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Then one winter, during a prolonged cold spell, vigilant neighbors observed that no smoke rose from the Emery chimney; the milkman found the frozen contents of his earlier deliveries bazzarely protruding from the neglected bottles. The curiosity of the neighbors turned to concern. But after so many past rebuffs they still hesitated. Finally, on the morning of the third day, some of them made earnest efforts to gain entrance. But all the doors were locked and securely bolted and only hollow echoes answered their frantic knocks on the heavy wooden doors.

I LOVED THEE, GENTLEMEN...

Quite a few people reveal more about themselves when they are dead than they ever do during their lifetime. While death seals the lips, it also sloughs off all need or chance for pretense and vanity. Secrets which have been buried for years are sometimes reluctantly disinterred when their possessor has needs to be buried. Some of these secrets are starkly tragic, some comic, and some--some remind me of Mary Jane Emery...

Miss Mary Jane Emery was the only child of a pioneer mining family. She taught in the second grade of the Chippewa schools for over forty years. This is a long time to spend in second grade, and may help to explain certain baffling aspects of the following narrative. After teaching school all week, on the seventh day, presumably to keep her hand in, Mary Jane taught a Sunday school class of tiny tots. Then she hurried upstairs to sing in the church choir. There on any Sunday one could see her pallid face, guiltless of makeup, lifted in song and shining with the white light of her vision... Mary Jane was the kind of pure soul who somehow sustains one's dwindling faith in mankind; one of those shining, innocent characters who must surely ascend swiftly to Heaven on spotless wings the moment they breathe their last.

The only dissipation Mary Jane had ever been known to allow herself was an occasional movie. At one time she was quite a fan. But in later years she denied herself even this harmless form of recreation, avowing that the movies had gone to pot. Even the actors weren't what they used to be. For one thing, it seemed they weren't men any more... In fact she became so exercised over the subject that she tried vainly to persuade her pupils, both in school and Sunday school, to shun all movies. "Motion pictures," she called them. She told all who would listen that cheap motion pictures, with their giddy young stars, were ruining the younger generation. She became locally regarded as gently cracked on the subject. Few listened and none heeded...

THE PROFESSIONAL WIDOW

The story of the status of widows is one of the saddest in the history of civilization," William Sumner wrote in his "Folkways." From the illustrations he gives I think he may have something there. On the Fiji Islands the widow was strangled on her husband's grave and buried with him. It seems she was obliged to accompany and wait upon his ghost in the nether world. On the other hand the primitive Indian Aryans initiated a dubious improvement--they simply lit a fire and burned their widows...

In more enlightened communities the widow was somewhat better off. They settled by shaving her head or forbidding her to re-marry or disinheriting her or merely starving her--all calculated to purge her of the "blame" for her husband's death. She was nearly everywhere regarded as a creature of ill-omen. Even the ancient Greeks and Romans frowned on the remarriage of widows, and Roman tombstones have been found upon which was graven this laudatory legend: "Wife of one husband." And did you know that the charivari sprang up in the Middle Ages to express the noisy disapproval of the neighbors when a lonely widow dared to snag a new husband?

The public attitude toward the remarriage of widows in any given time and place seems largely shaped by two factors: the current religious concepts of the "other world" and the supply of women. In places where the dead are stowed away with food, safety razor and a change of underwear--thus being endowed with conscious life--and are presumably able to enjoy the pangs of jealousy, widows have had no picnic. Where concern after death--where concern exists at all--is with the spirit and not its shell, widows fare much better. However, in communities where there are not enough ladies to go around, the laddie-bucks generally see to it that even the most stringent rules are relaxed, even though the outraged clergy and priestcraft may visualize the late husband jealously spinning and growling in his grave...

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Whatever it is that fluctuates the market in widows, the climate must be ideal for them here in the United States. For America is indubitably the mecca of the widow. Here she has come a long way from her sisters who used to be strangled on the Fiji's. Nowhere on earth does she enjoy such prestige and authority. Learned articles have been written, complete with charts and graphs, showing how much of the wealth of the nation she owns or controls. And she may remarry as soon and as often as she damn well pleases. Pictures of her sixth marriage, this time to Preston Todd III, Yale '08, are not uncommon in our society pages. I speak not of grass widows, though the growing prevalence of this latter clan in our commonwealth has undoubtedly done much to silence our tongue-clacking over the remarriage of the real McCoy...

Naturally, in my work I am obliged to traffic considerably with widows. My heart goes out to them. For our Lake Superior variety do not generally get to remarry rich old Yale grads to the accompaniment of exploding flash bulbs. No. They are more likely obliged to content themselves with marrying another miner. Their lot is not easy. Their cups runneth not over. Only their wash tubs runneth over with red from their husband's ore-stained underwear...

In the balance of this seminar I propose to discuss not the ordinary widow, no matter how many times she may remarry, but a special phenomenon among widows, and one which seems so far to have escaped the attention of the social essayists of America. I speak of the Professional Widow... What manner of woman is she? Come with me to the sunny warmth of my funeral home and I will try to display her to you in all of her native splendor...

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* * *

I LOVED THEE, GENTLEMEN...

Quite a few people unwittingly reveal more about themselves when they are dead than they ever do during their lifetime. While death seals the lips, it likewise sloughs off all need or chance for pretense and vanity. Secrets which have been buried for years are sometimes reluctantly disinterred when their possessor has needs to be buried. Some of these secrets are starkly tragic, some comic, and some--some remind me of Mary Jane Jarvis...

Miss Mary Jane Jarvis was the only child of a pioneer mining family. She taught in the second grade of the Chippewa schools for over forty years, which is a long time to spend in second grade. On the seventh day, just to keep her hand in, she taught a Sunday school class of tiny tots. Then she hurried upstairs to sing in the church choir. There on any Sunday one could see her pallid face, guiltless of makeup, lifted in song and shining with the white light of her vision... Mary Jane was one of those pure souls who somehow sustain one's dwindling faith in mankind; she was of those shining characters who must surely ascend swiftly to Heaven on spotless wings the moment they breathe their last.

The only dissipation Mary Jane had ever been known to allow herself was an occasional movie. But in later years she denied herself even this harmless form of recreation, avowing that the movies had gone to pot and that the actors weren't what they used to be. They weren't men any more... In fact she became so exercised over the subject that she tried vainly to persuade her pupils, both in school and Sunday school, to shun all movies. "Motion pictures," she called them. She told all who would listen that cheap motion pictures, with their giddy young stars, were ruining the younger generation. Few listened and none heeded...

May Jane lived alone in a big brick house on Blaker Street, near the edge of town. She had been born in the old place, which stood well back from the street among a group of towering elms. When her parents died, years before, she continued to dwell there alone, spurning all invitations to sell the place or take in roomers. When the day came that Mary Jane was retired as a school teacher, this somehow seemed to be the signal for her to likewise retire from the world. She gave up going to church and teaching Sunday school--she had forsaken the iniquitous "motion pictures" years before--and from that time on she was never ~~xxx~~ again seen to stir from her home.

