

“Us?”

“Ow. Damn.”

Pete Gumley mashed his big toe against a shabby chic armoire in his pitch-black living room. He'd arisen to grab a cold one from the refrigerator, forgetting where he'd positioned several vintage pieces . . . and where he plugged in the one working lamp.

“Go back to bed.” He heard his wife growling her command, unable to see her.

She pressed her back against the wall next to the front bay window. Her left hand lifted its curtain so she could spy across the road at midnight's rotating blue lights.

“What're you doing up in the dark?”

He stood on one leg, knee bent, toe out of harm's way, groping for a chair. Pete found one and sat down. Dressed only in his men's briefs, his butt chilled on the cold metal seat as he rubbed his hurting hallux.

Indifferent to her husband's pain, busybody Ellen strained to see the commotion. Her vision was blurred by buckets of water being dumped by rain gods.

“Across the street. At Trulove's house. Three deputies' cars and an ambulance. Didn't you hear the sirens?”

Two squad cars were parked on the lawn, another in the driveway. An Emergency Medical Services van had pulled up to the front steps, too.

“My toe. I think it's broken.” Pete had a low pain tolerance.

“Don't be such a big baby. If you sold some of your crap, you wouldn't be bumping into furniture.”

Her first and second husbands had left Ellen Turklehouse without a cent in alimony. One was imprisoned on a fraudulent pyramid scheme. The other perished in a boating accident without any life insurance. Divorced and widowed, opportunistic Ellen wed Pete six months ago, seeking financial security. However, she'd discovered her third spouse wasn't exactly the charm.

He'd courted her as a furniture czar, stretching the truth about his wealth. Operating a resale shop out of their home was his latest entrepreneurial venture. His dream was to one day own a classy furniture store, full of unique treasures from the Orient and beyond.

“I'm doing the best I can, Ellen. There's a lot of competition on eBay and Craigslist.”

You know every dollar I earn is for you and me. For us.”

“Us? Yeah, right. You’d make more money delivering pizzas.”

“I’m trying. I’ve been building inventory. I could make a killing with just one sale.”

If only Ellen could have seen the desk sitting at the end of their driveway, she would have better understood his prophetic words. As it turned out, she didn’t glance once in its direction, nor backwards at Pete’s voice.

“Dream on.”

“You coming to bed soon?”

Pete hoped against hope Ellen would let the deputies do their job without her surveillance. He didn’t want them coming across the road, knocking on their door, and having to explain his operating a retail business without any special use permits in a single family zoned subdivision.

“They’re bringing him out in handcuffs,” Ellen reported. “I don’t see his wife.”

Pete was half-kidding when he asked her, “You want to fool around?”

After a lifelong pursuit of pleasure spent in bordellos, and treatments for more than one venereal disease, he had given up his non-hygienic, amoral lifestyle to be devoted once and forever more to one woman—Ellen. Faithfully monogamous, he practiced safe sex with his off-and-on lustful wife. Just not tonight.

Her response was honest, straightforward, and dispassionate. “You crazy, horny, good-for-nothing. I gotta get up for work in a few hours.”

Pete flicked his cigarette lighter on so he could examine his toe. In the shadows, he saw his wife had worn minimal lingerie.

“Just thought since you were half-dressed . . .”

Her cotton babydoll was not intended to fire up Pete’s libido. On Monday, the central air conditioning unit had decided to run out of Freon as the heat index climbed to a hundred and twenty. Friday night and the rain had brought little relief to the sweltering sweatbox in which they inhabited.

A streaming saline river flowed down her neck between her breasts, past her potbelly, curving past her panty-less waist, heading for her thighs and calves until a puddle formed around her thick ankles.

“Get the AC fixed, sell some shit, and we’ll fuck on the sofa,” she said in a monotone voice. “I think they’re bringing her out now on a stretcher. Can’t see her face. She’s covered over good. Damn the rain.”

“Wonder what the hell happened? If I hadn’t just hurt myself, I’d get me an umbrella and go see.” For every true emergency, Pete was the type of person who’d volunteer to help, but never actually provide any.

“There’s another career waiting for you, Pete. Private investigator.”

“Good thing they got a street light in front of their house,” Pete observed. “Good thing you clerk for the sheriff.”

“I’m the one with a real job.” Ellen had enough marital material to work as a first-rate, cynical, stand-up comedian.

