precipitated a scene--and instead drove away for an afternoon of forgetful

*Instead her taunting, ambiguous features continued*  
fishing, ~~recalling~~ a recent remark of Parnell's that he

always found it hard to visualize and describe Viola Axholm

"because whenever she's around I keep looking for her broom."

*To swim before me, and I recalled*

During a tantalizing afternoon of fishing our ~~enig-~~  
~~matic~~ conversation <sup>about</sup> continued to haunt me. Who was she  
trying to put the finger on? I kept asking myself. On  
Connie's drunken and frequently quarrelsome brother Walt  
Farrow? Or on Connie's husband, Jason Spurrier, who at  
the time was hundreds of miles away? Or on still some-  
one else? Or was it possible that all her dark talk was  
<sup>just</sup> ~~only~~ the instinctual diversionary ~~palaver~~ <sup>effort</sup> of an infatu-  
ated woman trying to protect the object of her adoration?  
But imperious old Viola Axholm in love with young Randall  
Kirk? Tune in tomorrow, folks, for the next absorbing  
episode <sup>of</sup> ~~in your favorite soap opera,~~ "As the Stomach  
Turns"...

A large trout rolled upstream in front of me; I made  
a few false casts and dropped my dry fly daintily several

feet above the rise; the little fly circled uncertainly  
a moment and, bobbing bravely, floated ~~right~~ <sup>down</sup> over the  
scene of the recent ~~rise~~ <sup>commotion</sup>; the trout rose and took it  
savagely; I struck and heard the dismal "ping" of my  
snapped ~~barbed~~ leader; the barbed trout made one thresh-  
ing splash and disappeared forever from my life; I  
yelled "Goddamn!" and vowed to banish Viola Axholm  
from my mind or else quit fishing; ~~and~~ ~~alas~~, Axholm  
won.

## Chapter 9

"Good morning, Your Honor," I greeted the young district judge, Orville Wendt, idly reflecting that police court judges tended to be either very young or very old, possibly because the job shed a steady little glare of publicity on any ambitious young lawyer on the make, since lawyers after all couldn't come out boldly and advertize, just as it offered a soft berth and an assured meal ticket to the weary old lawyer coasting in.

"Good morning, Mr. Biegler," Judge Wendt said pleasantly. "I assume you're here for the Randall Kirk arraignment."

"Yes, I'm waiting for him to show up now. Meanwhile to save time I might as well tell you that I'm prepared to waive examination if the People will go along."

"Suppose we find out," the judge said, motioning the young assistant prosecutor Alfred Clish up to the bench.

There we three discussed the proposed waiver in an undertone since there was a fair sprinkling of spectators in the room, including the weekend's local take of traffic violators as well as a young reporter from the Gazette.

"As an old hand at this DA business," the young assistant prosecutor said, "you are of course doubtless aware that the People can themselves demand an examination despite the defendant's desire to waive."

*Mr. Bugler,*

"Yes, I seem to recall that," I said, modestly neglecting to remind the young man that when I was prosecutor I had learned this interesting procedural point the hard way by getting my ears firmly pinned back by wily old Amos Crocker, who had once waived examination in a statutory rape case.

Later in circuit court I had been obliged to dismiss the case because the deflowered young lady, the assault on her ~~wounded~~ virtue having <sup>evidently</sup> meanwhile been appropriately <sup>assuaged,</sup> ~~appeased,~~ had abruptly lit out for Canada leaving the red-faced young prosecutor high and dry and without <sup>ashed</sup> ~~any~~ proof. "Yes," I murmured,

"something about the right of the People to preserve and perpetuate testimony."

"I'm rather sure we'll waive, along with you, but I'd better play safe and first consult my boss," the young assistant prosecutor went on, referring to the prosecutor, Eugene Canda. "Excuse me while I go phone."

While he was gone Randall Kirk entered the courtroom accompanied not by one deputy sheriff but by two, both armed to the teeth. If the Sheriff in his official attire was content to look like a casual character out of "High Noon" his deputies more than made up for him: they were almost awesomely resplendent, and I was torn between guessing whether the <sup>creator</sup> designer of their get-up had cribbed <sup>his design</sup> more from the Canadian mounted police or from a <sup>revival</sup> ~~re-run~~ of "The Student Prince".

The three sat in some unoccupied jury chairs inside the rail, my client wedged between, and I went over and greeted him. He was clean shaven—even the <sup>more fugitive wisps of his</sup> ~~wispy~~ blond mustache seemed to have been trimmed a little—and tastefully dressed in a dark



summer suit.

"Good morning," I said, gesturing at his attire. "Don't tell me you found all that in your paper bag."

"No," he said, smiling, "a friend brought some of my things down ~~to me~~ yesterday--after you left on your research."

It was not lost on me that he had not volunteered the name of his mysterious friend to his own lawyer. I guessed it was <sup>probably the intense</sup> ~~the~~ lady of many profiles, Viola Axholm, and I made a mental note to find out for sure when the inquisitive deputies weren't around.

"Excuse me," I said, noticing that the assistant prosecutor had returned, and I joined him at the bench. Yes, he said, <sup>of examination</sup> waiver was agreeable with his boss, and so the judge signalled the two deputies, who briskly marched my man up to the bench between them and, presto, in a matter of seconds the whole thing was over and Randall Kirk, who had uttered not a word, found himself bound over for trial to the September

term of circuit court for the murder of Constance Spurrier.

"You understand, Mr. Kirk," the young judge explained, "that since first degree murder is not aailable offense in this state I of course have no choice but to remand you back to the county jail to await trial."

Randall Kirk looked at me. "Yes, Your Honor," I said, "I've explained all that to my client."

"Very well," His Honor said, gently shoing us away so that he could get on with the weekend's take of traffic delinquents. "The court will now proceed with the misdemeanor arraignments."

"I'd like to talk with my client alone a few minutes," I told the two deputies as we moved away from the bench, and shortly Randall Kirk and I were seated in the narrow combination district court jury and conference room, adjoining the courtroom, insulated from intrusion by two armed deputies toting gleaming .38 Specials that I suspected had never been fired in anger.