Her minister and her neighbors who had known her for years stood helpless on the porch vainly ringing the bell. Finally they turned and went away. She still kept her telephone but never answered it, only using it to tell the tradesmen her meagre needs. The only way people guessed she was alive was by the thin wisps of smoke that occasionally came out of the tall brick chimney. Deliverymen got no farther than the back door, where they were glad to drop their orders and flee. Naturally the eerie old house soon gained a reputation for being haunted. As the years went on most people shrugged and forgot about its lone occupant. When people spoke of her at all, which became increasingly seldom, they unconsciously spoke of her in the past tense. For all practical purposes Mary Jane Jarvis was dead and forgotten during her lifetime...

Then one winter, during a prolonged cold spell, vigilant neighbors observed that no smoke rose from the Jarvis chimney; the milkman found the frozen contents of his earlier deliveries bazzarely protruding from the neglected bottles. The curiosity of the neighbors turned to concern. But after so many past rebuffs they still hesitated. Finally, on the morning of the third day, some of them made earnest efforts to gain entrance. But all the doors were locked and securely bolted and only hollow echoes answered their frantic knocks on the heavy wooden doors.

On the evening of the third day the nearest neighbor called the chief of police. The chief wisely called the coroner, who in turn--need I add wisely?--called on me. The three of us met and drove immediately to the old Jarvis house. Night had fallen, the wind had risen, and it was already considerably below zero. In our car lights the dark and frosted windows of the old house gleamed blue through the wind-tossed branches of the naked elms. As we waded through the deep snow to the front door, occasional tufts of long-neglected grass rose above the snow like prairie hay.

The burly chief tried the door, which appeared to be bolted from the inside. The mailbox bulged with neglected mail, which the coroner removed and put in his overcoat. The chief stood rattling the knob of the heavy door... There was nothing to do but break in the door, so with a one-two-three we lunged against the door and catapulted into the front hall. We closed the door behind us and the chief played his flashlight, looking for a light switch. He found one by the hall door, the old button kind. It clicked noisily but no light came on.

We moved into a larger carpeted hall at the foot of a wide winding stair. Our breath steamed and we left tracks in the heavy dust which lay on everything. The chief found another light switch, but this also failed to work. Mary Jane had been without electric lights... The chief cast the beam of his flash into the large living room. Dusty photographs adorned the top of the grand piano and a solitary piece of sheet music stood open on the music rack. For some obscure reason I recall that the selection was called "Hearts and Flowers." I shivered. It seemed much colder inside than out.

By common accord we walked to the stairway and started up, single file. The moving flashlight cast weird shadows on the high walls. At the top of the creaking stairs we came to a long corridor off of which led a number of doors. All of them were closed. The chief stared uneasily at us. We stared back at him and shrugged. After all, he was the strong arm of the law... The chief gulped and then resolutely squared his shoulders and tried the first door. It was locked...

The chief moved down to the next door, the coroner and I following close behind him. He turned the knob and the door creaked open. In *the* light of the flash we saw a furnished bedroom. A large canopied double bed was completely made up, spread and all. Lying on the top of the spread, on one side, was a man's old-fashioned long flannel night-gown; and on the other side rested a woman's lacy night-gown. It was like a visit to a deserted museum. We glanced at each other and hurriedly backed from the clammy room. The chief softly closed the door. "Jesus," he whispered. We had disturbed the bedroom of Mary Jane's long-dead mother and father...

The next room appeared to be a ~~sex~~ sewing room. There was an ancient hand-cranked sewing machine, a collector's item in anybody's antique shop. There was an old dress form, with a dress still on it. There were sheaves of scattered paper dress patterns, piles of dusty dress material and rows of bulging cardboard boxes. We closed the door... The chief, getting into the spirit of the thing, carelessly flung open the next door. It was a completely furnished child's play-room--undoubtedly Mary Jane's, since she was an only child. There was an orderly array of dolls staring at us from a doll table. There was even a rocking horse--I hadn't seen one in years. We silently withdrew... The next room was a store-room; the next appeared to be a guest room--while the last

room was an upstairs sitting-room, complete with fire-place, a big chair and-- of all things--a stereoptican viewer and a set of views resting on a dusty table by the chair. The chief played his flashlight about--but still no sign of Mary Jane. We hurriedly backed out of this last room and closed the door. We clattered down the bitterly cold corridor and huddled about the first locked door at the top of the landing. We glanced at each other. The chief again tried the door. Lo! it was still locked...

Then it was the chief's turn to shrug. He leaned against the door and beckoned us to join him. With another one-two-three, we lunged and burst into the locked chamber. It took the chief a few seconds to recover his balance and focus his flashlight. "Jesus!" This time from all three of us.

Mary Jane Jarvis was sitting up in bed blasping something in her arms. It looked like a book. She was quite dead, of course, but her eyes were open and she was staring straight ahead of her with an expression that I can only call horribly beatific. We edged closer... An old-fashioned kerosene lamp rested on a table beside her. Playing S_herlock H_olmes, I shook it. It was empty; burned out. The chief shifted his light beam. On one side of the room was a small Franklin Stove upon which stood a tea-kettle. Its contents were frozen solid. There was a frying-pan containing what appeared to be a whitish frozen stew. Mary Jane had evidently prepared her meals in her bed-room. We turned back to the body...

There were rows of cheap wooden tables on either side of the bed. On these tables, and on a series of rough wooden shelves over the head of the bed, were piled countless hundreds of magazines. There must have been thousands of magazines in the room; magazines under the bed, resting on every chair and piled so high on her large dresser, opposite the bed, that I couldn't see the tall mirror behind

them. Arrayed on top of this mountain of magazines piled on her dresser was a series of photographs. "Hold the light still," I whispered to the chief. "I--I can't believe it..."

Yes, it was true... They were all ~~photographs~~ photographs--photographs of old-time movie stars. There must have been a dozen of them, framed under glass, all in elaborate silver frames. I am not precisely a spring chicken, but there were only a few that I could even faintly recognize. I guessed that two of them might have been William Farnum and Maurice Costello, both leading "matinee idols" of their by-gone day. The juveniles of the group, and the only ones I surely recognized, were Milton Sills, Wallace Reid and Francis X. Bushman...

"The magazines, the magazines!" the coroner whispered. "What'n hell are the magazines?" Out of sheer relief in action we pawed over the mounds of begrimed and dusty magazines. You've guessed it--all of them were movie magazines, old and new, thousands of them, with the faces of long-forgotten stars grinning and smirking at us from the dusty covers. The coroner fumbled in his overcoat and drew out the neglected mail. Yes, more movie magazines. At the time it seemed entirely natural that he should move to the bed and reverently place them alongside of her body.

"Look!" the coroner whispered, pointing at the body.

Old Mary Jane was made up like a dance-hall girl in an early movie Western. Gold earrings. Powder, heavy lipstick and rouge--with globules of illy-applied macara dripping from her eyelashes like black tears. There was a bright ribbon tied in her sparse gray hair. And that frozen, beatific expression... I looked away--

"What is it?" the chief whispered. It somehow seemed a sin to talk out loud...

