

A Pocket Full of Shells

A novel by John W. Arndt
johnwarndt52@yahoo.com

*"Baby and I don't know- reason why I say
run bring me my shotgun
oh man and a pocket full of shells
You know if I don't get some competition,
It's gonna' be some trouble here."*

Lightnin' Hopkins
"Shotgun Blues"

Preface

The "learning experiment" that character Jerry Egan participates in was inspired by one of psychologist Stanley Milgram's infamous "Obedience to Authority" experiments, which he began at Yale in 1959. In those experiments, naive paid volunteers were led to believe that they were administering painful electric shocks to a "learner" (actually a confederate to the experimenter; an actor who felt no shock) every time he gave an incorrect answer on a word association test. That deception was defended as being necessary to determine what might inspire ordinary men and women to summon the courage to defy the sort of commands that the Germans obeyed in World War II.

The racial disturbance depicted in its final chapter followed the April 7, 1964 death of Rev. Bruce Klunder, a white Presbyterian minister who was crushed by a bulldozer when he and a group of Civil Rights activists tried to block construction on a racially segregated Cleveland public school.

To put this book in its correct historical context, research was done through the microfilm records of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the *Cleveland Press*, the *Call and Post* newspaper, the *New York Times*, *TIME* and *EBONY* magazines, as well as in the records of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Excerpts from speeches given at two rallies are quoted verbatim from press accounts of the events.

Witnesses to the events of April 6 and 7, 1964 were interviewed, the area surrounding what is now the Stephen E. Howe Elementary School was visited, and after considerable foot-dragging and delay by the Cleveland Police Department, sworn testimony by witnesses to Rev. Klunder's death was obtained.

Finally, so I could get a feel for the accommodations my characters enjoyed during a jail house scene, I went to the Cleveland Police Department's Third District headquarters on Payne Avenue and asked to be put in one of its now-unused holding cells, where prisoners arrested at disturbances in downtown Cleveland would have been held in 1964.

Chapter I.

On a cold, blustery evening seventy-six days after gunshots in Dallas blew away America's innocence, two girls- one named Nora, the other named Donna- slouched on the shag rug covering the rec room floor in a tacky prefab bungalow on Cleveland's West Side, smoking and gazing at the image flickering on a small black and white television set. They watched it with the pretentious cool boredom that only sixteen year-olds can feign and Donna snapped when Nora's older brother- who'd come to do his laundry- sent the T.V. into a fit of white fuzz when he switched on the MAYTAG. "Dammit Jerry, they're on ANY MINUTE NOW!"

Jerry Egan dumped some TIDE into the machine, threw in his dirty work clothes, then stepped into the rec room to ask Donna: "WHO is on any minute now?"

"'WHO', he asks, 'WHO!?' The BEATLES are who!! Jeeze!" Donna lay down prone in front of the TV with her legs splayed suggestively and her tight black slacks insinuated their way deep into the crack of her rump to reveal more than she'd planned for. "What a DORK you are, Jerry Egan!" Winking, she reached back to adjust them. "You're telling me you don't know the BEATLES are on Ed Sullivan tonight? Sheesh!"

"Of course I heard." Just to tease her, Jerry faked a yawn like couldn't care less. "Four Stooges, and they all look like Moe. Big deal." He nudged Donna's foot to get a rise out of her.

She took the bait, kicked his foot back and put on an air of indignation. "They're NOT Stooges! I think they're cute! But what would YOU know?! AAaaa! More damn commercials!" She turned down the volume and lit one of Nora's LARKs.

Seeing that, Jerry relaxed and said, "So His Holiness is working double duty?"

Nora lit a smoke of her own and squinted through the match sulphur. "How'd you know? You and him talking again?"

"Hell no! I just knew 'cause you two wouldn't be smoking down here if he was coming home tonight, that's all."

'Little girl,' she droned, mimicking their father, 'your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so you shouldn't defile it by smoking!' Snorting, she drew in defiantly. "Yeah, His Holiness is pulling a double 'cause Sergeant Maranelli's taking his shift on Saint Patrick's Day. You know, so he can march with the Ancient Order of the Hibernians..." She yawned again.

"Shit!" Donna stood and lunged at the TV. "More static!" She smacked Nora's ZENITH to clear the fuzz. Smacked it hard.

"Donna," warned Jerry, "She worked hard to buy that. You break it, you buy her a new one!" Graciously, he went and clicked off the MAYTAG. "There, it can wait."

Ed Sullivan congealed out of the fuzz. "...let's welcome these youngsters from Liverpool, ladies and gentlemen, The Beatles!" A guitar's twang and the thump of drums reverberated over the shrieking of a thousand teenage girls in NBC's New York T.V. studio.

Donna and Nora got sucked right into it. Their screaming set Jerry's teeth on edge like fingernails scraped on a blackboard. It got so shrill he had to step back to watch it from a distance. The girls howled, kicked and rocked on the shag rec room rug in a state that looked like agony and ecstasy wrapped together.

Jerry twirled his finger by the side of his head, assessing their mental state. "Those pansies can do THAT to females?," he muttered. He played for a moment with the notion of combing his own hair down like theirs, but he knew he'd never work up the nerve.

Mercifully, the performance was brief. The girls collapsed on the carpet, moaning and looking embarrassed for acting like such fools. Then they fell quiet, each of them lost in thoughts of mop-top boys.

Jerry flicked the laundry back on. If he'd let it fester any longer, his work clothes would have sprouted alien life forms. They'd sat in that duffel bag ever since the strike began.

Hunger sent him upstairs to the kitchen. He found a fresh loaf of bread and some lunch meat, made himself a couple sandwiches and went to the family room to eat. He never dropped over except to do his laundry when the old man was out, but with him working late he decided to relax and make the most of his visit.

Jerry sat in His Holiness's special chair, the one place Philip Egan insisted was his and his alone. One more way Jerry had of taking his revenge.

He glanced at the clock, a big, no-nonsense institutional model Philip Egan had swiped from the station. It sat on the fireplace mantel, right between his Sacred Heart of Jesus picture and the black mourning sash-adorned portrait of JFK. Just a little after nine PM. More reason not to hurry.

Just like a cop, Jerry thought, for the old man to put a clock up there. Like punctuality was something sacred.

He put his sandwiches aside to go through the sports page. The big WBA heavyweight title bout was coming up, and Jerry couldn't get enough news about it. Some New York columnist had written a piece saying Sonny Liston was in tip-top shape, "...so Cassius Clay had better watch out!"

"Damn well better WIN," muttered Jerry. He had money bet on that clown. Anticipation of the fight- still two weeks away- got his juices flowing, and he got to work in earnest on those sandwiches.

They were settling into his gut and Jerry was about to doze off when Donna poked her head into the room. "Jerry, your wash was done, so I put it in the dryer. That's OK, isn't it?"

"Sure. Thanks Donna." It made him uncomfortable to have this little high school girl fawning over him. She'd been doing it for years.

She sat on the arm of the chair, rubbed his arm and squinted. "Jerry, is that a new eye?"

"No, it's just my backup." He plinked the prosthesis with his fingernail, making Donna cringe.