"Who brought you the clothes you're wearing?" I asked, coming abruptly to the point.

"A friend," he repeated, seeming to redden a little under my questioning.

"Yes, you told me that earlier, and I hoped your failure to name your friend was from reticence in the presence of the deputies. We're alone now, Kirk. Who was this friend?"

"Is all this necessary?" he countered.

"Let's not go through all that again," I said. "Who was he?"

"It wasn't a he," he said. "It was a she."

"Who was she, Kirk?"

There was a long pause before he answered. "Viola Axholm," he finally said in a low voice.

"You mean Connie's housekeeper?" I asked, knowing.

"Yes," he said.

"How could she get access to your things?" I pressed

him. "Or did she come down here first for the key?"

"No," he explained. "Sometimes on her day off she'd come over and straighten up my cottage for me. Not on a regular basis, but she did know where I keep the spare key."

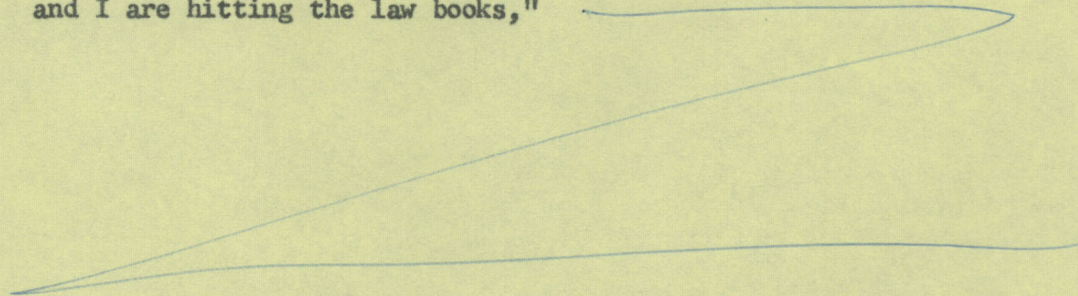
"Why didn't you tell me she'd brought some of your clothing?" I went on.

"I didn't think it was important," he said, flushing and drawing back offended.

"Let me be the judge of that," I said. "Did you have any other visitors yesterday?"

"In the evening Jason Spurrier stopped by briefly to say hello," he said, almost defiantly.

"Oh," I said, making no further comment, deciding it was safer to change the subject. "Next week my partner and I are hitting the law books,"



*said,*  
I ~~went on,~~ "so forgive me for again asking you--do you still fail to recall any of the crucial events of last Friday night?"

The question seemed to depress him and he sat delicately sipping his mustache and looking down at his hands.

"Do you or don't you?" I prodded him.

He looked up at me. "God damn it, Biegler," he blurted, "please believe me, I can't remember a thing--it's all a total blank."

"You still have no memory of going to Connie's?"

"No."

"Or of harming her?"

"No."

"Or of leaving there after you did whatever you did?"

"No," he repeated, this time in *a kind of* ~~an~~ almost despairing whisper.

"Do you still claim and are you willing to swear that the last thing you remember last Friday evening was sitting

alone in your own cottage about dusk?"

"I do and I would so swear."

Before asking the next question I dug out my trusty notebook so I'd get the words right. "And that you remember nothing," I went on, "after you heard, to use your own words, 'something like the faint tinkling or buzzing of a bell'?"

He sat staring ~~stupidly~~ at me. "Well?" I prodded him.

He spoke quietly. "I don't remember hearing any bell?"

"What?" I said, or almost yelped, suddenly standing up.

"I just told you," he said doggedly, almost surlily,

"I don't recall hearing any goddam bell." He again looked down at his hands.

"Look at me," I said harshly, trying to keep my voice down. "You mean to tell me that you did not hear some sort of bell ring in your cottage Friday evening and <sup>further</sup> that you told me you had Saturday night during our huddle at the county jail and <sup>once</sup> again only yesterday in your cell?"

"That's right," he said calmly, regarding me steadily.

"If I told you any such story I must have made it up. There wasn't any bell."

I felt a sudden chill ~~to my very spine~~ and for a moment <sup>feet</sup> was glad that two armed cops were <sup>unloaded</sup> ~~parking~~ <sup>sitting just over door</sup> outside our ~~door~~. Mingled with my sense of ~~dread~~ was a feeling of compassion for this afflicted man—that and a desire to help him.

"Look, Kirk," I said softly, "let's conduct a little review."

<sup>anyone</sup> "Let's," he said listlessly.

"Do you remember our huddle in the jail Saturday night?"

"Of course I do."

"And that we talked again in your cell yesterday morning?"

"Naturally, and especially all the ~~helpful~~ things you so thoughtfully brought me."

I then showed him the written notes I had earlier taken and again quizzed him on many of the things he had then told

me ~~that~~ <sup>and</sup> he still remembered. I held my breath as I asked him  
^  
a final test question. "Do you also remember telling me," I  
said softly, "certain intimate things about Connie Spurrier  
and what had gone on between you?"

He nodded assent but he didn't need to; from his sud-  
den flush I knew he remembered.

"So that the only thing you don't remember telling,"  
I concluded carefully, "is about hearing any bell?"

<sup>"Correct!"</sup>  
"No," he answered curtly. "In fact I'm damned if I  
^  
know what you're talking about."

I sat fighting two impulses, one to jump up and flee  
the place, the other to grab the man and shake hell out of  
him. I did neither.

"Kirk," I said finally, "if I thought you were kidding  
me I'd quit your goddam case cold. Right now, this very moment.

But I've already invested some time and energy in it so I'm  
not quite ready ~~for~~ <sup>to do</sup> that yet. Are you listening?"  
^



"I'm all ears."

"Now listen carefully. Do you still say you don't remember hearing any bell and do you still say you don't remember twice telling me <sup>that</sup> you had?"

He sat staring at me, or rather beyond me, his eyes filled with an indescribable look of anguish. He swallowed several times and then held out his hands toward me in a curiously beseeching gesture. "Christ, Biegler," he said huskily, "I swear I'm not lying to you. Do believe what I'm saying, man. I swear to God I can't remember any bell ~~for~~ ~~can I~~ recall ever telling you I did."