"What is what?" the coroner whispered back.

"That--that thing she's hanging on to?"

It took two of us to make her surrender the object from the avid clutch of her frozen, skinny arms. It wasn't a book at all. It was a large photograph framed in silver. The chief played his flashlight. There was writing on the photograph; small, feminine, teacher-like writing. "To my beloved Mary Jane" We stared at the photograph. "'Bronco Billy' Anderson," the chief whispered, naming one of the earliest moviestars. "Jesus," he repeated, this time like a benediction.

"Let's get the hell out of here," I hoarsely whispered, and all of us turned and silently tiptoed from the room softly closing the door.

Furnished
Feb 26, 1948

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I LOVED THEE, GENTLEMEN...

I am the D. A. in a logging and iron-mining community on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan near Lake Superior. I live in the mining town of Chippewa. I like to tell yarns about my job. Unlike big city prosecutors, I also like to personally investigate deaths that occur under suspicious or unusual circumstances...

One of the things that has impressed me, in the homicide phase of my work, is the truism that quite a few people reveal more about themselves when they are dead than they ever do during their lifetime. While death seals the lips, it also sloughs off all need or chance for pretense and vanity. Secrets which have been buried for years are sometimes reluctantly disinterred when their possessor has needs to be buried. Some of these secrets are starkly tragic, some comic, and some--some remind me of Mary Jane Emery.

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The only dissipation Mary Jane had ever been known to allow herself was an occasional movie. At one time she was quite a fan. But in later years she denied herself even this harmless form of recreation, avowing that the movies had gone to pot. Even the actors weren't what they used to be. For one thing, it seemed they weren't men any more... In fact, she became so exercised over the subject that she tried vainly to persuade her pupils, both in school and Sunday school, to shun all movies. "Motion pictures," she called them. She told all who would listen that cheap motion pictures, with their giddy young stars, were ruining the younger generation. She became locally regarded as gently cracked on the subject. Few listened and none heeded...

Mary Jane lived alone in a big brick house on Blaker Street, near the edge of town. She had been born in the old place, which stood well back from the street among a group of towering elms which had been planted by her grandfather. When her parents died, years before, she continued to dwell there alone, spurning all invitations to sell the place or take in roomers... Then the day came when Mary Jane was retired as a school teacher. The school board presented her with a nice gift and the local newspaper made quite a to-do about the occasion, quoting appropriately sentimental verbal bouquets from some of her former pupils. "May she dwell among us for many happy years to come" was the chief refrain...

The members of her church even arranged a testimonial dinner. A delegation headed by the minister brought an engraved invitation to her home and presented it to her. It was to be quite an affair. A male quartet composed of her former pupils was to surprise her by singing an old song embellished with new lyrics, composed especially for the occasion by an undaunted local poetess. "Miss Mary Jane Emery will dwell long in our memory" was one of the deathless lines which I treasure most. It was all very touching--except that Mary Jane neglected to attend her own testimonial dinner...

After nearly an hour of waiting the minister and the excited members of the program committee drove to her home on Blaker Street. Through the porch window they could see Mary Jane playing her piano in the old-fashioned living room. They pressed the bell but there was no response. The minister finally rapped on the window. Mary Jane turned from the piano and approached the window. She nodded gravely at the assemblage and even smiled faintly, and then calmly drew the blinds. Her bewildered visitors kept buzzing the doorbell. There was no response save the soft tinkle of piano music. Finally they turned and went back to Mary Jane's dinner and their cold ham and scalloped potatoes...

In the days that followed her neighbors who had known her for years stood helpless on the porch vainly ringing the bell. Finally they, too, turned and went away. Mary Jane seemed to have retired from the world. She still kept her telephone but never answered it, using it only to tell the tradesmen her meagre needs. The only way her friends guessed she was alive was by the thin

wisps of smoke that occasionally came out of the tall brick chimney. Deliverymen got no farther than the back door, where they were glad to drop their orders and flee. Naturally the eerie old house soon gained a reputation for being haunted. Months rolled into years. As the years went on most people--including the male quartet--shrugged and forgot about Mary Jane Emery. When people spoke of her at all they unconsciously spoke of her in the past tense. For all practical purposes Mary Jane Emery was dead and forgotten during her lifetime...

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On the evening of the third day the nearest neighbor called the chief of police. The chief wisely called the coroner, who in turn--need I add wisely?--called on me. The three of us met and drove immediately to the old Emery house. Night had fallen, the wind had risen, and it was already considerably below zero. In our car lights the dark and frosted windows of the old house gleamed blue through the wind-tossed branches of the naked elms. As we waded through the deep snow to the front door, occasional tufts of long-neglected grass rose above the snow like prairie hay.

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We moved into a larger carpeted hall at the foot of a wide winding stair. Our breath steamed and we left tracks in the heavy dust which lay over everything. The chief found another light switch, but this also failed to work. Mary Jane had been without electric lights... The chief cast the beam of his flash into the large living room. Dusty photographs adorned the top of the grand piano and a solitary piece of sheet music stood open on the music rack. For some obscure reason I recall that the selection was called "Hearts and Flowers." I shivered. It seemed much colder inside than out.

By common accord we walked to the stairway and started up, single file. The wavering beam of the flashlight cast weird shadows on the high walls. At the top of the creaking stairs we came to a long corridor off of which led a number of doors. All of them were closed. The chief stared uneasily at us. We stared back at him and shrugged. After all, he was the strong arm of the law... The chief gulped and then resolutely squared his shoulders and tried the first door. It was locked...

The chief moved down to the next door, the coroner and I following close behind him. He turned the knob and the door creaked open. In the light of the flash we saw a furnished bedroom. A large canopied double bed was completely made up, spread and all. Lying on the top of the spread, on one side, was a man's old-fashioned long flannel nightgown; and on the other side rested a woman's lacy nightgown. Over all lay the accumulated grime of many years. It was like visiting a deserted museum. We glanced at each other and hurriedly backed from the clammy room. The chief softly closed the door. "Jesus," he whispered. We had disturbed the bedroom of Mary Jane's long-dead mother and father...

The next room appeared to be a sewing room. There was an ancient hand-cranked sewing machine, a collector's item in anybody's antique shop. There was an old dress form, with a dress still on it. There were sheaves of scattered paper dress patterns, piles of dusty dress material and rows of bulging and be-grimed cardboard boxes. We closed the door... The chief, getting into the spirit of the thing, carelessly flung open the next door. It was a completely

furnished child's playroom--undoubtedly Mary Jane's, since she was an only child. There was an orderly array of dolls staring blankly at each other, stiffly sitting around a doll table and a set of tiny dishes. There was even a rocking horse--I hadn't seen one in years. We silently withdrew...