"AAAcckkk! Don't DO that!" She punched his arm and got up while Jerry chuckled. Leaning sideways to shake out her long blond hair she told him: "I liked it better when you wore the eye patch. You looked SO cool. Cool, like a pirate!" Donna wiggled her butt on her way out of the room and scooted back downstairs.

Jerry had to admit, for a dumb, born-on-the-boat DP, Donna was a sexy little wench. Sometimes late at night he'd imagine her prone beneath him, bucking and squealing, a peasant girl who knew no shame...

Too bad she chose to hang around with Nora. Donna's looks paled in comparison to Jerry's kid sister. The Egan kids were good looking, even if they weren't good for much else. Like Nora, Jerry had the deep brown eyes and jet black hair peculiar to the "Black Irish," those descendants of the Moorish mercenaries who washed up on Eire's shores when the Spanish Armada sank. Jerry, a sturdy light-heavyweight who was lean and muscular from working out on the YMCA's rowing machines and pounding their speed bags years after he was forced to hang up his gloves, had a big manly chin punctuated with a deep dimple and a rugged five O'clock shadow that made him look older than his twenty-two years. And his sharp stiletto eyebrows were made all the more intriguing by a mischievous gleam in his eyes, like a young Sean Connery. His EYE, actually. Neither the prosthesis he wore in his socket that night or his usual quite matched his real eye and that just added to his roguish good looks.

He stretched and yawned just as Nora emerged from the basement to takeout the trash. "Oh, hey," she called when she stepped back in the side door, "there's a letter for you from Joey Falcone."

"No shit!?" Jerry had wondered if his old buddy would ever write. "Where?"

Nora told him to look on the coffee table and apologized for not telling him about it the last time he'd dropped in. That was nearly a week earlier. Jerry snatched it up. Yep, it was from his old pal Joe, all right. Or more correctly, PFC Falcone, United States Army. He tore it open:

*January 28, 1964
Fort Sam Houston,
United States Army
San Antonio, Texas, USA*

Jerry Egan, you one-eyed dog!

Buddy, I used to pity you for being 4-F, but now I envy you! This training is a BITCH! I finished Basic a month ago, but get this: I'm in this special advanced unit, and I MIGHT get into Special Forces. That's the Green Berets! If I pass this big test next week, I'll be off to Fort Bragg for the REAL MOTHERFUCKER. The guys who make it through THAT are in the toughest unit Uncle Sam's got! Hell, you know that.

You'll be interested in this- they teach you close-up combat techniques that put all our street fighting to absolute SHAME! Korean Karate and Savate, all that stuff is for PUSSIES compared to what I'll be learning! Can't tell you any more because of National Security. Yuk, yuk!

Seriously Jerry, we might go to Indo China to fight the guerrilla Communists on their own turf. The guys here are saying it'll take everything we've got to rout those little bastards out of there, and I believe it. Buddy, just hope I'm up to it. I'll know in three weeks if I've been selected. If I have, it's off to Fort Bragg

But either way man, I get FIVE DAYS leave once this phase is over! Me and some of the guys are planning to drive down south of the border to Matamoras. We'll rent some motel rooms, get a couple cases of Tequila, then go dogging for chiquitas. I heard those little Mexican tarts will do just about ANYTHING! Heh, heh! We'll SEE about that! If your strike is still on, you ought to come down here. Who wants to spend another March in Cleveland?

You can drive down here in two days easy, even with that one headlight of yours. Who knows, maybe you'll want to buy a sombrero and stay. Just meet up with us at the Motel Rio on the week of the 9th. Can't miss it. Anybody in Brownsville can give you directions. Its right across the border. You better BE there or I'll kick your ASS when I get back from Indo China! I MEAN that!

Later Man,

Joe

P.S. I hope you're not allergic to penicillin. You never know what might jump off one of those little chiquitas and onto you.

Just kidding.

Jerry had to laugh when he imagined Joey Falcone sweating it out in boot camp. Sure, Joe was a good man to have on your side in a fight, so long as the fight didn't last more than a few minutes. That crazy little S.O.B. never did have much wind. He'd learned that years ago, when they were horsing around downtown one hot summer night with this other punk named Stanley Wallace. The three of them had just been booted out of a bar they'd snuck into when Stanley picked a fight with a big drunk steelworker who was pissing in the alley. Jerry stepped in to help him out when that steelworker started getting the better of him, but Stanley wasn't satisfied with Jerry folding him up with a punch in the nuts. The asshole had to kick him when he was down! Kick him in the head! Jerry was too shook up by the sound of it even to cuss Stanley out. "SPILufft!" Soft and squishy.

They just ran like hell through the alley to Carnegie Ave, then headed toward the bridge that spanned the Cuyahoga river. Joey fell behind after the very first block. Jerry slowed to let him catch up, but Stanley just kept running. Jerry had to slow again and again, even grabbing Joey by the collar once to DRAG him along.

The kid huffed and puffed like he was having some sort of attack, so the two of them ducked behind a bridge abutment so he could catch his breath. Jerry thought his friend was going to die, and Stanley was long gone by the time they set out again to cross the bridge.

The next day, Jerry heard on T.V. that some guy was found stomped to death in an alley downtown.

That had them both shitting their pants for days, but Philip Egan didn't mention any murder downtown, and there wasn't anything in the paper about it, either. The guy was a nobody, a loser whose death the Department wasn't going to waste any time investigating. Case closed. But they didn't dare let on about it to Stanley, because that stupid punk might have BRAGGED about it if he knew, and they never spoke of it again with one another.

Stanley was in reform school a year or two later on some whole other matter when he got his throat slit. No great loss for humanity.

The episode bothered Jerry sometimes, but he always managed to tell himself it was on Stanley Wallace to burn in Hell for it, not him or Joey Falcone. But he made sure never to get himself in a jam with him again where they might have to run.

Jerry considered the deadening February freeze outside, then compared that to a week in a Matamoras motel room with a jug of tequila and a dirty brown slut at his beck and call. There was no contest. "I'll worry about finding the penicillin later," he snickered.

His strike benefits were nearly depleted, so he'd need a little extra cash to make the trip. But not much. Joey owed him a hundred bucks from before he got drafted. He'd have his pay coming from basic training, and the sooner Jerry got down there, the better his chances of collecting. So he picked up the Sunday paper again to look for any quick cash opportunity it might offer.

Pickings were slim. Sure, he could sell blood or sit around a temporary labor hall for a day's grunt work with a bunch of minimum wage winos, but Jerry had too much pride to stoop to something like that.

Then an odd thing listed under "miscellaneous" caught his eye:

**Earn Money and Help Us
Understand the Human Mind!**
**We are seeking paid volunteers for
a groundbreaking study of learning.**

- * One hundred Cleveland men age 21-50 needed.
- * Earn \$20.00 (plus one dollar carfare) for two hours of tests.
- * No other obligations.
- * Sorry, college students and military veterans aren't eligible.
- * Call Major Robero Nunes, PhD at 247-4312, days if you wish to participate.

Jerry made a screwy look and read it again. "Twenty bucks? For two lousy hours?" It wasn't April Fool's Day yet, so he figured it must be genuine. "Heck," he muttered, "that would put enough gas in the tank to get me halfway there!"