I again felt a nameless chill and the elusive mocking countenance of Viola Axholm swam before me. "Did you see Mrs. Axholm when she brought your things down yesterday?"

"No, it wasn't visiting hours."

"So she left your things downstairs?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't see or talk to her?"

"As I just told you, no I didn't."

The discussion seemed to make him both restless and somewhat resentful so I pondered a moment before continuing. "Did she leave you any message?"

Curtly: "No."

"Did she leave anything else for you?" He flushed but did not answer. "Did you hear me?" I persisted.

"Only the soup," he said.

"What soup?" I said, baying along this new scent, vision of strange love-potions and <sup>witch's brews</sup> ~~witchcraft~~ dancing in my head.

"Mrs. Axholm is a good cook and she makes a wonderful homemade barley soup. Usually when she cleans for me she brings a batch. She thoughtfully brought down a jar full yesterday."

"And was it good?" I said.

"Excellent."

"Is there any left?" I tried to ask casually.

"No, I finished it off last night."

"Did you save the jar?"

"Naturally I rinsed it out and saved it for the next batch." He saw my look of disappointment. "What are you driving at, Biegler? Do you think Viola Axholm or her soup somehow made me forget that goddam bell you keep harping on?"

"I don't know, Kirk" I answered truthfully. "But I do know, and swear to you, that <sup>only</sup> on Saturday night you did tell me that the last thing you remembered Friday evening was hearing some sort of bell, and that you ~~so~~ told me <sup>so</sup> again in your cell yesterday morning. Here, let me show you the notes I took."

He glanced at them and looked at me vacantly. "Incredible," he murmured.

"Do you think I made up those notes?" I said.

"I can't see in God's name why you would."

Slowly: "Then--now listen closely, Kirk--you don't think I'm lying?"

"No, sir," he said in a low listless voice, "I don't think you are."

"Then," I quickly ran on, trying somehow to reach the man, "if I'm not lying <sup>manifestly</sup> ~~then~~ you did tell me you heard a bell and either you ~~are lying~~ <sup>lied then or now</sup> or else you have not only forgotten hearing it but <sup>also</sup> forgotten telling me <sup>you'd heard it,</sup> you had, right?"

"Yes, sir," he said meekly.

"And if you are not lying can't you see how dreadfully serious all this could be?" I said. He nodded glumly as I pressed on. "The other night you told me things that just

might offer a ~~small~~ <sup>faint</sup> gleam of a legal defense. It is this gleam my partner and I hope to track down in the law books.

Now if your own lawyer can't know what parts of your story to believe and rely on how in hell can you <sup>ever</sup> expect him ~~ever~~ to persuade a jury to swallow any of it?"

"I don't know," he said in a small voice. "Maybe I'm losing my mind."

I had been wondering ~~such~~ the same thing and my mind raced to envision what our next steps should be. Could the man be suffering from some sort of progressive mental ~~deteri-~~ <sup>disease?</sup> ~~oration~~? If so, how then did one account for the other things he remembered? Why was the elusive little bell the only <sup>new</sup> thing forgotten? And what <sup>might</sup> ~~did~~ Viola Axholm and her delicious soup ~~had~~ have to do with it? One thing was plain: an already desperate criminal defense situation had taken a sudden <sup>turn</sup> ~~div~~ for the worse. Maybe insanity was smack back in the case. In any event the possibility had to be explored and resolved before Parnell and I wasted <sup>any</sup> ~~our~~ time hitting the law books.

"Kirk," I said, "I'm staying with <sup>your</sup> ~~the~~ case. I've simply got to see this through. For one thing I'm getting mighty <sup>goddam</sup> curious."

"Thank you," he said seriously. "What are we going to do now?"

*I think simply*  
"First, you've got to have a thorough physical and mental examination. Will you go along? It will doubtless be long and searching and probably disagreeable to boot."

"Of course. Anything to end this dreadful uncertainty and—"

"Yes?"

"Confusion," he said rubbing the back of his hand across his ~~now~~ perspiring forehead. "I'm so terribly confused."

"Very well," I said, rising. "I'll go now and try to fix up the examination. Meanwhile mum's the word to everybody—including your friends, and I mean any friend, including Mrs. Axholm. Your whole future may be riding on how this turns out. Do you promise?"

"I promise," he said, smiling wanly. "And I'm glad you're <sup>sticking,</sup> ~~staying in,~~ Paul."

I opened the door and signaled the waiting deputies, who briskly came and led Randall Kirk away between them. As I

watched the retreating procession I found myself whispering a droll litany. "The poor tormented bastard," I was saying over and over.

"Any comment?" the eager young Gazette reporter rushed up and asked me.

I regarded him thoughtfully. "Nothing you'd dare print in a family newspaper, Miles," I told him. "When I do I promise you the scoop." *have one*

"Thanks, Mr. Biegler."

Chapter 10

My virtuous plans to beagle law that afternoon in the library of the county courthouse instead of going fishing had vanished. For one thing, what was the use trying to roll suave legal spitballs for a client who, when next you saw him, might not even remember you had been retained? But fishing was equally out of the picture, I saw, for things had grown so serious that I simply had to go see my law partner Parnell McCarthy before our case evaporated into thin air. <sup>I maybe had</sup> Or ~~hadn't~~ it done so already? <sup>speculated</sup> I glumly ~~asked myself~~ as I crawled into my coupe and headed for the probate court to avail myself of the first chance to read the last will and testament of the late Borden Farrow on file there. What I found, coupled with the implications of Viola Axholm's mysterious hints, kept my mind in a whirl all the way back to the office.



Stripped of its occupational legal jargon the will was simple enough, setting up the spendthrift trust for Connie's boozing brother, Walter, that Parnell had already told me about. The significant part new to me was that it then provided that the trust should terminate upon the death of either Connie or her brother, whereupon the considerable principal of the estate should be divided equally between the surviving child and the "heirs, assigns or legatees" of the child who had died.