The next room was a storeroom; the next appeared to be a guest room--while the last room was an upstairs sittingroom, complete with fireplace, a big chair and--of all things--a stereoptican viewer and a set of views resting on a dusty table by the chair. The chief played his flashlight about--but still no sign of Mary Jane. We hurriedly backed out of this last room and closed the door. We clattered down the bitterly cold corridor and huddled about the first locked door at the top of the landing. We glanced at each other. The chief again tried the door. Lo! it was still locked...

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Mary Jane Emery was sitting up in bed. She was clasping something in her arms, which were folded in a prayerful attitude across her chest. She appeared to be holding an album or a book. Mary Jane was quite dead, of course, but her eyes were open and she was staring straight ahead of her with an expression that I can only call horribly beatific. We edged closer... An old-fashioned kerosens lamp rested on a table beside her. Playing Sherlock Holmes, I shook it. It was empty, burned out. Hm... She had evidently died while the lamp was still lit... The chief shifted his light beam. On one side of the room was a small Franklin Stove upon which stood a tea-kettle. Its contents were frozen solid. There was a frying-pan containing what appeared to be a whitish frozen stew. Mary Jane had prepared her meals in her bedroom. We turned back to the body.

There were a half dozen cheap wooden tables on either side of the bed. On these tables, and on a series of rough wooden shelves over the head of the bed, were piled countless hundreds of magazines. Wherever we looked there were

magazines. There must have been thousands of them in the room, under the bed, resting on every chair and piled so high on her large dresser, opposite the bed, that I couldn't see the tall mirror behind them. Arrayed on top of this mountain of magazines on her dresser was a series of photographs. "Hold the light still," I whispered to the chief. "I--I can't believe it..."

Yes, it was true... They were all photographs--photographs of old-time movie stars. There must have been a dozen of them, framed under glass, all in elaborate silver frames. I am not precisely a spring chicken, but there were only a few that I could even faintly recognize. I guessed that two of them might have been William Farnum and Maurice Costello, both leading "matinee idols" of their by-gone day. The juveniles of the group, and the only ones I surely recognized, were Milton Sills, Wallace Reid and Francis X. Bushman...

"The magazines, the magazines!" the coroner whispered. "What'n hell are the magazines?" Out of sheer relief in action we pawed over the mounds of begrimed and dusty magazines... All of them were movie magazines, old and new, thousands of them, with the faces of long-forgotten stars grinning and smirking at us from the dusty covers. Mary Jane's bedroom had become the Library of Congress of the movie magazines... The coroner fumbled in his overcoat and drew out the neglected mail he had found on the porch. Yes, more movie magazines. At the time it seemed entirely natural that he should move to the bed and reverently place them alongside her body.

"Look!" the coroner whispered, pointing at the body.

Old Mary Jane was made up like a dance-hall girl in an early Western movie. She wore gold earrings and her face was adorned with powder, heavy lipstick and rouge--with globules of illy-applied mascara dripping from her eyelashes like black tears. There was a bright ribbon tied in her sparse gray hair. And that frozen, beatific expression... I looked away--

"What is it?" the chief whispered. It somehow seemed a sin to talk out loud...

"What is what?" the coroner whispered back.

"That--that thing she's hangin' on to?"

It took two of us to make her surrender the object from the avid clutch of her frozen, skinny arms. It wasn't a book at all. It was a large photograph framed in silver. The chief played his flashlight. There was writing on the photograph; small, feminine, teacher-like writing. "To my beloved Mary Jane Emery," the inscription read. We stared at the photograph. "'Bronco Billy' Anderson," the chief hoarsely whispered, naming one of the earliest movie stars. "Jesus," he repeated, this time like a benediction.

"Let's get out of here!" I whispered, and all of us turned and tiptoed from the room.

THE BURIAL

My father has often told me about a fabulous undertaker called McGee who lived in our town years ago. Mortician McGee conducted his undertaking parlor on the ground floor of a long frame building, the upstairs of which was devoted to the pursuit of commercial romance, the establishment being conducted by a lady called Big Annie... Anyway, McGee was obliged to run his place on a ~~shoe~~ shoe-string because of his droll tendency to spend all of his money on whiskey. It seems undertakers used to drink in those days... McGee's credit became so poor that he was often hard put to find a hearse or even a team of horses and a driver to dispose of the corpse.

One March day McGee's friend and book drinking companion, Shamus O'Rourke, up and died. For old times sake McGee got the corpse but O'Rourke's widow stoutly refused to advance him a dime until after the funeral. She knew McGee. What to do? McGee could still borrow a hearse but he couldn't find anyone ~~which~~ who'd trust him for a team of horses and a driver. Finally, over in C^harlie Jokinen's saloon, where McGee had repaired to seek inspiration, he ran into a little Finn farmer called Matti Hunginen.

Little Matti was in town with his team of ~~xxx~~ horses to deliver milk and eggs for his wife, Impi. Would little Matti come in on Friday with his team and help bury O'Rourke? Since that was his regular milk and egg day, Matti agreed. The story seems to tell more about the folkways of Chippewa and Matti and his pals than it does about the art of undertaking, but I still think it's a grand yarn. Take 'er away, Butch...

ALAS, POOR YORICK

Foreword

I come from a family whose vocation for three generations has been to bury the dead. My grandfather was called a funeral director; my father an undertaker; and I call myself a mortician. I believe I can show you that the Dead Language has surprising life and vigor... Grandpa used to embalm the corpse in the back room of his furniture store, place it in a coffin, and cart to the grave-yard in a horse-drawn hearse. Father, bowing to progress, more reverently used to embalm the remains in the morgue of his funeral parlors, place it (or rather, them) in a casket, and with the timely aid of six pall-bearers, transport them to the cemetery in a horse-drawn and later a motor hearse. The march of time has found me preparing the body in the mortuary of my funeral home, exhibiting it in the funeral chapel, and, with the assistance of escorts, likewise transporting it to the cemetery in a motor hearse.

You will observe that the only word the three of us have left in common is hearse. Some of the more modern-minded of my colleagues have been trying to persuade me that I should abandon this macabre word usage and henceforth more daintily prepare my patients or cases in an operating-room, store them in a slumber room, exhibit them in a slumber-cot in a chapel, and finally transport them to the cloister or memorial-park in a funeral-car or casket-coach. This would completely remove the sting--and all distinction--from man's last drama... The worth/y purpose behind all this nicety of language seems to be twofold: to avoid as much as possible the sorrowful connotations associated with death and burial, and perchance somehow elevate the pickling profession at the same time. Both points are debatable...

Some of the more advanced students of the semantics of my trade would call me a mortuary consultant or funeral counselor. However, within the foreseeable future I do not think I shall budge beyond mortician, although I must confess that no other person besides a fellow mortician has ever dreamt of calling me anything but undertaker.

ALAS, POOR YORICK

Mortician is not new. In his The American Language H. L. Mencken has arrayed the evidence that it first blossomed in America in 1895 but did not really reach full bloom until 1917. However, if it was the desire of the grammarians among my colleagues to find a soothing euphemism for the comparatively inoffensive word undertaker, I think they could have scarcely made an unhappier choice than mortician. The word, to my mind, somehow conjures up a picture of a medieval dealer in death moving mysteriously along a damp stone passageway lined with rows of grinning skulls. But it looks like I'm stuck with it...