He tore out the ad, folded it and slipped it into his wallet. He'd go to a payphone first thing in the morning and call.

Just then, headlights bounced in the driveway. "Who?" Instinctively, Jerry ducked and snapped off the lamp. "Oh shit!" A police cruiser! The old man had stopped in at home for some reason.

Jerry crept out of the family room and down the basement steps, gladder than hell he'd parked the Pontiac around the corner. With luck, His Holiness wouldn't even know his black sheep son was there.

He found Nora daydreaming on the rec room couch while Donna flipped through a teen magazine. "Dad just pulled in the driveway," he warned, then ducked into the furnace room, where he sat on the floor to wait it out while Donna and Nora tried to fan their smoke out the basement window.

The side door slammed and Philip Egan clattered in, stomping the slush off his police boots in the alcove. He muttered something and came down the steps. "Nora? Have you got company?"

"Yes Dad," she answered, meeting him at the foot of the stairs. "Donna's here."

His Holiness sniffed, then forced a cough to pretend the odor was making him sick. "I TOLD you two not to smoke in the house!"

"Oh, hi Mr. Egan," said Donna. "It was only me who was smoking. Nora was upstairs and I just kind of forgot you didn't want it here..." She rustled around, collecting her purse, boots and coat. "I'm sorry. It won't

happen again." An obvious lie, but it was the best she could do in a pinch to defend her friend. "I'll see you tomorrow in Chem Lab," she told Nora.

Donna pattered up the steps and out the side door, closing it so softly the click was barely audible.

"Nora," said the old man, "I want you to tell her if she does that again, she's not welcome here for the rest of the school year! Understand?"

"I understand," answered Nora, her voice hoarse, subdued. "I'll tell her tomorrow at school."

"Good. But I didn't come here to spy on your friends. Remember that magazine article about IRS loopholes we used when we did the taxes? If it's still here, could you dig it up? My partner Jack Serovicki's out in the squad car, and he's going to need all the help he can get come April fifteenth. The dummy went and shot his wad on the horses again. Heck, he still owes taxes from last year!"

In his mind's eye, Jerry could picture His Holiness gloating over another's weaknesses. It seemed to be what gave the man his strength.

"...darn fool's going to put his whole family in the poorhouse if he keeps that up..." Nora sighed and went to a filing cabinet that the old man put in the basement for things he didn't deem important enough to keep in his den, yet didn't quite want to throw out. She poked around in the clutter, mumbling she'd seen it there somewhere.

"So your brother was here?" asked His Holiness.

"Was. He left an hour or so ago."

"Yeah, that looks like his mess up in the kitchen. Any news about the strike?"

"He didn't say."

"You know what they say about idle hands. It better end soon, or your brother's going to get himself in trouble. Mark my word, Nora, one more week of this nonsense and I won't be surprised if I go into work one day and find him in a cell."

At that, Jerry was overcome with the urge to storm out of the furnace room and tell Philip Egan he'd HEARD THAT, but he squelched it. Barely.

The old man's walkie talkie squawked. "Damn. I'll be right back. Keep looking, OK?" He plodded

upstairs and out to the cruiser.

Jerry suddenly remembered he'd left Joey Falcone's letter on his chair. That would be a dead giveaway he was still in the house. He rushed upstairs to snatch it before His Holiness came back inside.

Too late. They collided in the alcove by the side door.

"Goddamn," grunted police Sergeant Philip Egan. "Haven't I TOLD you a thousand times to let me KNOW if you're here!?" He puffed his big, black leather jacketed chest and patted the holster of his service revolver; a pretentious gesture. "I might have thought you were a burglar and SHOT you!"

In the dim light of that alcove as Jerry stood nose to nose with the man he hated, he wouldn't allow his eye to blink. He unlatched the screen door to make his exit. "Look at it this way Dad, if you killed me, at least that would save you the embarrassment of your pals at work seeing your son in a jail cell!" Jerry stepped out into the cold and let the door slam behind him.

Chapter II.

Angry, Jerry tooted around the West Side, looking for somewhere to go, but it being Sunday night meant nothing was open. He drove past an old girlfriend's apartment, brooding even more when he saw her new beau's car parked outside. People were saying that it seemed the more the bum beat her up, the tighter the two of them got. Jerry found a bit of cold comfort in knowing at least she was getting what she deserved for dumping him like she did. "Nice guys finish last," he muttered.

But he swung around the block one more time, a part of him still hoping he'd just happen to drive by and catch that guy slapping her around in the driveway. Jerry would be Diane's rescuer, her knight in shining armor. He'd break the guy's nose, maybe an arm too, if he'd hurt her any.

No such luck. The place was dark, quiet. They were probably screwing in there. "So the hell with you, bitch!" He gunned the accelerator when he passed that last time.

Jerry went north up 25th St and turned onto the high level bridge, flooring the old Pontiac's pedal. He

squealed out onto the icy bridge, skidded and swept perilously close to the guardrail. Another ounce of acceleration would have had man and machine splashing into the Cuyahoga river two hundred feet below. When he tipped for that split second at the brink of oblivion, Jerry wondered: "Can Mom see me doing this from up in Heaven?"

On a hunch he already had reservations made for him somewhere else, he eased up on the gas and whooshed off the bridge and onto the east shoreway intact, but shaken by his glimpse of Eternity.

Funny, he hadn't thought of her like that in years. Belinda Egan had died giving birth to his sister Nora when Jerry was just six. She was only a vague memory, more real to him as the cause of the old man's endless depression than anything else. Still, during his occasional brushes with death, he found himself getting choked up wishing he had more of her to hang onto.

Shoreway traffic was sparse on that quiet Sunday night in February and Jerry sailed east, lost in thought. The Burdox Oxygen Co. billboard sparkled ahead of him to the right. A big animated display; countless hot little orange lights pulsating atop a plant at the edge of railroad tracks along the highway, it showed a mask-protected welder leaning forward, flame searing from his torch. The poor guy never had a break, never punched a clock, never went home. Again and again, twenty four hours a day, that welder performed his task.

"At least you got a mask, pal" mumbled Jerry. Then he cringed, closing his one eye and driving blind when that welder leaned forward and a thousand light bulbs exploded like sparks off of the display.

In his mind's eye, he could only remember the last time he'd witnessed something like that. The last thing he'd EVER seen with his right eye. In its place was a little globe of glass.

He cursed himself one millionth time for daring some kid to pitch him lit cherry bombs one Fourth of July ten years earlier. Jerry had batted three of them up to explode high in the air, bringing cheers the gang. Then the fourth pitch exploded in his face.

That fire bit again. He gritted his teeth, counting off the seconds it took to pass by the billboard. Seeing that thing always brought the bomb's searing heat straight into the here-and-now.

When he looked, he'd scarcely drifted from his lane.

He often assuaged the shame of his foolhardy act by reminding himself of the admiring remarks he heard later from the nurses at the hospital: "That kid's tough. He didn't even cry!" From that day on, whenever life wounded his pride, he allowed that to serve him as his badge of honor. Even when being tough only made more trouble for him.

There'd once been a time when Jerry Egan didn't pass muster, and after that he swore he'd never let his father- or anybody else- force him to do something he felt in his heart was wrong.