“You sure I can’t convince you to do anything?” ‘Do’ was Pete’s way of hinting at copulation.

“How many times I’ve told you ‘no’ means ‘hell no.’”

“My toe still really hurts. I’m going to ice it . . . and get me a beer to dull the pain, too.”

Pete was beginning to understand their honeymoon was over. He’d have to get the AC fixed and sell some stuff before Ellen would allow him to strap on another condom and play cowboy inside her ample range.

. . .

The doorbell had been broken for several years. It hadn’t been a priority for Pete to fix, and was another task on his honey do list. Otherwise occupied with several failed small business ventures, he just hadn’t gotten to it.

A visitor kept clanging the brass knocker until Pete shouted, “I’m coming. I’m coming. Hold your horses.”

He threw his briefs on, careful not to get his toe caught in the material. Hopping to the front door, he wondered who could be selling what on Saturday morning. Looking through the portal’s glass hole, Pete saw the eye of his best friend forever pressed up against it. *Always clowning*, he thought, and swung the door open.

“Billy, what you doing here?” Pete stood on one leg, not putting any pressure on the other, while rubbing his eyes.

“You forgot about us going fishing today.”

“Us? Fishing? Oh, yeah. Shoot, sorry.”

“Get some clothes on your little ass and let’s go. Those mullets ain’t waiting forever.” Billy Ferris ‘Wheel’ lived to fish.

“I can’t. Ellen’s on my ass about selling my junk. Maybe the phone will ring, or someone will make a best offer on one of my auctions.” He leaned against one of the sofas.

“Bring your cell with you.”

“Nah. My toe hurts bad. Might have to get something for the pain.”

Billy finally looked down at his fishing buddy’s toe wrapped in gauze and tape. “What’d you do? Kick Ellen in the butt?”

“Course not.” Pete rolled his eyes back so only the whites showed. Billy couldn’t see his pupils for a few seconds. “She’s got a temper. You don’t know.”

“And a rack to match.” Billy held his hands up in front of his chest, like he was holding two cantaloupes.

Pete pushed off the sofa and stuck his face up against Billy’s. “Watch it. She’s my wife, you know.”

He was two-thirds his friend’s height and double his weight, and Ellen was about the width of a mid-sized chest of drawers. He wasn’t madly in love with her, or she with him, but their marriage still deserved some respect.

“Sorry, I meant it as a compliment.” Billy held his hands up in surrender. “Hey. Got any brews? You can still drink, can’t you?”

As long as it was cold, any combo of barley, hops, and yeast could reaffirm their friendship.

Pete backed up, only staying upset for a few seconds. “Have you ever known me not to?”

He turned to shimmy between a dresser and a curio cabinet, heading for the fridge in the kitchen.

Billy posed a question that stopped Pete’s indoor, limping beer run. “So why’d you throw that desk out? Looked valuable to me.”

Billy had never been a furniture craftsman or in sales, nor did he have any experience

in antique appraisals. What could he be talking about? Pete's acquisition antennas poked up on high alert.

"What desk? You been drinking before you got here?"

"The one out front by your driveway, Beavis. Almost hit it when I pulled in. Why'd you put it there?"

"If I'm Beavis, you're Butthead, butthead. I didn't put nothing nowhere. Not last night. Not with it raining like it did. Not with deputies across the road."

"What happened?"

"Don't know. Didn't see anything. Ellen said they hauled Trulove away in cuffs and a body out in a stretcher. I'm guessing it was his wife."

"He and his wife kept to themselves. They weren't warm and friendly."

"Not friendly like you, Billy."

"Thanks, man. You know me. I'm there whenever and wherever anyone needs me." Billy winked.

"They've been married for a good many years. Took camping trips together. Never saw them openly fight or argue," Pete said. "Just the other day, she gave him a kiss on the front porch before he went to work."

"Never know about people. Folks are wound too tight nowadays. He could've snapped, and you'd never know it." In another life, with the appropriate PHD, he could have been a superb psychoanalyst as well as a pathological liar.

Forgetting about the beer, Pete looked out the front window at the desk.

"They probably threw that crap in my driveway last night." Pete hobbled back to his bedroom, slipping on his flip-flops, shorts, and a tee-shirt. "Let's go see what's out there."

"Who's they?" There were times when Billy played stupid like a professional cartoon character.

"The Truloves, Butthead." They walked out the door, Pete hobbling.