I propose in this book to tell you about my job as a small-town undertaker; about some of the people I have dealt with, both living and dead; about some of my experiences--and occasional adventures--in one of the oldest professions in the world. So take your places, ladies and gentlemen. Pallbearers will please occupy the cars forward. And hold your hats!

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One March day McGee's closest friend and boon drinking companion, Shamus O'Rourke, up and died. For old times sake McGee got the corpse but O'Rourke's widow stoutly refused to advance a dime until after the funeral. She knew her McGee... What to do? McGee found he could borrow a hearse but he couldn't find anyone who'd trust him for a team of horses and a driver. Finally, over in Charlie Jokinen's saloon, where McGee had repaired to seek inspiration, he ran into a little Finn farmer called Matti Hunginen.

"Kin you bring in your horses and drive a hearse for me Friday?"

McGee asked.

Little Matti lived in a farming and logging area north of town known as Hungry Hollow--in the general neighborhood of his closed drinking friends, old harum-scarum Danny McGinnis and big Buller Beaudin and that crowd... Matti happened to be in town with his team of horses delivering milk and eggs for his wife, Impi. The idea of driving at a funeral rather appealed to him...

"Kin you?" McGee repeated. "I'll pay you three bucks--after the funeral."

"Sure, sure," Matti amiably agreed. Friday was one of his regular milk and egg days anyway, and here was a chance to earn some extra drinking money without his wife knowing anything about it.

"Ok then," McGee said. "T'is a bargain, it is."

McGee the embalmer and little Matti touched glasses. "When you come to town pick up the hearse and the corpse at my place under Big Annie's and then drive over to St. Xavier's Church--prompt at nine o'clock, mind you," McGee directed.

"Matti'll be dere--Yonny on dat dot!" Matti solemnly avowed, tossing down his drink.

The story seems to tell considerably more about the folkways of chippewa and Matti and his chums than it does about the art of undertaking--but a funeral was involved, so here goes. Take 'er away, Butch...

The day of Shamus O'Rourke's funeral rolled around... Little Matti Hunginen stealthily crept from the side of his snoring wife, Impi, at 3:30 A. M. and worked until daylight currying and rubbing his hay-bloated, dung-coated horses, Fred and Ensio. Matti had scrubbed his face and put on a green necktie and even donned his second-hand Burberry overcoat. Such an unwonted burst of industry and such a display of sartorial elegance filled his dour wife, Impi, with black suspicion.

"Wat you going for do in town, Matti?" Impi asked her husband in her high-pitched voice as he hurriedly put the freshly-polished harnesses on Fred and Ensio and hitched them to his long sleigh.

Impi was a vast be-sweated female, with great breasts which flowed down her person like sagging bladders of wine. She was rumored to possess a bad temper, which was probably not improved by having to minister to the half-dozen odd little blue-eyed Hunginens which overran their farm.

"Wat you going for do in town?" Impi coldly repeated. A purposeful woman, she would not be put off.

Unlike big city prosecutors, I ^{also} like to personally investigate deaths that occur under suspicious or unusual circumstances.

If I am the D.A. in a logging and iron-mining community on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan near Lake Superior, ^{I live in the town of Chippewee.} I like to tell yarns about my job. ~~One of~~ One of the things that has impressed me, in the homicide phase of my work, is the treason that quite (pick up yarn)

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Many people seem to think that the job of undertaker is all shittles and beer; that all he has to do is wear a doleful face, a pair of striped pants, and collect the money after the funeral. Let me disabuse your ^{minds} on that score. There have been many times when I wish~~ed~~ I had taken up professional hockey or weight-lifting or some placid occupation of that kind. What would you do if you ^{and your helper} were faced with the problem of transporting a 350-pound corpse ^(dead weight) down two flights of ^{itly-let} stairs in the dead of night? Do you begin to see why the double-hernia is the occupational ^{ailment} ~~malady~~ of us undertakers?

Do the dead ever wake up after burial?

I speak not of metaphysics or religious matters nor of the concept of resurrection after death; I simply mean: have there ever been any evidence that a person, pronounced dead and duly buried, exhibited signs of life after interment?

Two things appear certain: When a person is truly dead, that is, when there is a permanent loss of consciousness and cessation of breathing and circulation, and heart action,

THE IRISH SWEEPSTAKES

The advent of the automobile speeded up our funerals--much to the relief of the pallbearers--but left many a livery stable keeper throughout America crying in his beer, forlornly contemplating the thousands of dollars he had invested in hungry horses and expensive hacks, both of which he maintained largely for hiring out at funerals. My Dad has always claimed that much of the pageantry and, curiously enough, more of the dignity attending the funeral procession disappeared with the passing of the horse...

Swifter funerals did more than that. In the old days funerals took so long that anyone attending the entire service--from church to the graveside and back--usually planned to make a day of it... It was usually so late by the time the mourners finally got back from the cemetery and returned their horses to the livery that there wasn't much use taking off the blue serge suit and going back to work. Certainly not... Unless one was too disaffected by grief, the only sensible thing to do was to go and han one's foot over the brass rail of the nearest saloon and drink a toast to the memory of the departed...

But in Chippewa the automobile did more than bankrupt the livery stables and spoil an occasional holiday for the more casual mourners. Overnight it banished what must surely have been one of the strangest and most colorful funeral customs in America. I speak of our local Irish Sweepstakes...

Years ago Mike Gleason and Dinny Nolan ran the Hump saloon, a sagging brick building which stood next door to the Chinese laundry on Main Street. Both buildings leaned against each other for mutual support... Every Sunday morning following last Mass nearly all the Irish males in Chippewa, singly or in pairs, seemed irresistibly drawn as by a magnet to the alley entrance behind the Hump saloon. A ritual knock on the "Sunday" door by the initiated gained immediate

admittance. In a thrice one would be standing in the smoky and darkened interior--the front blinds had always to be drawn on Sundays--ready to "hist" his "boiler-maker"--a double shot of whiskey and a foaming stein of beer.

"Ah-h-h..."

One glittering April Sunday morning the boys were duly gathered in the Hump as usual... "Say!" big Dan Mahoney sibilantly whispered, so that curious passers-by might not possibly divine that the Hump was again illegally open of a Sunday. "Say," Dan whispered, "I see they're burying poor old Matt Scully--our late brother--tomorrow mornin'. I s'pose the rest of you byes will all be attendin'? I certainly am!"

Since big Dan Mahoney, a red-necked, thick-wristed Irishman, was the president of the local lodge of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and high up in the K.C.'s too, his most casual observations carried the weight of an edict. They'd better all be attendin'...

"Is the race on-fer tomorrow, I mean?" timidly inquired little Mike O'Dwyer, the treasurer of the Hibernians, and a wistful aspirant for the presidency so long held by big Dan Mahoney.