It was the way his father forced him to kill the family dog. Herman Joe was a big old German shepherd who was older than Jerry himself. He was a good old dog who'd been a loyal companion, but in the summer of that firecracker, he'd reached the end of his line. Jerry knew that he had to be put out of his misery, and it was a solemn Philip Egan who took them out to the country to do it one day while his little sister Nora was with her babysitter. Jerry could not hold back his tears that day, and Herman Joe licked them from his face as they drove. Jerry expected his father to do the deed, as one would expect of a tough and seasoned policeman, but when he led them into the woods, he held his service revolver out for Jerry.

"A lot of things you'll do in this life are going to break your heart," Philip Egan told his son, "but you've got to learn to do them." He gripped Jerry's chin and forced it around when he wouldn't turn. "Put the muzzle right in front of the base of his ear. He'll never know what hit him." He scowled. Jerry wouldn't take the gun from his hand.

The feel of Herman Joe's tongue licking away the tears was still on his face when Jerry finally looked. "Dad, I... Do I have to?" He gazed up and saw nothing but disappointment. "I mean, you're the one who said he had to be..."

"Jerry, I want you to do it."

He stood fast and wouldn't take the gun.

"Son, I'm counting to ten." His gaze locked with Jerry's in a test of will. "I want you to be holding it by the time I reach ten. One, two..."

Jerry tried again to argue, but the words would not come.

"...Eight. Nine. Ten. Jerry, take my gun!"

Herman Joe made a plaintive sound. Though he trembled, Jerry wouldn't budge.

Then came a hard, cold slap to the face. Philip Egan had struck him for disobedience. "You're to do what I say! Your stalling only hurts Herman Joe! Now take my revolver!" He slapped Jerry again.

Herman Joe growled, rising in protest.

The hurt that Jerry saw in Philip Egan's eyes was worse than the sadness in Herman Joe's. He knew that to his father, he would forever be a weak boy if he failed to shoot.

Torn between two betrayals, Jerry's mind went blank.

The next thing he knew, his ears rang and the sting of cordite was on his hand. Herman Joe lay still, an ugly red indentation on his head where the bullet had entered. A trickle of blood ran from it and Jerry knew that in his momentary lapse, he'd committed a betrayal worse than defying his father. It was as if that father had named him Cain, and then forced his hand against Abel.

"All right," sighed Philip Egan. He reached to take the revolver from his son's hand. "It's done. But it's too bad Herman Joe had to wait like that... Hey! What are you doing?!"

Jerry pulled back the firing hammer for a second shot, aimed right at his father's heart and squeezed the trigger.

CLICK!!

"I was afraid there might be something like this," rumbled Philip Egan. "So I only put one round in the cylinder." He wrenched the gun from his son's hand and slammed his big closed fist into his cheek, knocking him to the dirt. He cursed, jammed the revolver in his belt and took up the shovel to dig Herman's grave. Back turned, sweating from his labor, he finally said, "I'm going to act as if this never happened." Then he turned, crouched and grabbed Jerry by the collar, twisting it so hard it nearly choked him. He could barely contain his violence. "But don't you EVER try a stunt like that again!"

Jerry knew that to rise up then would only get him struck again. And harder. So he stayed down, tasting his own blood. But he had no problem holding back the tears. Hatred provided the continence he needed. Provided it amply.

All along, Philip Egan had meant that rite of passage to be a test of Jerry's willfulness. And in being

willful, he failed. Failed like it was a forgone conclusion that he would go bad.

That is how love between father and son died and was buried with a dog one hot summer day in 1954.

Jerry had often imagined how different his life would be if he'd used that one bullet on Philip Egan instead. He'd say it was an accident, feign a period of grief, then just get on with a new life with some foster family far, far away from anyone who knew anything about it.

Jerry Egan didn't kill his father that day, but he still managed to extract his revenge.

Philip Egan had begun his cop career with the Chicago police force and never returned his badge when he moved to Cleveland with the woman who was to be Jerry's mom. He was proud of that badge. It meant manhood to him, and he kept it in a special cabinet in his den. So it was if Jerry castrated him when he swiped it from that cabinet.

He ran to the railroad tracks so that a thousand tons of rumbling steel could simply obliterate it, smash it flat like a lost penny, but on his way to the tracks it occurred to him that would yield only a fleeting victory. Why not KEEP it, like some savage warrior would keep the head of his vanquished foe; a primitive talisman to be his own source of power!?

So he did.

Jerry hid the badge deep underneath loose bricks in an abandoned factory near his home.

And none too soon, for Philip Egan wasted no time discovering the loss. He confronted Jerry, demanding that his son return it immediately.

Jerry denied any knowledge of it, so Philip Egan beat him again, and harder. But buoyed with his new source of power, Jerry held fast and suffered the blows without a whimper. His strength grew as the chasm between them widened.

Soon thereafter, the firecracker robbed him of his eye and the first thing Jerry did upon his release from the hospital- with a thick wad of bandages still covering half of his face- was to go to that hiding place to be sure his talisman was unmolested. He moved it periodically, keeping it hidden till long after Philip Egan gave up hope of ever seeing it again.

As a young man, Jerry carried that badge sometimes, thinking it might prove valuable should he want to

impersonate a plainclothes police officer. Flashing it so fast and with such authority that they'd not see it wasn't a Cleveland Police badge- nor dare to ask- he might win favors or gain entry to places where ordinary men could not...

Jerry pulled off the shoreway at East 72nd St. and drove to the foot of Gordon Park's storm swept rock breakwall, where old Colored guys came year 'round to fish Lake Erie's murky brown waters. He needed to get out and stretch, to move around in the brisk air and shake off his encounter with the old man.

As soon as his eye adjusted to the dark, he scaled the slippery breakwall and jumped nimbly from one icy boulder to the next, defying the notion that losing an eye robs a man of his depth perception.

Jerry sat on the highest, driest rock pedestal and felt the spray of waves breaking below. There he brooded till the waves' spray turned to ice and his legs grew numb on the cold rock. So he climbed down and began the walk back to his old Pontiac.

About halfway across that lonely lakefront park, he came upon another car, a big Chevy station wagon with its engine idling. A figure leaned on it, facing away from him, breath making frigid white puffs as Jerry approached. The gravel crunching beneath his feet betrayed his presence. That figure jerked around, dropping a beer can at his feet. He was a short, solidly built Colored guy in an Army uniform.

"Damn!" The young soldier scowled. "Don't DO that to me, man! You startled me!" He scooped his beer can up from the gravel before it could spill its contents.

Jerry stopped and shrugged. He didn't need any trouble, but he sized the man up just in case. "No problem, pal. I was just passing by." He made an innocent, palms-up gesture.

Seeing that, the soldier relaxed and offered him a beer. It was *P.O.C.*-cheap horse piss, the worst on the market- but for diplomacy's sake Jerry accepted one, punching the top with a church key the soldier handed him with the can. "Kinda' cold out here, huh?" He handed back the opener, wondering: What the hell are you doing out here drinking beer on a night like this?

"It's cold, all right," said the soldier, snickering. "But I got something in the car to keep me warm!"