The death of Connie, in other words, meant that the surviving Walter, who <sup>since late adolescence</sup> ~~for years~~ had been <sup>absolutely</sup> ~~quietly~~ pickling <sup>in alcohol</sup> himself on a pittance, would now suddenly get a real bundle of money with which to <sup>try and</sup> ~~appease~~ his <sup>quenchless</sup> ~~helpless~~ thirst. So if Viola Axholm had intended anything by her cryptic insinuations and dark hints of the day before it was rather plainly to imply that Walter Farrow had murdered his sister the quicker to get his share of his father's estate. But if so,

why hadn't she come out and said so? Why too hadn't she told the police? Above all, why hadn't she told "dear Randall" for whom she dutifully housecleaned on her days off and to whom she delivered clothing and jars of home-made soup? Why? Why? Why? I asked myself as I sped for home.

"Hi, Maida," I greeted our red-headed secretary back at the office, glancing in at Parnell's empty desk. Where's the old boy? Over having coffee?"

"Gone to Ann Arbor," Maida said.

"Gone to Ann Arbor?" I echoed stupidly.

"Gone to Ann Arbor," she repeated.

"But why there of all places?"

"To look up law for your new case at the library of

of your old law school," Maida said.

"Our new case is getting older by the moment," I said, and I told her a little more about its background and especially about the bombshell of the forgotten little bell.

"It isn't so much that he forgot this mysterious bell," I explained, "because we still can't fathom what all that signifies, but that he has forgotten anything he'd already told us. Don't you see? How can we hope to decently defend a guy who can't remember from one day to the next what he's already told us?"

"You just split an infinitive horribly," Maida said reprovingly.

I ignored her thrust and shook my head. "And why didn't Parnell at least phone me?"

"He tried several places in Iron Bay," Maida said, relenting, "including the courthouse law library, where you'd told him you were going after this morning's arraignment. He even tried your other favorite reading room, Callahan's Bar, but

*-or should I say no cribbage?*  
no dice. So he left you a note and took off for Ann Arbor."

"Where's the note?"

"On your desk. Go read it."

"Yes, ma'm," I said meekly.

"Dear Polly," Parnell's note read. "I've been brooding all weekend about our new case, as well as hitting the law books, and have tentatively concluded that, besides insanity, there are only about three other possible defenses we might seriously consider: amnesia, somnambulism and unconsciousness. All appear to be off-beat and little-used criminal defenses--if indeed they are defenses at all--and the only law on them I can find up here is as sparse as it is tantalizing. So I'm taking off for our old law school library where I can at least chase down any leads <sup>to the original source.</sup> ~~try to~~ spare the fish and save the fort.

Parn.

P.S. You can tell how serious I am about all this when I tell you I'm flying down to old Ann Arbor town."

Serious indeed, I reflected, standing there holding his note and remembering how much Parnell hated flying. In fact he had a simple theory about aviation, namely, that airplanes weren't here to stay. "If they are then we aren't," he had recently declaimed. Yet ever since the railroads had discovered there was more profit in hauling pigs than people, the only other way he could have got to Ann Arbor was by bus or hitchhiking--either that or driving.

And driving was out, I knew, because Parnell had neither owned nor driven a car since we had become partners. And hadn't our very partnership itself all started with a midnight phone call from the state police way back when I was still district attorney?

"Sorry to bother you at such a late hour, Mr. Biegler," the embarrassed young officer had apologized, "but we've just picked up one of your fellow lawyers, Parnell McCarthy,

for drunk driving and he insists upon seeing you tonight down here at the Chippewa city jail."

"What happened?" I had sleepily inquired.

"He ran off the road and wrapped his old Oldsmobile around a tree and we practically had to pry him away from it."

"Is he all right?" I asked, full of sudden concern, for though at the time I knew Parnell but slightly, I not only liked the old boy but had great respect for his legal ability.

"Fit as a fiddle and still hollering he wants to see you. What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him I'll be right down," I said, getting out of my pajamas and back into my prosecutor disguise, wearily reflecting that a small-town district attorney—especially after midnight—often had to act more the part of a sort of <sup>community</sup> pacifying ambudsman than that of <sup>fearsome</sup> public prosecutor.

"When you gettin' me outa this stinkin' sty?" Parnell  
demanded when I got to the jail and we were ~~finally~~ <sup>finally</sup> left  
alone in a tiny conference room, ~~him~~ <sup>resentfully</sup> glaring at me out of  
bloodshot eyes. I sat studying the wreckage of a fine  
lawyer: unshaven, rumped-haired, the loosened knot of his  
askew necktie resting somewhere under one ear, and so reek-  
ing of whiskey that after a few inhalations, I began feeling  
~~mildly intoxicated~~ <sup>a little giddy</sup> myself. <sup>discreet</sup> "When you gettin' me outa here?"  
he repeated.

"How did it happen?" I said.

"As true as I'm settin' here," he answered hoarsely,  
giving me an elaborate stage wink, "I was blinded by the  
glarin' lights of an approaching dragon."

I doubled up with a sudden choking spell and when I had  
sufficiently recovered to ~~spea~~ <sup>Talk</sup> again I sat up and resolutely  
faced him, speaking earnestly. "Please tell me, Mr. McCarthy,"  
I inquired respectfully, "when are you coming off this crazy

booze thing? Surely you are aware that if you want to kill yourself rat poison's much cheaper and faster."

My concern touched him and for a moment I thought he might cry. His lips trembled and when he spoke it was in a tremu-

lous whisper. "I <sup>do</sup> want to quit, son, but I'm so far gone now I <sup>simply</sup> gotta have help."

"What kind of help? Please tell me."

"Look, I've chased all my friends away, and drunk up my law practice," he went on. "I've even managed the <sup>incredible</sup> gastro-  
nomic feat of drinking down an entire law library--he half  
smiled--"and I'm sure you know that a lawyer trying to practice law without law books is like a carpenter trying to carp without tools." He shook his head wearily. "I'm at the end of me rope, lad."

"How can I help?" I said.

"Help?" he said, as though it were some strange new word.

"Did <sup>I hear</sup> you say you wanted to help <sup>me,</sup> <sup>young fella?</sup>"



"How can I help?" I repeated. "Please tell me."

He reflected a moment before he spoke. "Very well, then, you can take me on as your law partner," he said simply, just like that.