The two opportunists looked across the road at the Trulove's front yard. It looked like the inside of the Gumley's house and garage, only their soggy furniture pieces were dispersed. Two leather sofas, a large Victorian dining room table with six leather-backed chairs, one early American china cabinet, and an Asian-style buffet were strewn across the lawn.

An eclectic ensemble if there ever was one, Pete mused.

“Whoa. Look at their shit. All over the place. Must’ve been some married squabble,” Billy said. “I wonder who was caught cheating on whom?” He winked again.

“Why’d they throw that desk on my property?” Pete dismissed Billy’s question with a wave of his hand, clueless as to what had happened, why, and by whom.

Ellen would find out and tell him the straight dirty poop when she came home from work.

“Doesn’t look half-bad, but I’m no resale expert like you.” Billy looked wide-eyed, serious, and a supportive pal, still in need of a cold libation. “Let’s go back inside for that brewski.”

“Holy shit. Look at it. All that inlaid wood and fancy carvings. This desk might be worth a small fortune.” Marveling, Pete ran his fingers over the desk.

After rummaging through hundreds of flea markets, attending thousands of auctions, and sifting through tens of thousands of yard sales, Pete had never encountered a piece carved up quite like this one. Two teak breasts protruded from the centers of large drawers. Their areolas had inlaid mahogany with rosewood nipples serving as pull out handles. A misogynistic thought crossed Pete’s mind—the desk’s boobs were about the size of Ellen’s.

An oblong hole in the desk’s center was about three fingers wide and deep. A strange place to position an ink holder, though Pete thought it was appropriate for its one-of-a-kind uniqueness.

The desk’s top was covered with circles and arrows pointed northeasterly and circles with crosses pointed down. Circles intertwined, circles alone, and squares abounded across its surface. Hieroglyphics he’d never witnessed before. Ancient cultures had never interested him. If it didn’t quickly sell, Pete promised himself to visit the local university’s archaeologist. A PHD-type could interpret the non-alphabetic inscriptions tattooed on every square inch of its surficial face.

Its four posts were carved like shapely human calves. Being an amateur wood connoisseur, Pete recognized one was white oak, another cherry red, a third black walnut, and the last yellow heart pine. They felt smooth to touch and glossy to view. Sculpted feet with toes arched downward like ballerinas pointed to its femininity.

Billy dropped to his knees and started sliding his hand up and down one of the desk’s legs.

“What’re you doing?” Pete shook his head in disgust at Billy’s perverted caresses. “You might pick up a splinter.” He was genuinely concerned about his buddy.

“She’s as smooth as one of Ellen’s thighs.” Billy’s long tongue hung from his mouth, like he was about to lick the inanimate object.

“You are a first-class butthead. How would you know? Besides, it’s a piece of fancy carved wood. That’s all.”

“Can’t joke with you anymore. What’re you going to do with it?” Billy stood up, his tongue retreating into his mouth, and shoving his hands in his pockets.

“Possession is nine-tenths of the law. Seeing as they hauled Trulove away last night in cuffs, and seeing as he’s thrown it out, and seeing as its sitting in my driveway, I’m its new owner.” Pete’s deductive reasoning was unparalleled for a home-based businessman.

“Do I get half for finding it?” Begging like a brown-eyed, beagle puppy, he pouted.

Pete didn’t immediately answer him. “Help me get it in the house. Clean it up a bit. Take a few photos. I’ll put in on Craigslist and have it sold in no time.”

They put their hands underneath either side of the desk, starting to lift it toward the front door. They were surprised to discover it was as light as balsa wood.

“You think your old lady won’t have a problem with it in the house? It’s freaking huge.”

“Just temporary. Can’t leave this piece out here. Gonna rain again. Won’t be inside long.”

“Your toe doesn’t hurt no more?”

“Still painful, but I see dollar signs of relief.”

“Now who’s the butthead?”

“I’m going to give you ten percent of whatever I get for finding it and helping me drag it inside.”

“There’s my generous Beavis returned from the broken toe dead.”

“Going to get it looking pretty before Ellen gets home from work. She’ll be okay with it.”

“I’m leaving after we’re done and you give me a beer for the road,” Billy said. “I’m going to see if I can catch anything off the pier.”

“I’ve done my fishing for today, and I didn’t have to go far,” Pete said, grinning from one ear to the other.

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After his BFF departed to try his luck at catching the one which got away, Pete turned his attention to his newest treasure.