He peered in the window. A couple fucked away in the back seat. The bare, upturned ass on top was black and his lowered trousers were of Army khaki; another young Colored soldier home on leave. But the

young lady underneath him was white. "What the HECK!?" Jerry's mind raced. How could Jerry join Joey in Matamoros and still call himself a man if he let these bums have their way with that girl in the back seat?

Trouble, Jerry Egan had not sought, yet it was trouble he'd found. He stepped back, hand reaching for the pocket which held his father's badge. Could he send those boys packing and drive the girl to safety? His eye scanned for any sign they might be armed.

The one with the beer turned and pounded on the back door window. "Dennis the Menace," he called, "Your time is UP! We got a line forming out here for sloppy seconds!"

Dennis the Menace turned over, yawning, apparently satiated. He rolled down the window and the head of a young blond girl popped into view. Her hair was a mess, her face wet and her eyes bleary. "What gives, Governor?" She belched.

The Governor winked to Jerry. "Ain't she a pretty one?" He stroked her face, tickling her lips with his finger. She licked it suggestively. He giggled. "She'll suck your dick for five dollars." He turned ninety degrees, opened his long Army jacket and urinated on the gravel. "Or you can fuck her doggy style for ten!"

"Ten bucks," she replied, her voice husky, inebriated, "and another six-pack of beer!" She reached out and groped for the Governor.

"So how 'bout it, stud?" He zipped up, facing Jerry again. "You up to it?"

Jerry gaped at the spectacle like he'd lifted a rock and found something squirmy. His hand came off the badge.

"Five or ten," repeated the Governor. "Either way, you're king for the day!"

"Not after you bastards have been inside her." To hell with her. He wasn't about to risk getting killed just to rescue some slut. It wounded his pride, but Jerry walked away, ignoring those soldiers' taunts and their curses. He squealed out of the park and onto the shoreway.

The only way he could defeat the impulse to go back there and fight them was to keep his eye on the Burdax Oxygen billboard as he passed it.

Chapter III.

Jerry shivered. The cold stung his bare hands. Numb, his fingers groped for the dime in his pocket. He dropped it in the slot, but it fell through to the coin return. He scooped it out and propelled it back in with a flick of his fuck you finger.

That did the job. He got the tone and dialed, freezing all the more and swearing while he counted the rings. He'd gone out for the call in shirtsleeves, not counting on it being so cold that morning. Jerry was about to slam the phone back down on the cradle when his curses were cut short by a girl's voice.

"Department of Psychology, Doctor Nunes's office. May I help you?" It was crisp, clipped. British?

"Yes, I'm calling about the..."

"The advertisement?"

Ad-VUR-tiz-ment? Cute. Jerry fought the impulse to chuckle. "Yes, I am."

"You meet the stated qualifications?"

"I believe I do."

"You're not a university student or military veteran?"

"No, Ma'am, I am not."

"Are you looking for a session this week?"

"Yes." A few more days and he might miss out on Matamoros. "The sooner the better."

"Good. That works well for us. We've had a cancellation, so perhaps we can fit it in today, Mr...?"

"Egan. Jerome Patrick Egan."

"Can you be here at eleven?"

"Yes, if you'll just tell me where you're located." He had a good idea where the university was, but he let her give him the directions anyway. His exit from the shoreway wasn't far from where he'd been the night before.

"...and you may park in our lot. We've a space set aside for visitors. See you at eleven?"

"You certainly will!" He hung up and ran the two blocks back to his apartment before he got frostbite.

An old lady who rented the storefront downstairs from him for her antique shop was just opening up as he passed her window. She scowled. Jerry was the building's only other tenant, and she'd never made any secret of the fact she didn't trust HIM living upstairs from all her precious junk.

He returned the dirty look and yanked open the door to the stairwell, letting the wind bash it shut behind him. He bounded upstairs into his apartment and plopped himself down with his back to the living room radiator. Damn, he was cold! It'd be a miracle if he didn't catch pneumonia from making that call. It was a good thing he'd at least paid the gas bill.

His pad was on Lorain Ave, way west of the old man's house. Philip Egan liked to think he had class, but the fool was still attached to his house down with the shanty Irish on West 65th. Hot summer days in that neighborhood would bring the stench of the Storer Ave. stockyards up his way and just about make you gag. Riff-raff had started moving in, and there were rumors that bulldozers might come up from the Interstate 90 construction and turn the whole neighborhood into an Urban Renewal slum.

Jerry, on the other hand, had made a point of renting way out near Kamms Corner in an area that was nice by just about anybody's standards. Well-kept houses, quiet streets with lots of trees, and no bums or stinking industrial plants nearby.

The apartment had shiny hardwood floors and a quaint bay window where he used to imagine Diane hanging curtains and plants some day. He'd taken a lease on it just before she jilted him. So much for his big plans to take a job with her old man's construction firm and start a family with her. He looked to that barren bay window and cursed the bitch again.

Jerry could barely afford the place, especially now with the strike dragging on like it was, but he was determined to hold onto it for the full year of the lease, if for no other reason than to spite His Holiness.

Yeah, Jerry Egan was a bitter young man all right, and getting more bitter with each new curve life threw his way. A chip on his shoulder as big as Mt. Everest, coupled with his skill with his fists made him somebody you DID NOT want to mess with; a young man who could be truly dangerous if provoked. But he was also one with a powerful conviction that some things were right, some were wrong, and a moral

compass within him whose needle spun so fast he often could not tell which way was which. If only he could read it, he'd have been a better man than he was.

He got up once the radiator eased his chills, scorched a can of Armor corned beef hash in a pan on the stove and slurped down a cup of instant coffee. He ran the bathwater forever, hoping it would bring up heat, but it barely got tepid. Jerry undressed and suffered a quick shower anyway.

Blanket draped over his shoulders for warmth, he tore through his closet for something he could wear to fit in around that university. He settled for a dark sweater, some grey slacks and a pair of stiff Sunday shoes he only wore to weddings and funerals.

And an old Navy pea coat he usually wore to work would have to do. Either of his two others- a long, doubled breasted black leather jacket with a belt at the waist, or his "Frank's Gym" warm-up jacket with the red leather sleeves and golden felt boxing gloves emblazoned on its back; the one he'd wear on Friday nights for bar hopping with the guys, would make him look too much like a hoodlum.

"And maybe that's what I am," he grunted, pulling on his sweater.

Jerry yanked a cap over his ears and clomped down the stairs. It was so cold out there he was afraid the Pontiac's fuel line might be frozen up, but it started after a couple of tries and he sat with it idling till the heater kicked in.

His watch said he'd have a little extra time, so he veered off Lorain at Denison Ave to drive past the plant and look for any sign the strike was nearing an end.

No activity. Just the three pickets the court allowed, huddled around a trash barrel wood fire for warmth. Jerry honked as he passed, flashing the thumbs-up, but none of the guys turned to see who it was. Behind barbed wire, the big ugly plant brooded in a state of forced hibernation.

Jerry turned north at 25th street, retracing his drive of the previous night. As his tires whined over the concrete and wire mesh surface of the high level bridge, he glanced over the side at the point where he'd nearly flipped into the river. Down there, a dingy brown iron freighter and two barges were iced in, awaiting the spring thaw. To the south, dense plumes of smoke billowed from steel mills and refineries to shroud Cleveland under a dark ceiling of smog. And it all stank like a lavatory in Hell.