"And if I did, Mr. McCarthy," I found myself helplessly saying, "would you promise to <sup>give up the booze and</sup> go on the wagon and stay on?"

"That I swear, lad," he quickly said, holding up his right hand. "Forever and a day. What's more I'll never <sup>again</sup> drive a car, ~~again~~. Let's shake on it."

So we had shaken hands and I had taken him home <sup>to my own</sup> ~~with~~

~~we~~ and showered and fed him and put him to bed like a lost foundling, and the next morning had driven him down so that he could plead guilty and pay his fine--which I advanced--

and surrender his driver's license. Then we had gone over <sup>to the office</sup> and had Maida type out the new partnership papers we both <sup>helped</sup> dictate ~~X~~ and by noon had them solemnly signed, sealed and delivered, as we lawyers <sup>so</sup> love to say.

The ringing telephone disturbed my reveries and I heard Maida telling someone that Mr. McCarthy would be out of the office for the balance of the week, so I stashed his note in my briefcase and grabbed my hat and headed stealthily for the office door.

"Where you goin', boss?" Maida inquired sweetly. "Trout fishing again or is it mermaids this week?"

I turned and gave her the agrrieved look of an accused drunk for once caught sober. "Of course not," I said loftily. "Since my partner has flown the coop I'm going out to consult with Doc Salter about our new case."

"Do you plan to be back?" she persisted.

"Why the inquisition?" I parried, having already laid plans to take off for a remote stretch of the Big Escanaba when I was done with Doc.

"Not prying, boss," she said. "Simply thought I ought to know your plans in case a cash client should <sup>inadvertently</sup> wander in while

→ But in my book," he concluded, wagging his head, "women who dye their hair are like men who wear five-dollar wigs -- the only people they really deceive are themselves."

you're gone. How do you like my hair?"

Maida was one of those women who, as Parnell once put it, "eternally tinker with the hue that nature originally endowed their hair with. If you accuse them of dyeing it they are horrified, though if sufficiently coaxed have been known to concede they ~~have~~ <sup>occasionally</sup> tinted nature a bit with a wee dash of rinse."

While it was true that Maida had been a redhead when I first hired her, and still remained one, during that time its redness had ~~often~~ <sup>frequently</sup> oscillated between a sort of flaming forest-fire russet to the orangy look of freshly-dug <sup>late</sup> fall carrots. Today—I looked closer—the forest fire effect raged pretty well out of control. "Tell me," she repeated, "how do you like my hair?"

"Ravishing," I said. "As one of Oscar Wilde's characters once greeted a mourning Lady So-and-so following the

death of her husband, 'Ah, my dear, I'm saddened to see that  
your hair <sup>has</sup> turned quite gold from grief.' "

"Don't go literary on me. And please tell me, are you  
coming back or going fishing when you've done with Hugh  
Salter?"

"Going fishing," I confessed, all but hanging my head  
as I made my escape.

That was the way it was between Maida and me. Under-  
neath her banter and wise-cracking ways she was <sup>awesomely</sup> smart and  
efficient and <sup>she</sup> ran our office with an iron hand. Moreover  
<sup>she</sup> both Parnell and I were a little afraid of her.

Chapter 11

"Good morning, Doctor," I greeted Hugh Salter, who I found on his hands and knees in a flower bed in the large garden he kept behind his rambling vine-covered house on the edge of town. "Digging worms?"

He paused and squinted up at me. "Planting gladiola bulbs that arrived late. Must get 'em in fast. What's up?"

"Nothing much," I said, <sup>“</sup>except that our new case may be flying up the flue. In fact things look so bad I've simply got to talk with you."

He quickly got to his feet, still carrying his basket and trowel, and lead me to a shaded bench in a vine-covered arbor where he planted me down beside him. "What's cooking, Paul?" he said.

He was wearing a pair of faded and patched old-fashioned blue denim overalls, <sup>g</sup> ~~the kind~~ with matching cloth suspenders

and a high bib <sup>of a kind</sup> I hadn't seen in years. "What's cooking?"  
he repeated as I reached out and felt the pussy-willow  
softness of his ancient overalls.

"You know, Doc," I said pensively, still fingering the  
voluptuous old fabric, "there are doubtless a dozen envious  
country-club gals hereabouts who would promptly reach a  
climax if only they could wrap their ~~lovely asses~~ <sup>ungirdled → backsides</sup> in such  
exquisitely faded blue denim."

"So?" he said thoughtfully. "And did you know that our  
word denim is a charming bastardization of the French for  
serge de Nimes, a coarse serge once made there, and maybe  
still is for all I know. But back to your case--I must get  
these bulbs in."

So I got him up to date on the latest developments,  
including Parnell's abrupt flight to Ann Arbor. "I know,"  
he interjected, "I drove him to the plane" He leaned forward

intently when I told him about Randall Kirk's failure that morning to remember the sound of the little bell he had told me about earlier.

"Well, well," he said thoughtfully, staring into space.

"Tell me, did Kirk remember the other things he'd already told you?"

"Everything. I was so floored by the bell bit that I naturally checked out everything else, but he came through. This case is giving me the willies, Doc. Maybe tomorrow he won't remember his own lawyer."

"Tell me this, Paul--do you believe him?--that he honestly forgot telling you earlier about hearing any bell?"

"Damned if I don't, Doc. Sir <sup>Oliver</sup> Lawrence himself could not have faked the performance he put on--the man was terrified."

I sighed and continued gloomily. "Seems to me, Doc, that the first thing we ought to do is put him through a thorough physical and mental examination. What do you think?"

"By all means," he agreed gravely, "and especially through what we doctors in our trade patter call a neuro-psychiatric examination."

"But who up here in this remote Lake Superior bush country could do that?"

"Well, there's a bright new young psychiatrist fellow down at the Clinic in Iron Bay I'm told is good."

"An expert, you mean?"

"I'm not sure what an expert is, Paul, though an old pathology professor once ~~simply~~ defined an expert for us as *any* ~~man~~ *man* from far away. If so, the young man should still qualify—he hails from England."

"Do you think you could help Parnell and me by persuading him to have at our man?"