“You’re going to make me some money. Yes, you are. Just rub you down nice and make you shine.” He talked to the desk like it could hear him.

Pete retrieved lemony furniture polish and a soft rag from his garage. This wasn’t the first time he’d brought a find to life. He was a happy resale entrepreneur envisioning a hundred percent profit, singing a childhood tune:

*Once there was a little old ant
And there was a rubber tree plant,
Now everyone knows that ant can’t
Move that rubber tree plant,
But he’s got high hopes
He’s got high . . .*

“You missed my spot, handsome,” a voice as rich as sandalwood said.

“Huh?”

Pete stopped crooning and pulled back in shock. No one had ever called him handsome. He scuttled from underneath the desk, frowned at the flaking ceiling, and shouted.

“Ellen, is that you? You back home early?”

“Underneath my right front leg, please,” the voice whispered.

“I started drinking too early,” Pete admitted. “I’m not having another drop for the rest of the day.”

He rolled onto his stomach, pushed himself to his knees, and stared at the desk.

“Don’t be scared. Trulove was afraid. That was his undoing.”

The hole in the desk’s center moved like two lips from which words escaped.

Pete rubbed his eyes, cleaned his ears with a handy pencil eraser lying nearby, and stood up, staring at the hole. If a tongue had appeared, he would’ve wet himself.

“Holy shit. I got me a talking desk. What will those Chinese think of next?”

Pete realized his find could bring him more dough than he ever dreamed. He’d make Ellen proud, proving he could be a furniture resale magnate. He moved a few steps towards the laptop he’d left in the kitchen, intent on modifying the piece’s pricing on Craigslist.

“Get back here,” the desk ordered, her voice changing to a stern oak tone.

Although the house's heat and humidity approached a sauna's atmosphere, Pete froze in his flip-flops. He hadn't yet called the AC repairman.

Both drawers extended to their maximum lengths, their breasts shaking, menacing him.

"You put your rag and polish under my right front leg. In its corner. Don't have me ask you twice," the desk said.

Pete again knelt down and reached underneath. His most recent find had fast become a dictatorial piece of ornately carved wood. He placed his cloth where he'd been instructed and began to massage it. To his surprise, he found the wood was softer than the rest, almost sponge-like. Smelled better than a Fraser Fir.

"That's it. Keep rubbing just as you are."

"Holy shit," Pete said as the desk began to shiver.

"You're good, Pete, better than Trulove ever was."

"You know my name? But how? What's yours?"

Pete stopped for a moment, shifting his weight. His injured toe had started swelling again.

"Don't stop. Don't you dare stop," the desk commanded.

Pete put aside his pain and resumed working his fingers on the spot the desk desired to be massaged.

"You've got nice fingers. Ooh. Ah."

"What happened last night? Why'd they take him away?"

"Forget about him and his prissy wife. He didn't listen to me."

Pete persisted. "What didn't he do? Is his wife going to be okay? Why'd the deputies come?"

The desk, lost in her own wooden lust, said, "Keep working your fingers, Pete. There . . . right there . . ."

"This ain't right. This can't be right. I'm dreamin' drunk."

Inebriated or not, Pete continued to move his three fingers in and out of the spot.

The desk began to vibrate, its breasts jiggling up and down, its legs seemingly lengthening, stretching, and swaying at once.

"Oh, yes, Pete. Yes. Yes. Yes." The desk screamed, lifted up, and shuddered for several seconds until coming to a stop. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, I guess." He sat back, and in a low voice, began to slowly mumble.

Whoops there goes another rubber tree
Whoops there goes another rubber tree
Whoops there goes another rubber tree
Plant

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Ellen modeled last night's cotton babydoll, reclining in her bed with her knees bent, the soles of her feet planted on her mattress and her legs parted. Sans panties. If Billy Ferris "Wheel" held her ankles down, she could do sit-ups, but she was posing for another kind of indoor exercise.

"What took you so long?" she asked.

"I got here as fast as I could after you called. The traffic's bad this time of day," Billy lied.

He was reeling in a legal-size red snapper off the dock when his cell phone began vibrating. Priorities. After he reeled the fish in, he checked his voicemail. She threatened to rat him out to Pete if he didn't get his ass right over there. Billy couldn't lose his BFF, his fishing buddy, his free beer. Priorities. He kicked aside his loafers, ripped his tee-shirt off, and unbuckled his pants.