"That it certainly is," Dan grimly replied. "What?--you're not after tryin' to welsh on the bet are ye, Michael?" he taunted his little rival.

"No-o-o... That I am not," Mike replied. "I--I just wanted to make sure, is all," he lamely added. He glanced nervously at the Lash's Bitters clock on the wall behind the bar. "I guess I'll be gettin' on home--the ol' lady wants me early fer dinner."

"Drinks fer the house!" Dan Mahoney ordered as soon as little Mike O'Dwyer turned and scuttled out the back door. "We'll see who's goin' to win the big bet tomorrow," he happily crowed, winking at the assemblage. His voice sank to a confidential whisper. "As ye awl know too damn well--I'm already after bein' over to Jack Ryan's livery an' rinted Big Red fer the funeral tomorrow!"

The crowd roared, because every child in town knew the Big Red was the fastest horse in Iron Cliffs County.

"Sh-h-h!" admonished perspiring Dinny Nolan toiling behind the bar. "Bo you lavericks want me to be hauled up before Judge Flanigan ag'in--an payin' another stiff fine?"

Things looked bad indeed for little Mike O'Dwyer. For it looked like he was going to lose the biggest Irish Sweepstakes ever held in Chippewa. And what were the Irish Sweepstakes, pray tell?

It was simple--at any funeral the last man to show up at the Hump saloon on the way back from the cemetery had to buy a round of drinks for the house. That was why, before any Irish funeral, the prospective mourners combed all the livery stables throughout the county to rent the fastest horses they could find--so that they wouldn't lose the Sweepstakes and have to set up the drinks for the crowd at the Hump bar...

Nothing disrespectful was meant, mind you. It was all in good fun--and since the boys were taking a day off anyway, and had already rented the horses, they might just as well have a little racing bet on the side, so to speak. The departed would surely want it that way, and had probably himself participated in many a past Sweepstakes...

But tomorrow's Sweepstakes was for even bigger stakes! For the track rules provided that when any two or more mourners had lost four Sweepstakes in the past, the last back to town of these four-time losers would set up all the drinks the rest could hold in two hours of concentrated drinking... The rest of the mourners didn't count in that race--except to come in and enjoy the drinks. And the big trouble was that poor Mickey O'Dwyer was a four-time loser. Indeed, so was big Dan Mahoney--but hadn't he already deceitfully rented the fastest nag in the county?...

* * *

Once outside in the beautiful April sunshine little Mike O'Dwyer broke into a nervous trot. He scuttled down the damp and littered alley to Division Street, scurred up Division to First, skidded north on First to Pearl, and then turned west on Pearl on a dead run. But where was he going? Home didn't lie that way...

Jack Ryan was just snapping the lock on the sliding doors of his livery stable when little Mike ran up to him, all out of breath.

"Thanks be to Gawd I found ye," little Mike panted. "I--I want to rint Big Red an' a buggy fer Matt Scully's funeral tomorrow--that I do."

Jack Ryan thoughtfully spat a stream of Peerless juice and shook his head. "Sorry, Mie," he said. "I'm already jest after rintin' out Big Red fer tomorrow--to big Dan Mahoney hisself. He was here this mornin' even before first Mass."

"Why, the big double-crossin' Hiberian snake!" hissed little Mike. "I'll give you tin dollars extra fer Big Red!"

"Nope, I can't do it," Jack shook his head.

"Twinty, then!"

"Nope! Tain't honorable, t'aint..."

"Twinty-five, then, you robber! Not a damn cint more!"

"Well--" Jack faltered. "Of course, bein' a lover of horses meself, if you're that much attached to the animal, I guess mebber--"

Just then Big Dan Mahoney and a couple of his cronies appeared on the other side of the street, homeward bound.

"Mind you, don't let nothin' happen to Big Red!" big Dan shouted across the street to the wavering livery stable keeper. "If anythin' does," he darkly warned, "in the future our lodge will start rintin' all our horses an rigs from the goddam Swedes!"

"You've nathin' to worry about atall!" Jack reassuringly shouted back. "Nathin' atall atall, Dan. Me an' Mickey here was jest fixin' up to rint him Miss Flora, was all."

Since Miss Floras was a gaunt and spavined old pacer that even the local fishermen shunned, little Mike's misery was complete. He stared down at the ground. After big Dan Mahoney's laughter died away down the street, he looked up at Jack Ryan.

"I s'pose there ain't a ghost of a chance fer rintin' me Big Red now?" he muttered in a small cracked voice.

Jack shrugged and threw out his hands. "I'm terrible sorry, Mike," he said. "But what kin I do? You don't expeck me to up an' ruin me business, do you? You wouldn't ast a chum to do that, would you?"

"No, I guess not," Mike dolefully agreed. "But can't you give me somethin' faster than Miss Flora, man?"

"Nope!" Jack answered. "All the byes was here when I opened up this mornin' an' rinted all the others. That Dan Mahoney's a hard an' jealous man! Looks like he's got 'em all gangin' up on you, Mike."

"That it does," Mike answered, bowing his head in defeat. "That it does--fer a bloody fack it does..."

The next morning--the day of Matt Scully's funeral--little Mike O'Dwyer was down at Ryan's livery stable before Jack himself. He looked pretty dapper in his new blue serge suit with the peg-top trousers.

"Good mornin', Mike," Jack cheerily said, when he appeared. "Was you down here so bright and early to shine up Miss Flora fer the big Sweepstakes?"

"May the divil blow a gallon of slaked lime up your rear valve," little Mike shot back, cut to the quick. "I jest came down early to see if the old nag survived the night!"

"Well, go in an see fer yourself, then," Jack said, rolling back the big doors. "I've got to git busy an' feed all these bloody hungry animals."

Little Mike sat on the stairs to the hay loft and disconsolately watched Jack measure out the oats to the whinnying horses: first to Mollie Dee, the little barrel-bellied roan on the far end; then to Chief, the tall gelding in the next stall; then Cub; then Doc; and so on down the line... Finally he brought the oats into Miss Flora's stall and then an extra helping of oats into the big corner box stall occupied by Big Red, his spirited stallion and the pride of the Ryan stables...

"Will you stay here an' watch while I go throw some hay down?" Jack said, starting up the stairs to the ~~left~~ left. "You kin even start givin' 'em water-- that's if you've a mind to."

"Anythin' to help a pal," little Mike said, leaping nimbly for the water pail. "That's me."

When Jack was safely upstairs pitching hay, little Mike darted into Big Red's box stall.

"Steady there, Red," he crooned, as he whipped a large bottle of castor oil from his coat and dumped the entire contents into the big stallion's oat box. "That's a fine bye," Mike said as he watched the big horse greedily sluicing down the damp mixture.

"Everythin' coming out honky-dory down there?" Jack shouted down through Big Red's hay chute.

"If it ain't--it damn soon will be!" Mike cryptically shouted back.

"What's that!" Jack's muffled voice came down the chute.