He sailed past the lakefront stadium, then off the bridge and onto the asphalt highway. Up ahead, the welder on the Burdox Oxygen Co. billboard was but a dull twinkle. Jerry looked right at the blowtorch as he passed and felt like a sissy for letting it bother him the night before. That brought to mind those soldier boys and their little blond slut.

A scene of battle crashed through his mind; a battle never fought, wounded dignity never redeemed. Courage, he knew, must prevail the next time.

His exit came up on the right, and he turned off the shoreway. A treacherous drive through Liberty Boulevard's turns brought him to University Circle. A few lights later, and he found himself at an intersection where a swarm of co-eds hurried across the street. Just as she marched past him, one girl's skirt came flapping up in the wind to reveal the pink gooseflesh of her thighs, topped off by immaculate little white panties. She dropped her books and made matters all the worse for herself when she bent over to scoop them up. Jerry grinned when she caught his eye and cringed. Horrified, she merged back into the throng and rushed off to class. Witnessing that, Jerry thought perhaps he should look into furthering his education.

Just then, a greeny stick 'em cop turned the corner and glared. University Circle's private security force patrolled an area entirely within the Cleveland police force's own jurisdiction. He'd grown up hearing His Holiness put them down. "Green uniforms, green cars," Philip Egan would say, sneering, "and green with envy of real cops!" But Jerry wasn't about to risk making himself late by provoking them any. When the light changed, he straightened up in his seat and didn't let his eye wander till the greeny drove on.

He found his destination one more block up the street; a dour brick edifice with sickly green ivy iced to its sandstone corner turrets and shadowed by a massive cathedral's backside; the Mather Memorial building.

Jerry worked his Pontiac up its drive to a lot tucked between it and the cathedral. Just as he locked up his car, the cathedral's bells started a slow, somber toll and Jerry made a mental note to be on his best behavior. It was eleven O'clock.

Oak double doors swung open and three academic types brushed past, oblivious to him. Entering, he found marble floors in corridors dimly lit by nothing more than the grey daylight filtering through leaded-in glass window panes. Jerry guessed the reason that eggheads always wore glasses was that they had to

squint at their books all day in that lousy light. It was a wonder they weren't all blind.

He plodded the dim hallways without the faintest idea where he was supposed to find this Major Nunes's office.

"Mr. Egan?" came an echo of that English voice he'd heard on the phone.

Startled, he turned and called down the corridor. "Yes, I'm looking for the..."

"The Psychology Department?" A figure stood at the far end of the hallway, silhouetted against the daylight gloom from one of those windows. "If so, you've found it. Or more correctly, it's found you..." She beckoned him.

He went to her, finding a dark haired girl wearing a technician's white lab smock. She was as tall as he, thin, pale and bony, but her face was pretty, with a sweet bashfulness in her deep brown eyes. "I'm Miss Porter," she said, extending her hand, "I believe we spoke this morning?"

Jerry had to wonder: was it just her British accent, or was she teasing him? There was something in her voice that said: "Watch out, Mate! Things aren't quite what they seem to be here!" But she didn't dare say it in as many words. He introduced himself and shook her hand. For a girl's, it was firm.

"...so if you'll just follow me..." She indicated a hallway veering off from the one they were in, and took him to a door marked by a plaque that said: "Learning Laboratory."

There was even something fishy about that plaque. It hung loose, slightly ajar. What did it cover?

Miss Porter sat him down in a little cubicle with a messy desk, took a chair opposite to his and held her knees together modestly. "First," she said, clearing her throat, "I'll need some information." She tapped at a clipboard. "Age?"

"Twenty two," he answered, chagrined by the girl's crisp, businesslike manner. She was like Miss Drysdale in the Beverly Hillbillies.

"Occupation?"

"Forklift operator, Midwest Coil Corporation. We're on strike right now."

"Yes, I know," said Miss Porter. "You're a union member?"

"Of course. You've got to be. It's a closed shop. If you don't pay your dues, you don't work." He

shrugged.

"Is that the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers?"

"Right. I.B.E.W., AFL-CIO. Local 482." Odd. She seemed to have a particular interest in that, but didn't write any of it down.

"Is your boyfriend a member?" He grinned.

"No. Just curious." She shifted in her chair and grasped her pen tight.

"Selective Service status?"

"4-F. Permanently unsuitable for military duty..." He raised an eyebrow.

She reacted predictably, giving him a screwy look, as if to say: "What could be so wrong with a big strong lad like you that Uncle Sam wouldn't want you in his army?" No doubt she suspected he was a nut case or a paroled felon.

Jerry played with her for a moment, allowing her to get edgy and glance to the hall to plot her escape before he pointed to his prosthesis and said, "Glass eyeball. Lost the real thing when I was a kid."

Hearing that, Miss Porter went red-faced for letting her imagination get the better of her. She looked down to her clipboard.

Damn, she was cute when she blushed! Jerry's own imagination kicked into gear...

"Marital status?"

He snapped out of the daydream. "Single." It was a lurid one.

"Education?"

"High school. West Tech. Class of 1960. That's it. Maybe I should try college..."

She asked him for a number where he could be reached, so as much as he hated doing it, he had to give her Philip Egan's, and made a point of telling her to ask for his sister Nora if she needed to leave message.

"And how did you learn of the experiment?"

"Experiment?"

"You know, the thing you've come here for today...?"

"Oh, right. Sorry. I saw an ad in the paper yesterday." He forced a sheepish grin, but cursed himself silently for letting himself look like an imbecile.

Miss Porter set down her clipboard. "O.K. Mr. Egan, that's all the background we'll need presently. Now, if you'll come with me..." She took him to what appeared to be a classroom. It was well-lit, with blackboards, bookshelves along the wall, and a teacher's desk, but no students' desks. Instead, folding chairs were arranged along one wall, and a long table stood off to one side. Two men were in that room. One was a heavyset, balding fellow in his forties, wearing a sports coat and tie. He sat in one of those folding chairs, reading the newspaper classifieds. When he noticed Jerry, he looked up and nodded pleasantly.

Jerry took an immediate dislike to the other one, a weasely looking guy of about thirty five in a crew cut and glasses with heavy black rims, and wearing a uniform that looked like an airline pilot's costume. He fiddled over some equipment on the long table, then sat at the teacher's desk and shuffled through papers, seeming to be too preoccupied with his tasks to acknowledge Jerry's entrance.

Miss Porter introduced Jerry to the one with the newspaper. "Mr. Egan, this is Mr. Deshkovic..."

"Call me Ivan," he said, smiling and shaking Jerry's hand.

He found it soft, feminine, like the hand of some fag or mama's boy. "Jerry's my name," he muttered. He shifted uncomfortably as soon as he sat.

"See the ad in the paper yesterday?" asked Ivan.

"Yep. Needed some quick cash for a trip I'm taking."

"I've just got bills," sighed Ivan, yawning. "I work nights on my regular job. That's the only reason I was able to make it here today. I just hope I don't fall asleep there tonight."

Jerry wasn't about to explain his job situation to this guy, so Ivan just returned to his newspaper. Then, two dour-looking academic types, both of them wearing white lab aprons, entered and sat at the far corner of the room. Neither spoke.