"Pete'll be back in an hour. Let's do this."

In the bedroom, Ellen tended to be an excellent time manager. Working for the sheriff's office for the past five years, she'd won efficiency awards, too.

Billy stood on the side of the bed in his briefs. "Could I play with your rack a little?"

"What's wrong with you? Didn't you get enough breast milk as a child? Didn't you hear we've got time for a quickie?"

She turned up her nose and thought she smelled something funny.

"Got it. Just . . . something's bothering me."

Ellen mocked him. "Billy's got a conscience?" She turned onto her side and looked directly at his uninspired crotch, sizing up his lack of size. From her view, his secondary brain was having huge memory loss this afternoon.

"I do, and I don't, but that's not it. I was here earlier helping Pete carry that desk inside."

"And?"

"Pete said he'd make good money selling it. I'd get ten percent."

“Don’t do me any favors helping him bring more crap into the house.”

“But Ellen . . .”

“No buts. Lie down next to me and let me get you to function.”

Ellen patted the bed like she was gesturing for Fido to come over for a doggie biscuit.

Billy obliged by lying on his side, facing her cookies.

She slipped her hand down his briefs and ran her fingers through his black forest.

He looked at her with bloodshot eyes. “Pete said he broke his big toe last night.”

“He’s another infant. He’s at Urgent Care right now getting x-rays I’ll have to pay for.”

“What happened last night? Pete said you’d find out.”

“The deputies’ report charged Trulove with murder. They found wood splinters in her head.”

“He beat her to death?”

“Must have. They had some kind of fight. You saw their front yard with all the crap out there.”

“Pete said they were married a long time. They never argued far as he could see. Aren’t you curious what happened?”

“I’m going to get dressed. All you want to do is talk.”

She removed her hand from his crotch. His cock was still limp an over-cooked noodle.

“Ellen, wait. I’ll get it up. Just give me a minute,” Billy said, frustrated by his heterosexual inabilities.

“From what I felt, you’re overly optimistic on the time it’ll take.”

She lay back on the bed with her hands behind her head, watching the ceiling fan whir. Seething inside, sweating outside, Ellen continued to smell something fishy.

“I’ll feel better if I close and lock the door.” Billy arose and walked to the bedroom’s entrance.

“Sure. Waste more time.”

“Shoot. It won’t close. Hey, Pete’s desk has got one of its legs stuck out. It’s making it so it won’t close.”

Ellen focused her vision on the fan. Pete still hadn’t called the service man to fix the AC. He was as useless as her first two husbands.

“Nice. How’d it get there?”

“You asking me? It was jammed up in the living room with other furniture.”

“Why can’t I meet men who aren’t kids?” Ellen asked, not expecting Billy to answer. “Push it aside and get back here.”

“I can’t budge it. It was a lot lighter this morning.”

Billy dropped his briefs on the floor, returning to bed. He touched Ellen’s face, trying to turn her gaze away from the fan.

She frowned like she just smelled a week-old blowfish.

“Your hands smell like crap. Did you go fishing and not wash ‘em? You’re a pig, Billy.”

“I didn’t use my cock as bait,” Billy clarified. “Give me some, sugar lips. Then, I can give you what you want.”

“You’re crazy if you think I’m putting my mouth on your little worm. I’m insane for messing with you.”

Ellen sat up in bed and turned away from him. Her sheets had become drenched from her sweat, scorched by her unfulfilled lust, and stinky from the fisherman’s foreplay.

He turned toward her, whispering words she wasn’t quite prepared to hear. “That desk. Strange it moving into the doorway like it did.”

“Get out. Get the fuck out. You, Pete, and that fucking desk. You all can screw yourselves. You first.” She jumped off the bed away from him.

Being the efficiency freak she was, she didn’t enjoy wasting time. The past fifteen minutes hadn’t fulfilled her.

“I think it’s staring at us.”

Billy arose and fumbled back into his briefs, pants, tee-shirt, and loafers. Throughout the entire aborted sexual tryst, he’d kept his white socks on.

If Ellen had anything nearby by to throw at him, she would’ve done just that. “I think I was too kind when I said you were crazy. You’re a butthead. It’s another piece of old furniture you’ve dragged in which’ll collect dust mites and mold.”

“Pete says I’m a butthead, too, but not in a way like you said it.” Billy buckled his belt, staring at the desk. “I think I saw it shake.”