"I said 'Yass' you damn laverick!" Mike shouted, quickly darting into Miss Flora's stall.

"Steady there, Flora," he said, whipping out another bottle and pouring the contents into her oat box. Lo! this time it wasn't castor oil--it was a full quart of Old Cordwood blended whiskey!

The services for poor Matt Scully began at St. Xavier's Church promptly at 9:00 A. M. All the lodge brothers were there--Dan Mahoney and little Mike O'Dwyer and the others--and more, too, for Matthew Terrence Scully was a well thought of man. Mighty well thought of, indeed. The length of the funeral procession was a tangible measure of ~~the~~ a man's popularity, and the lines of waiting horses and buggies and rigs and hacks stretched up and down Main Street on both sides, as far as the eye could see...

Then the bell finally tolled, the grey-gloved pallbearers brought out the remains of Matthew Scully and reverently slid them into the tasselled horse-drawn hearse, the mourners climbed into their waiting vehicles, and the cortege slowly headed for the distant cemetery on the north end of town... Big Dan Mahoney was naturally up near the head of the procession driving Big Red, being president of the deceased's lodge and all, followed by little Mike O'Swyer, the treasurer, driving Miss Flora. Both men kept a tight rein on their horses for Big Red and Miss Flora seemed to be curiously skittish and restless--as though they somehow sensed that they were the big stars in this latest and biggest running of the Irish Sweepstakes... So skittish were they in fact, that out at the cemetery two small boys were detailed to hold them by the bridles while the mourners filed to the graveside and the services began...

"Amen," ~~xxxx~~ Father Daugherty finally said for the last time. Everyone respectfully waited until the good Father and the family mourners were in their hacks and rolling their way--all according to the established rules of the Sweepstakes. Then the tense crowd stood back ~~xx~~ as Big Dan and little Mike raced for their horses. Long-legged Big Dan reached his horse first and vaulted into the buggy. The crowd "ahed" as it watched Big Dan lash out with the reins, and as Big Red neighed and reared up and then catapulted away toward the Hump saloon. Big Dan crouched professionally low over the dashboard, his nose virtually touching Big Red's rump, like the driver of a racing sulky at the County Fair. "Giddap!" little Mike calmly said to Miss Flora, gently flicking the reins.

"They're off!" someone shouted. The race was on...

Little Mike O'Dwyer was sitting at a deserted cribbage table in the Hump, calmly enjoying a quiet boilermaker when Big Dan burst in through the swinging doors.

"Good morning, D^{an}," little Mike ~~innocently~~ innocently greeted the loser of the Irish Sweepstakes. "Was you overcome with grief fer the late departed on the way in?"

"Glory be to Gawd!" shouted a stunned Mike Gleason from behind the bar. "What in the name of Jaysus happened to ye, Dan! Was ye jest after fallin' down the manure chute at Ryan's Livery? Speak up! Was ye, man!"

"Drinks fer the house!" big Dan gamely roared, groping blindly for the bar. "Here--gimme that there bar rag so's a man can see to pay his bloody way!"

FUNERALS CAN BE FUN

A successful funeral is like a play that must open on Broadway without a single rehearsal. More precisely, it is like the revival of a well-known play that is ^{expected} obliged to be given a perfect performance ^{without practice and} each day with an entirely new cast. For the play is old--it has been given over and over from time immemorial--but the ^{members of the} company ^{are} is new, at least to each other, if not to the play. The only experienced hand is the harrassed stage director--our old chum, the undertaker himself.

He is always in there with his prompt book: ^{stealthily beckoning} nodding ~~solemnly~~ to this group of actor^s; frantically wig-wagging to ^{that;} another; ^{still} whispering to ^{this} that one; or extravagantly gesturing like a hard-pressed headwaiter to another... His most devout wish is to ring down the final curtain without any member of the company falling flat on his face...

It is perenially surprising to me how well these untried performers really do play their parts. There are probably a number of mixed reasons for this fortunate circumstance: first--ahem--the adroitness and skill of the undertaker himself; then the innate penchant for histrionics and ritual in all of us; and again the normal desire of men not to fumble on so solemn an occasion; and lastly, the general familiarity of most people with the highly-conventionalized funeral ceremoney itself...

But nevertheless, quite a few people do fall flat on their faces at funerals. To flail final hell out of my metaphor, I'd like to tell you about some of those awful occasions when some of the members of the "cast--including the "star" (the corpse) and even the director himself--have pulled exquisite boners that have added more gray hairs to my thinning locks. In retrospect some of these boners seem incredible, like monstrous nightmares, and I am appalled at the number and variety of "incidents." Yet, by and large, I wouldn't have missed them; to me they somehow add that fallible and wryly human touch to a drama without which I sometimes think my work would be unendurable. But perhaps I am only a frustrated comedian...

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JUST A STONE'S THROW

The phone rang insistently. I groped in the dark for the night table.
"Hello," I sleepily muttered.

"Is dis you?" a voice challenged me over the wire.

"Yes," I confessed, not wishing to engage in any ^{ponderous} metaphysical discussions at that hour of the night.

"This is Clifford Balsam--you remember me, doncha? You buried my ol' man three years ago."

"Yes," I answered, also remembering that there was a substantial unpaid balance remaining ^{unpaid} on the funeral bill.

"Well, I got word tonight that my Uncle Clifford--that's my rich uncle--up an' died over at Nestoria. Can you take care of him--the funeral, I mean?" Nestoria was a small logging community some sixty miles west of Chippewa--via some of the worst roads in Michigan. "Can ya?" the bereaved Balsam plaintively repeated.

"Can't you make arrangements at the other end?" I sparred, trying to think of a legitimate reason for refusing the case.

"They ain't no other ^{end,}" Balsam came back. "You know damn well they ain't no undertakers up dere in the woods... ^{ay} Don't you worry about gettin' paid," he ^{strongly} cagily continued, appealing to my cupidity, "because ol' uncle Cliff's got lots of dough--an' I was his favorite nephew. I'll take care of the bill an' ^{that} ~~of our~~ other little balance ^{on Pa's funeral} right after the ^{service} funeral, see."

"Where do I call for the body?" I wearily surrendered, rolling up out of bed and feeling for my slippers.

"Jest go to the station agent at Nestoria," Balsam instructed me. "Fella by the name of Eddy. He's the coroner, too, the sheriff tole me... Lives by the depot. Uncle Cliff's place is just a stone's throw from the depot."

"I'll call you when I get back with the body," I said.

"Okay, an' then I'll come down an' pick out a swell funeral," Balsam *bailed me*

on,
~~said.~~ ^ "Ol' Uncle Cliff deserves the best."

It was late in February. I enjoyed driving through

~~I shall not recount~~ the long moonlit ride to Nestoria over the frozen
bumpy roads. ~~it was late February.~~ *I sang hymns and excerpts from "Gilead"* ^ ~~As a matter of fact I enjoyed driving through~~

through the night, rushing down the rolling corridor of roads past the walls of tall
evergreens, their mounds of ~~lotted~~ *lotted* snow gleaming blue in the moonlight...