Jerry's eye darted around as he tried to piece together what he'd gotten himself into. That's when he noticed another little room with a plate glass window opening onto the one he was in.

It was furnished with a hospital bed. Devoid of sheets, with a stack of electrical gizmos next to it, it

reminded him of something out of Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory. The worst thing about it was that the bed was fitted with shackles. "We're about ready," announced Miss Porter, who stood at the uniformed guy's desk, "so if you fellows would just move your chairs on over here, we can get started." She pulled one of her own from next to Jerry's, but positioned it on the far side of that desk with the guy in the uniform.

"I'm Major Nunes," he said, with a faint accent. "I have a doctorate in Psychology from an American university. What we're studying here is how human beings learn. No doubt you're familiar with the idea that either the carrot or the stick, punishment or reward, that is, can reinforce a lesson." He looked right through his audience, like they weren't really there. "A parent lets a child watch the Saturday morning cartoons if he's cleaned up his room and the schools reward straight-A students with tickets to the ballpark. It's easy to see how rewards work..." Nunes coughed up his spiel as if he'd recited it a hundred times before. "...but bribery has its limitations. If society rewarded every responsibility met, it would be bankrupt in very short order..."

Jerry found himself nodding, as if on cue, when Miss Porter did...

"...till now, we haven't delved into the role of the stick in any objective, systematic way." Nunes paused, stood with his hands gripping the desk and scowled down at his subjects- part of an act, it seemed- first to Jerry, then to Ivan. "That's why we've asked the two of you here today."

Ivan squirmed.

Jerry raised his hand. Nunes glared at him, but Jerry left it up. "Could fill us in on just WHAT branch of the service you're a Major IN?"

"I'm on loan to this university from my country's Ministry of Intelligence," he snapped. "Does that answer your question?"

Jerry hated himself for it, but he answered: "Yes, sir."

Nunes smiled darkly. "You can be briefed once we're finished with this session, should you have any further questions. Now where was I?"

"The role of negative reinforcement in learning, sir," said Miss Porter.

"Thank you.

"...now if you'll come over here with me..." He went to that table with the electrical equipment and gestured that Jerry and Ivan should pull their chairs up next to him.

Jerry complied, but he didn't like it; didn't like anything about this damn setup...

"...We've assembled a series of number tests. One of you shall be the learner, the other, the teacher..." He looked to Ivan, then to Jerry, and raised an eyebrow.

Jerry wasn't about to volunteer to be the learner and the notion of hitting that Ivan with a stick seemed like some sort of sick joke to him. He fought to keep a straight face.

"...so if neither of you has any preference," sighed Nunes, "I guess the fairest thing to do would be to draw lots."

"I'll get a box to pull them from," offered Miss Porter. She hurried from the room.

Nunes drummed his fingers waiting for her return, and that's when Jerry got a good look at the stuff on the table: a console with a row of switches on it and cables running to that bed in the other room. "Mild Shock," said the first of those switches. A few notches up, they were labeled: "Painful Shock," and "Very Painful Shock."

Miss Porter returned with a shoe box. "I marked a couple of pieces of note pad and folded them up," she said, shaking them around in the box.

"Good." Nunes stood and took the box, holding it at nose level to the first of his guinea pigs. Jerry reached in, fishing around till he found one. He pulled it out and Nunes offered the box to Ivan.

Miss Porter looked to Jerry without really looking AT him, and asked, "What did you draw?"

He unfolded the slip and read it. "It says: 'teacher'." Jerry certainly wasn't going to stick around if he got pegged "learner," because the last three switches were marked: "Extremely Painful Shock," then just "XX," and "XXX." He shot Ivan a pitying look and wondered: "Should I warn him?"

"OK Mr. Deshkovic, it looks like you're the learner. We'll get you prepared..." Miss Porter took him in that little room with the bed and told him to lay down and roll up his trouser leg.

"I feel like I'm in the hospital," he chuckled.

Nunes sat next to Jerry and tapped at a microphone he was to use speaking with Ivan. "In this first round you'll read Mr. Deshkovic series of five two-digit numbers..." He set a paper in front of Jerry with those numbers printed out in neat rows and columns. "You are to read this first row only once. Remember, never repeat a digit sequence after you've read it..."

The man's breath was terrible. Jerry edged away, as far away as he could and still keep his eye on the instructions.

"...and after you've read the whole sequence, you'll go on to the next row, which may or may not contain the second and fourth digit of the first row somewhere, anywhere in it. You're to read that and the next three to him. Only one sequence contains those two numbers. You'll read the first row, count silently to three and read the four choices, each after a pause of only a second..."

Jerry's attention drifted to those two guys in the lab coats across the room. He didn't like the way they sat, arms folded, staring at him...

"...and if his answer is incorrect, you're to turn the red switch to administer a shock. Likewise, if a correct answer comes too late, or if he gives no answer at all, you are to administer a shock." Nunes set a stop watch in front of Jerry. "He MUST remain there for the duration of the experiment and YOU must also complete your part of it."

Jerry turned to look at Miss Porter through the glass opening, but she was still fussing with Ivan and her back was turned.

"...and press the switch, administering the next higher level of shock with each incorrect answer, again, never going backward, only forward." Nunes leaned way back in his chair. "Got the picture?" he asked, scowling just like his buddies across the room.

"I think so." Jerry gulped and swallowed his doubts. If he messed up, he figured he could wing it. Heck, he thought, how is this jerk going to know if I hit the wrong darned switch?

Nunes fiddled with some wires leading from the console. "I want you to get an idea of what Mr. Deshkovic will experience if he makes a mistake," he said, holding two little electrodes for those shocks.

"So, please roll up cuff, hold these against your ankle, and I'll trigger one of the lower intensity shocks, just so you'll know..."

Jerry laughed. "So this is how you separate the men from the boys, huh?" He did what the major asked, expecting to feel some little tickle when the man hit the switch.

What he got was a real jolt, not enough to make him yelp, but almost. And Nunes's hand was only on the switch marked "Mild Shock."

"Hey, that's some gag buzzer you've got there!" he told him. Jerry shook his head and slapped the electrodes down on the table.

He turned and looked through that glass partition again. Ivan's face was easily within view, but Jerry suspected it was a one-way mirror, so Ivan wouldn't be seeing him. The girl had his leg all wired up, and worse yet, it looked like she was strapping him onto the bed. What sort of man, he wondered, would allow them to do THAT to him?!

Miss Porter emerged and Nunes told Jerry to proceed. With that, the girl left the classroom. Jerry shrugged and leaned toward the microphone. "OK Ivan," he said, "this is it." He drew in a deep breath and read out the numbers: twenty four, Nineteen, sixty one, forty seven, eleven.

Then, like Nunes had instructed, he went to the next row. "Ninety one, seventy seven, twenty two, fourteen, sixty two." He paused, looking to the major, who sat next to him, watching.

Nunes nodded. "You're doing fine," he said. "Continue."

He read all three remaining rows.

"Line D," said Ivan, without a second's hesitation. His voice came, like Jerry's did to him, from a little speaker mounted at arm's length from his seat.