"Of course. I'll phone the clinic right after I finish my planting," he said, reaching for his basket.



"There's one other thing, Doc," I said, and I told him about my strange conversation with Viola Axholm outside the jail the noon before, and what I'd just found in the will of Borden Farrow. "If the old girl meant anything," I went on, "she must have meant to point the finger of guilt at Connie's brother, Walt Farrow, don't you think, Doc?"

Hugh Salter sat lost in deep thought, slowly stroking his chin, and I wondered whether he'd heard me. "Parnell's told me some of the weird things you told him about Axholm, *Draw on,* and *just* as we sit here *now* the thought flashed through my mind that maybe she did it to try to take the heat off the young man she brings homemade soup to, Randall Kirk. Are you listening, Doc?"

"I'm listening, Paul. Also thinking. Leaving Axholm for a moment, tell me this—did young Kirk show any resentment this morning when you insisted he'd told you earlier about hearing any bell?"

→ "The macabre terminal dance of neglected Spirochaeta pallida -- more prosaically known as general paresis -- always seems to fascinate you lawyers."

"Well, he seemed quite positive, almost sullenly insistent, that he hadn't heard any bell and that he could not remember ever telling me he had. The whole thing is baffling."

"Yes," he murmured, again staring into space, "it's very strange indeed."

"Doc," I pushed on, "might he not be suffering some sort of progressive brain damage from, say, the late stages of unsuspected syphilis?"

He smiled. "~~Paresis seems a prime favorite with you lawyers.~~"

<sup>always</sup>  
"But seriously, Doc?"

"Well, <sup>its</sup> possible, Paul, but <sup>rather</sup> unlikely in one so young."

"What then, in God's name?"

He arose and pointed his trowel at me. "No use speculating, Paul," he said. "That's what the examination's for."

He lead me out of the garden past an old bronze sundial. "Now

you run along to your fishing games while I finish my chores.

I'll phone the Clinic within an hour."

There was a weathered inscription on the sundial and I stooped and deciphered it.

"I am a sundial  
And I make a botch  
Of what's done better  
By any watch."

"Lovely," I said. "Where did you ever find the clever verse? Or are you the unsung William Carlos Williams of Michigan and made it up?"

"Scarcely," he said drily. "I stole and adapted it from something I found years ago in a book by Hilaire Belloc, I've forgotten its name."

"Who's he? Sounds more like a tourist ad for a Scottish seaside resort?"

"Oh, he was a clever and prolific English writing fellow <sup>of</sup> ~~long dead.~~ <sup>the</sup> Era of Bennett, Chesterton, Wells and Shaw, <sup>those old boys.</sup>"

"Don't go literary on me," I said, thinking of Maida.

"Can I phone you later tonight?--about the examination?"

"Fine, fine," he said, waving me away.

"And you won't forget to tell the docs about this baffling memory thing?"

"Scarcely, Paul, since <sup>that's</sup> ~~that is~~ the big reason for having any examination at all. Now be off fishing."

"Thanks, Doc," I said. "I'm mighty glad you're along for the ride."

"Paul," he called after me after I'd gotten about ten paces closer to fishing.

"Yes, Doc?" I said, wheeling around.

He spoke in such a low voice I could barely hear him.

"The thought <sup>has</sup> just flashed through my mind, Paul, that Axholm <sup>-- just may, say --</sup> may be pointing the finger of suspicion at Walter Farrow not only to help save your client but <sup>perhaps</sup> also to divert suspicion <sup>or someone else.</sup> away from herself. Think it over."

"Yes, Doc," I said, walking slowly out to my car thinking it over.

## Chapter 12

That evening I fished into dusk, dutifully splashing along--occasionally over the tops of my waders--absently flailing away, mechanically going through all the familiar motions of fly fishing, but all the while really brooding about our tantalizing case. When finally I got back to the car, weary and fishless, and fought my way out of my sodden waders, I realized I was chilled to the bone.

So, purely as a therapeutic measure, on the way home, I stopped off at the Rainbow Bar and prescribed myself a few belts of bourbon. This so magically healed me that in no time at all I found myself deep in a table-thumping game of partnership cribbage, which naturally meant more therapy, win or lose. When finally around midnight I aimed my car homeward I discovered that not only had my chill evaporated but that for several merciful hours I had not thought once about our case.

Rounding a corner my car headlights lit up the ramb-  
ling old white frame house where I'd been born. Tonight  
it seemed all but lost in the towering forest of trees  
that surrounded it. Not only was I born here, I reflected  
as I parked my car <sup>out</sup> on the street in front of the old place,  
but my mother, now so many years dead, had herself first  
come here as a young bride. Yes, ~~here~~ <sup>this</sup> was the only home  
I'd ever known. And hadn't this sort of thing virtually  
disappeared from the land, I sleepily asked myself, this  
feeling of family continuity, this sense of rootedness,  
this almost visceral awareness <sup>that</sup> whenever one arrived at  
this place one ~~had come~~ <sup>was truly</sup> home?

That the old place was far too big for a trout-cr<sup>a</sup>zed  
bachelor who was so seldom home, I knew full well. I also  
knew that any sensible citizen would sell or rent the place  
or at least take in roomers; either that or thriftily

remodel it into nice income-producing apartments and spend

*with luck, henceforth*

his winters fishing in Chile. Or better yet, resolutely

shut his eyes to cloying sentiment and let the champing

buldozer boys have at ~~it~~ <sup>the old place</sup> and, once the wreckage was

carted away, plant in its place—perhaps as a symbolic

cemetery marker—one of those frugal modern cubicles that

the new breed of carpenters <sup>seem to</sup> conjured up overnight out of

a witch's brew of plywood, plastics and salvaged box tops...

Still I clung to the place, not only out of senti-

ment but as one of those crazy fishermen who feels in his

bones that his fishing will <sup>one day</sup> surely perish unless he person-

ally resists and fights the creeping stain of city. Then

there was a more elusive reason: the wistful hope that *some*

~~one~~ day I might still find a woman I wanted to bring there,

and, ah yes, who herself wanted to <sup>be brought.</sup> ~~come there.~~ After all,

*in my relaxed state*

creaky old houses full of mingled memories, cobwebby attics  
and antique plumbing weren't every woman's cup of tea.