~~Fortunately, I had only one blowout.~~

and bitterly cold
It was daylight when I arrived at the "loop" of Nestoria. This consisted
of the main railroad track, a rusty siding upon which stood a partially loaded
gondola car of spruce pulpwood, and the traditional section-house red depot

and dwelling house of the station agent, complete with ~~the~~ geraniums in old
tomatoe cans. *standing in the window.* ^ I looked up and down the track for Uncle Cliff's place which
his nephew had assured me was only a stone's throw from there. "David must
have been hurling the stone at Goliath," I grimly concluded, failing to spy
another human habitation within a mile in either direction. *I shivered with the cold.* ^ Then I saw a light
appear in the window of the station agent's house and wearily headed that way.

"Ol' Man Balsam's place?" the station agent-coroner repeated, hitching
up his suspenders. *and rubbing his unshaven hair in his cupped* ^ "Hm, I ain't laid eyes on the ol' duffer near to a year.

Didn't even know he was sick... All I know is his shack is somewhere off

yonder in there. ^ He waved his arm vaguely in the direction of the woods north
of the tracks. *Sorry* ^ "I can't go in with you today. Got to tend to the telegraph. *goddamn*

But ^ you kin bring him out. *He saw me shivering.* ^ "Won't you come in an' have a cup of coffee?"

"Thanks," I said, eagerly lunging over the threshold

"Gilead" as I know

During the ritual of coffee the station agent--Matt Eddy was his name--told me that two Finnish deckers would shortly be on hand to finish loading the gondola outside. "They live in a shack in that way, too. They'll probably be able to tell you where to find old Balsam's place. Quite a soak, that old Balsam," he reminisced. "Quite a soak..."

Urho and Matti--the two Finnish loggers--appeared while I was on my third cup of coffee. Matt Eddy called them into his kitchen and put on a new pot of coffee, the universal brew of ^{the dwellers in} Michigan's upper peninsula.

It developed that old Balsam's shack was "six-eight mile" in the woods due north of Nestoria. Would they take me in there? They would, provided I'd pay them for the time they would lose loading their car of pulpwood.

"What road do we drive on?" I asked.

"Dere's no roads dat place," Urho answered. "Only vay you get dat place is take da snow-s'oe."

Snowshoes! I groped for another cup of coffee. Of course I could have chucked the whole thing and turned back, but my stubborn Swedish phelmgm or ire or something was getting aroused. I'd see the damn thing through now if I had to walk in on my hands... "Where can we get a toboggan and an extra pair of snowshoes for me?" I asked.

"You can use ^{mine} my shoes," the friendly station agent offered. "The toboggan's only eight feet long. Better take some food with you, too. Never can tell just how long you will be..."

I went out and got my embalming kit, and the carrying basket, accepted the bag of food from the station agent, ^{and} lashed the whole business to the toboggan. In a few minutes Urho, Matti and I started into the woods for the body of old Cliff Balsam--"jest a stone's throw from the depot."

"Have a good time," the station master shouted from his kitchen door.

We stopped at the shack of Urho and Matti on the way--they were only about two miles from the depot--and it was noon before we straggled out of the woods and into the clearing before old Balsam's shack. *"Six-eight mile" turned into ten miles if it was an inch.*

I wearily threw off the chaffing and unaccustomed snowshoes and, walking curiously bowlegged, headed for the door of the shack. Urho and Matti, obviously reluctant to enter a house of the dead, hovered together near the outhouse some thirty paces away, uttering in Finnish. I opened the door.

"Hm..." I said, entering the ^{mess-littered} disordered place.

Old Clifford Balsam was seated at his kitchen table, his head on his arms, his arms on the table, quite dead. The place was ^{so} bitterly cold, I ^{I could almost} tried to move the body. Frozen stiff. ^{Old Balsam} He must have been dead for at least three days. I went to the door.

"Bring in some water and wood--lots of both," I called to Urho and Matti, ^{silent} who were still keeping their vigil by the outhouse.

There were a half-dozen or more whiskey bottles scattered about the camp--one in the bunk; several on the floor; and an overturned and partially filled ^{obviously} bottle on the table near the body. Old Balsam had gone out in a blaze of alcoholic glory... ^{On the table drawer I found an unpaid grocery bill; a dumpling} Prowling further, I discovered three full fifths of Old Cordwood whiskey on the oilcloth shelf over the table. "Hm," I said, removing the cork from one of them. I again went ~~to~~ to the door. Urho and Matti had not moved from the outhouse.

"What in hell's the matter?" I shouted. "C'mon in."

"'Fraid for dead mans," Urho, the spokesman, muttered.

I held up the bottle of whiskey in the February sunshine--and marvelled to see fear dissipate so rapidly from our segment of the earth. I was nearly trampled in the rush...

How much rings within my breast? letters from a collection agency; and a bank check with a balance of \$37. The one Mr. Balsam--the rich uncle...

While Urho and Matti started roaring fires in both stoves, I bustled around to prepare to embalm my man. First, of course, we'd have to thaw him out--that is, after we thawed ourselves out. I found three frozen lemons in the cupboard--and in ten minutes I had crammed two hot whiskies apiece down the throats of my laboratory assistants and their chief. In ten minutes more I was venturing my first Finnish song with Urho and Matti, and after the next hot drink they helped me move the contorted body of ~~four~~ frozen friend over by the red-hot heating stove--chair and all--the better to thaw it, my dears...

After the first bottle was gone, we decided it would be well to eat. Urho and Matti prepared the meal while I--getting into the spirit of the thing--mixed up another batch of hot whiskies. After our lunch I suggested that we should play a game of cards.

"We have to put in the time some way till the old man thaws out an' I can embalm him," I carefully explained. "Do you boys play smear?--quarter a game and a quarter a set?"

"Oh, li'l bit," Erho modestly admitted, so after another hot drink we sat down to a quiet game of smear. Darkness was falling when I discovered that I was out eight seventy-five! This discovery was punctuated by a thud from the direction of the heating stove. We glanced up from our game. Old Balsam had thawed out and subsided to the floor. Cards in hand I got up and signalled my companions to do likewise. "Gentlemen," I reverently intoned, "respect for the dead dictates that we arise and play the rest of this hand standin' up."

"Okay, okay," Urho ^{and Matti} said, leaping to their feet.

Urho ~~and~~ made supper and opened the last bottle of whiskey while Matti and I mixed the embalming solution with water and proceeded to embalm the body. I concentrated on my work--only pausing for two hot whiskies--and by the time supper was ready I had old Uncle Cliff embalmed and in his basket, lashed to the toboggan out in the moonlight. During supper we sang songs and finished the whiskey--and it was with genuine regret that we blew out the light, closed the door, adjusted our snowshoe harnesses, and started back over our winding moonlit trail. As we threaded our way through the tall balsam's and spruces, the toboggan squealing on the frosty snow behind us, Matti and Urho sang Finnish songs, augmented by my wavering tenor...