“That’s it. Go in the tool shed and find me an ax. I’m chopping that bitch up.”

“Pete wouldn’t like that.” Billy would defend Pete’s acquisition until his fish breath sucked its final drop of air.

“Pete wouldn’t like his best friend screwing his wife,” she tossed back.

“I can take a hint. I’ll be going now and not coming when you call again.”

The desk was now fully blocking the doorway. He jumped on top of it and leapt into the hallway.

“I think I heard it grunt when I hurdled it,” Billy said, dusting himself off.

Ellen’s insides were churning. Her crimson face contorted, looking for something, anything that could inflict damage. She spied and grabbed her clothes’ iron.

“I’ll pound on it. Then we’ll see how much it moves.” She hit the top of the desk with the pointed end of the iron.

“I wouldn’t do that,” a stern female voice said.

“Don’t tell me what I can or can’t do.” Ellen didn’t realize those cautionary words weren’t Billy’s. She started shouting and pounded on the desk. “Stupid piece of furniture. Stupid Pete. This feels good. I should get rid of more crap he’s hoarded.”

Every time Ellen dented the desk, its two drawers extended themselves further and further out until they fell to the floor. Her soaked lingerie clung to her body, glued by her sweat, more profuse with each strike. She swung her bludgeon more than a dozen times into its wooden flesh. She grunted and panted, not hearing the desk’s pained groans and sighs.

The unique writing table, assuredly not Made in America, finally decided it had experienced enough domestic abuse.

The drawers flew up from the floor. In opposite directions, they zoned in on Ellen’s ears, clapping them like two wooden cymbals. They retreated to different corners, changed direction, and rammed her face and the back of her head again and again, until dizzy from their pounding, she fell to the floor.

She tried to shield her head from their blows. One of the desk’s legs lengthened until it entered Ellen’s open potty mouth. It continued stretching, twisting, and shoving its pointed toes until they protruded out the back of her neck. The leg retreated until it was the same length as the other three. Then, to make extra certain she was dead, the desk crouched, jumped in the air, and landed on Ellen’s head. Twice.

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“Honey, I’m home. Wasn’t a broken toe after all,” Pete said, dodging past the treasures he had for sale in the hallway, heading for the bedroom. “Ellen? Where are you? You hiding from me like on our honeymoon?”

Pete was proud of his day. He had shined and beautified the desk, discovering it had verbal qualities that increased its value. Already, he had three inquiries. He hoped for a quick sale, questioning whether he’d underpriced it.

He had scheduled the air conditioning service to come on Monday. Ellen would be proud . . . and grateful. *Maybe she’d show her appreciation with us fooling around.*

To round out his good fortune, he’d found a nice coffee table by the side of the road, which would bring at least twenty dollars after it was cleaned up. Whether it talked or not.

Unfortunately, he found Ellen with her eyes bulging out, staring at the ceiling fan. He knelt beside her.

“Oh, Ellen. My Ellen. Oh, wow. I’m so sorry. This isn’t good,” he whispered.

“She *wasn’t* any good. Trust me,” the desk said.

“But murder?”

“Self-defense. I’d call it manslaughter, if you had to call it anything. Honest. Look at what she did to me with that iron.”

Pete got up and ran his fingers over all the gashes Ellen had inflicted.

“Easy, Pete. With your help, they’ll heal.”

“The law will think I killed her.”

“Not if you’re smart.”

“Huh?”

“Make it look like a gas stove fire.”

“Burn the house down?”

“You’ll collect on insurance. Start over elsewhere.”

“But I wanted my first and only marriage to work.”

“No one likes a whiner. Move her to the kitchen. Do it. We don’t have much time.”

“But you’ll burn too.”

“I’m coming with you. Hurry. Let the gate down in your pick-up. I’ll walk to it and hop in.”

“But . . . but . . . what’ll I tell the law?”

“Bring me to the sheriff’s office after you set up the ignition conditions for the explosion. Tell them the truth. You found me in your driveway. Tell them you think I killed Trulove’s wife.”

“They’ll think I was insane.”

“You’re right, but I’ll be your alibi while the house burns down.”

“But then what?”

“You’ll need to find us a place to stay.”

“Us?”

After he’d married Ellen and started his resale business, Pete had such high hopes.

High apple pie in the sky hopes.

“Us.” The desk walked out the front door, heading for Pete’s pick-up truck.

End