Wasn't I having a hard enough time lately even luring clean-  
ing ladies there?

A breeze had sprung up and high above me in the cool  
darkness I could hear the purring rustle of the leaves,

stealthily whispering. As I leaned out the car window to  
listen, and perhaps ~~with luck~~ <sup>divine</sup> even ~~translate~~ their secret language,

I nostalgically recalled that 'way back when ~~my father~~ <sup>my father once telling me</sup> had  
<sup>first</sup> planted these trees they had been mere saplings...

My reveries were rudely interrupted when a car with

glaring headlights suddenly roared around the corner and  
~~raced up behind mine, and gave~~ <sup>squealing to a stop and giving</sup> my rear bumper a thudding jolt.

~~as it squealed to a stop.~~ <sup>slowly</sup> I sat there gathering my wits

along with an appropriate charge of invective. Then I

heard a car door slam and a man came running up and leaned



heavily against my open window, panting and breathless.

"Real sorry, Mr. Beigler," he began--

"What the hell you trying to do, Buster?" I broke in.

"Cross-breed your goddam crate with mine?"

"Real sorry," he repeated in a slurred voice, and then by the lights of his still glaring headlights I saw it was Connie's brother, Walt Farrow, characteristically more than half drunk, standing there swaying and blowing like a spent porpoise. I had not seen him up close for months, and I was shocked to see how he had changed.

He was still enormously fat, with that bloated, lumpish, ~~over-stuffed~~ *padded* field-marshall look that so many chronic drinkers get. But tonight his fatness seemed to sag from him in folds, oddly suggesting the presence of hidden pendant bladders from which half the contents had been drained. He looked *somehow contrived to* both

swollen and deflated, and I thought of a haunting photograph I'd once seen of the doomed Welsh poet Dylan Thomas shortly before his death. Even his clothes seemed curiously to droop from him as though underneath all ~~his~~ <sup>this</sup> swollen bulk ~~there~~ lurked a wasted thin man only masquerading as fat.

"Well, well," I said, trying to make talk while he collected himself, "you sure must have wanted to see me pretty bad. What's on your mind at this late hour?"

"I'm Walt Farrow," he said giving me a grave slow-motion alcoholic bow.

"Yes, I know, Walt. What's up?"

"Gal your office tole me you'd probably be home early," he went on breathlessly, as though dictating a telegram.

"Didn't phone 'cause wanted // to talk you personal~~ly~~ <sup>Since afternoon</sup> ~~ly~~ <sup>N</sup> Musta passed here umpteen times since afternoon. Some redhead— girl your office, <sup>I mean.</sup>"

He was taken with a sudden coughing spell, and then he started to retch violently, leaning low against my car, his head sunk between his supporting arms, moaning piteously between shuddering spasms. I drew away and averted my eyes and tried to remember when this poor driven soul had not been a problem to himself and others. The effort was not fruitful. Not only was his drinking wrecking his health, I saw, but it had never allowed him <sup>time even</sup> to grow up.

Although in his teens and younger manhood Walt Farrow <sup>had,</sup> I knew, ~~had~~ been exposed to a wide assortment of schools, little of the exposure had ever rubbed off on him. From ~~those~~ schools he hadn't promptly fled during his first bout of drunken homesickness he would shortly be expelled, usually before the Thanksgiving holidays. And so <sup>t</sup> his education <sup>al charade</sup> went, year after dreary year.

Talking with him tonight, I sadly saw, was like trying to converse with a grade school drop out, the kind that when I was a boy used to quit school regularly in their early teens to launch their careers in such glittering jobs as pin setters in the local bowling alleys--back in the days, that is, before pin boys had become as obsolete as itinerant umbrella menders.

Walt's sorely tried parents valiantly kept on packing him off from one school to another until finally, ~~as people~~ *as so people said* ~~said~~ in quiet despair they would send him *on* to the next new ~~school~~ *increasingly* less for their son's possible enlightenment than for their own peace of mind.

Following a final epic spasm Walt Farrow gathered himself and looked up to me, still clinging to the car door,

dolefully wagging his head. "Musta been somethin' I ate,"

*half and half gasped*  
he said with the unblinking gravity of an owl.

"Want to talk out here or in my house, Walt?" I said,

feeling a mixed impulse either to laugh or cry, I wasn't

sure which. In a world so full of *unavoidable heartache* ~~real inescapable ache~~

and sorrow why was it ~~so many~~ people worked so hard creat-

ing gratuitous torment for themselves and others?

"Out here fresh air mush better," he said, releasing

the car door as though to demonstrate his return of equili-

brium and composure. Instead he swayed perilously back-

wards and barely grabbed the door in time to keep from

falling "S'pose redhead's married got seven-eight kids?"

"Want to talk out here or in my house, Walt?" I said.

"Yes, Maida's quite a gal."

"Out here'sh fine, Mish Biegler," he said, swaying ~~back and forth~~

~~precariously~~ and suddenly gripping ~~the~~ <sup>my</sup> car door to keep

from falling. " 'Spouse married an' got seven-eight kids?"

"Maida's divorced and childless," I said, afraid he might <sup>collapse</sup> ~~pass out on me~~ before he'd unburdened himself. "Let's

have it, Walt. What do you want to see me about?"

His head rolled sleepily and <sup>with an effort</sup> then his eyes ~~dreamily~~ <sup>dreamily</sup> focused on mine. " 'Bout poor sis Connie a 'course."

"Yes, Walt?" I said.

"You're Randy's lawyer, aintcha?"

"Yes I am, Walt."

He leaned closer and lowered his voice. "Look, Biegler, is it ~~really~~ true Randy claims he can't 'member nothin'

'bout bein' at Connie's the other night?"

"True," I said, "but how <sup>would</sup> ~~did~~ you know <sup>that?</sup>"

"Sheriff tole me," he said, giving me a slow wink.

"Sheriff'd tell on his own grandmother // to win a vote." He

chuckled extravagantly at his little joke, his shoulders <sup>heaving jovially</sup> ~~shaking~~ like those of <sup>at ~~ambitious~~</sup> a jolly department-store Santa Claus.

"Is that all you want to see me about, Walt?" I said.

He pursed his moist pendulous lips, lost in profound

thought. "Anything else, Walt?" I prodded him.

<sup>came a wavering plump finger at me and</sup>  
He squinted shrewdly ~~at me~~ out of one eye, like a

television cross-examiner boring in. "Then Randy don't

'member nothin' 'bout bein' there?" he said.

"Right."

"Or seein' Connie?" <sup>¶ "Right." ¶ "Or anyone else."</sup>

"Right."

"Includin' seein' me?"

"That's right, Walt" I said. "Had you also been there?"

"Sure, sure. Was just leavin' the place when Randy  
<sup>Musta been</sup> arrived <sup>we</sup> aroun' dark. Hollered at him when passed out-  
side--'Hi, Randy'--but he didn't answer nor look nor  
nothin' !"

"Maybe he didn't know you," I said.

He shook his head. "Know me? Randy and me was prac-  
tically raised together. Took him on his first beer blast.  
Fact is we were together the night I piled up my first car--  
~~levely~~ ol' rebuilt Stutz."

But not the last car you piled up, Walt, I thought.

"Perhaps he didn't recognize you in the dusk," I said.

He nodded sagely. "Maybe. But I mor'n half swacked  
<sup>remember--</sup>  
an' still I recognized <sup>^</sup> <sup>^</sup> him."

Here at <sup>lost</sup> ~~least~~ was one witness, I <sup>quickly</sup> saw, who could <sup>lend</sup> sup-  
<sup>to</sup> port Kirk's claim that he was unaware of his surroundings



on the fatal night. "Walt," I said, "have you told this to the police?"

He thought a moment. "Guess maybe I did. Anyway they took a long statement from me an' asked lotsa questions an' I finely signed it."

"Had you seen Connie while you were on the island?"

"Natch. Only reason I <sup>was</sup> went there, man."

"I see," I said. "Go on."

"We met on her front porch 'cause for more'n year now

Connie wouldn't let me <sup>but foot</sup> in her house. Lately <sup>I started callin'</sup> ~~called~~ her

porch Madison Square Garden 'cause we staged so many ~~of~~

~~our~~ monthly scraps there—you know, wranglin' over my

goddam allowance from the ol' man's estate."

"And did you and Connie stage one of your monthly scraps on her porch last Friday evening?"

*Connie I slapped her that there time...*

*downed res' my goddam drink an'*

*wound up standin' toe to toe.*

"Yup, a real dandy. ~~It~~ <sup>^</sup> fine'ly got so bad she up an' left me an' went into the house bawlin'." He shrugged.

"So I beat it."

"Did you tell the police about that, too, Walt?"

There was silence. "Did you, Walt?"

"Well, naturally I tole them I'd been there," he answered. "They'd of foun' that out anyway."

"How?"

"Well, from gabby old Axholm, for one, who <sup>^</sup> *fetches the* brought me drinks out on the porch."

"Did," I began, pausing to choose my words, ~~carefully,~~ "did you and Connie physically touch each other during your ~~big scrap~~ <sup>^</sup> *argument* the other night?"

He straightened, still swaying, and covered his eyes with one hand, and then looked at me searchingly from haunted, ~~weary~~ <sup>^</sup> *staring* eyes. "That's just what I can't

*figger out,*  
zactly ~~man~~ man," he whispered. "Was li'l potted, like  
*an' pretty burned,*  
I say. Main reason I'm <sup>here</sup> botherin' you."

"Why me and not the police? I'm Randy's lawyer  
remember?"

He shook his head as he spoke. "Been back to the state  
cops but they gave me the ol' brush. <sup>Just</sup> Won't talk." His eyes  
brightened. "Maybe I'll go see ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> gabby sheriff again."

"What is it exactly you want to know, Walt?"

*He looked at me quietly, anxiously, and for once spoke in a low clear voice.*  
"What it was really killed poor Connie?"

"The newspaper said she'd been strangled. Surely you  
knew that."

"I know, Biegler, but I thought as Randy's lawyer you'd  
know the details--whether they foun' any clues such as finger-  
prints an' the like."

"Don't know yet, Walt," I said, and probably won't now

till the trial since we've waived a preliminary examination."

"Oh," he said, suddenly straightening, his whole body seeming to shiver. "Real sorry to bother.." and his words

trailed off into a ~~boozy mumble.~~

*sort of boozy incoherent soliloquy.*

"Walt," I half whispered, and he turned back. "Aren't

you a little worried, ~~too,~~ about just who killed Connie?"

Again there was a silence. "Aren't you Walt?"

He looked away as he answered. "Why should I?" he ran on in a kind of querulous mumble, as though debating himself.

"Cops pinched Randy not me, didn't they? An' didn't I go

goddam jail ~~to~~ try an' beat him up?" He held out and

widened his hands and looked down at them. "Ol' Waltie

wouldn't never hurt a fly." He took a deep breath, almost

a sob. "Ol' Waltie never <sup>really</sup> hurt nobody but himself."

"But you are worried, aren't you Walt? I said, per-  
sisting.

*straightened up and*  
"You goddam right I'm worried, Biegler," he said, *nodding.*  
"Fack is, think tomorrow I'll go pump ol' talky Sheriff  
*He threw back his head and almost lost his balance.*  
again. Fack is, think I'll go see ol' bastar' right now.  
Thanks an' see you later." With that he puffed out his  
*suddenly*  
cheeks, *successfully* strangling a burp, and *and slowly walked* turned away.

Presently I heard the roar of his motor and then the  
scream of burning tires as he backed up and then shot for-  
ward past me—in his latest still unwrecked foreign sports  
car, I *wryly* observed—leaving me sitting under my father's trees  
listening to the whisper of the leaves, ~~and~~ the subdued  
sleepy whir of the chilled crickets and, farther off, the  
occasional high screech and zoom of a hunting nighthawk.

I sat there for a long time in the summer darkness, think-  
ing of many things, thinking of the strange case in which  
*I was becoming*  
~~I'd become~~ enmeshed, thinking finally of how chilly it  
had suddenly grown.