"Next set," whispered Nunes, hovering close enough to torment Jerry with his halitosis again.

Jerry read them off quickly, without hesitation.

"Line B," Ivan answered in an uncertain voice.

"Wrong," said Jerry. He made a face and moved his hand to the switch marked "Mild Shock," but hesitated, remembering how it felt on his own arm.

"The learner has given an incorrect answer," rumbled Nunes. "The shock must be administered."

He gritted his teeth and flicked the switch. A little red light over it winked, then went out.

"How long should I leave it on?"

"It's timed," answered Stinkbreath. "One point five seconds, and it's over when the light goes out.

Now please continue."

Jerry sighed. "Twenty six, seventy three, ninety six, thirty one, fifty nine." He counted silently to three, then read out the four choices.

"Line A," came Ivan.

"Good."

"Please, no conversation!"

Fuck you, asshole!, Jerry thought. The words nearly slipped from his lips. "Fifty two." He turned and shot Nunes a hate stare, but the man remained stone faced. That gave Jerry a chill, and he felt himself break out in a sweat as he read out the rest of the lines. "...seventy six, twenty eight, seventy three . "

"...Line B!"

Another wrong answer. Jerry gulped and flicked the second switch.

"Ugh!"

In the booth, he saw Ivan writhe and make a terrible face.

"Hey," Jerry said to Nunes, "that really hurt him!"

"The experiment must be completed."

"But..."

"You are required to carry on." The doctor was like a robot, issuing his words without a trace of emotion or expression.

That really unnerved Jerry; unnerved him so bad he found himself reading the next set of words almost as if he, too, were an automaton...

Ivan answered correctly on that set, and on three more.

Jerry thought: Good, he's got the hang of it now. Maybe I don't have to shock him any more. "...forty nine, thirty seven, eighty one, twenty two, sixty eight," he recited.

"Line A," groaned Ivan.

That was a wrong one. Jerry turned to Sphinxface, who hadn't moved a muscle. "Hey look, this can't go on..."

"You have no choice. You MUST go on."

"I WHAT?!?!"

"It is absolutely essential that you continue."

Just for a second, Jerry's imagination ran wild. This Nunes was some sort of mad scientist with a monster factory in the back, and those guys across the room were his henchmen. If he refused now, they might mummify him or slice him up for body parts. Jerry relented. "Sorry, pal," he sighed, giving Ivan switch number three.

The man's shriek was horrible; it was the cry of a heretic on the Inquisitor's rack... "Please," he gasped, "STOP IT!"

That snapped Jerry out of his horror movie. He looked to the booth. Ivan wore the most pathetic expression he'd ever seen. Those eyes- just like...

"Mr. Egan," droned Nunes, "Please read the next sequence!"

...just like Herman Joe's a moment before Jerry pulled the trigger...

"No man! Uh-uh!" His palms itched and his arm tingled as if the gun was in his hand again.

Nunes leaned forward, repeating what he'd said before: "It is absolutely essential that you continue!" Cold blue eyes bored right into Jerry, bored into him just like Philip Egan's did that day so long ago...

"...absolutely essential..."

Jerry snapped. "Like HELL it is! You let that dummy out of that bed, OR ELSE!" But he didn't wait to see what Nunes would do. For a split second, he simply went blank and his arm acted on instinct. It shot forward, mashing the palm of his right hand right into the center of that ugly face. Nunes stumbled

backwards out of the folding chair and hit the floor. He sprawled out with a crunch and his chair snapped flat underneath him.

"Hey," peeped one of those guys across the room. "S... Stop!" He rose, gape-jawed in fear, and the other one looked like he was about to cry...

"Oh no." Jerry groaned the instant he realized what he'd done. But it was too late to back out. Now he had to carry it all the way. He stepped over Nunes and moved toward the torture chamber. "Hold on Ivan, I busting you out of there!"

"Get... Get a grip on yourself," sputtered that one who'd stood. The other rose, knock-kneed, and the two stumbled toward him.

Ivan hollered something, but his words were muffled. Jerry grabbed the door knob, but it was locked, so he kicked, then lunged to smash it in with the weight of his body.

The bolder of those guys tried to grab hold of him from behind. Jerry hurled him off his back, sending him crashing into a bookshelf. The jerk slumped, speechless with agony and cradling an injured funny bone. The bookshelf tipped forward in slow motion and Nunes crawled out of its way just before it released an avalanche of books and splintered apart all over the lab floor. Seeing that, the one still standing shrank back, whimpering, "Oh, Lord!"

"That's right," snarled Jerry. He menaced him with his fist. "Don't even TRY to stop me!" That kept him at bay. Ivan hollered again, and Jerry threw another body block at the door. It started to give under the pressure...

"...an act," cried the one who Jerry had just shook his fist at. "It's just an ACT!"

Miss Porter bounded into the room to see what the commotion was and gasped, "OMIGOD! I'll call security!"

She turned and galloped back down the hallway.

"...A BIG ACT! Calm DOWN, sir!" pleaded the crybaby, "IT'S JUST AN ACT! An act to test peoples' reactions to, to..."

Just as Jerry lunged a third time, the door swung open and he stumbled into the room. Only his quick reflexes kept him from repeating the lab assistant's stunt with the bookcase. He kept his balance, cushioning his impact with the wall by throwing his arms out in front of him. "Ugh!" He reeled around to find Ivan standing free and looking perfectly dismayed.

"Please, Mr. Egan, listen," he begged, gripping Jerry's shoulders with those mild sissy hands of his. "PLEASE listen to me! This has all been a set-up, with YOU as the subject, not me!"

"WHAT!?" Jerry wrenched himself away. "Are you saying it's ME you're testing!?" Things weren't at all what they'd seemed to be. Now he felt like a fool.

Ivan shook his head and chuckled sadly. "Look at me," he said. "I'm FINE! Perfectly OK! I wasn't being tortured OR held against my will! The shock machine, those electrodes, this bed," he nudged it with his foot, "everything you see here- just props! Like on a movie set! You might say this has all been a scientific version of Candid Camera!"

Nunes limped into the room, and the guy who'd hit the bookshelf followed warily.

"He's right," grumbled the Major, still not looking him in the eye. "It's all been staged, like Candid Camera."

Jerry's anger swelled. "Oh," he shot back at Nunes, "and you're ALAN FUNT, huh? You've got a lot of GODDAMN NERVE, playing me for some kind of schmuck!"

"Let me explain, Mr. Egan..."

"I don't want to hear it!" He stepped toward the door, but the Major blocked his path. "Get out of my way. I'm leaving."

Nunes moved, allowing Jerry to pass.

His lab assistants made way too, but Jerry paused at the door. "I ought to SUE all you bastards!" With that, he stomped out and down the hallway.

The timider of those two assistants found some courage and followed, pattering a safe distance behind him. "Wait! You haven't been properly debriefed! You need to fill out our questionnaire!" Jerry turned and found the man trembling, holding a paper.

"Thanks!" He yanked it from his hand. "Maybe I can use this when I take your nutty professor to court!"

"But, but..."

"Save it for your next patsy!"

More footsteps followed. Jerry reached the door and threw it open. The harsh noontime glare from the snow blinded him and he paused on the steps to let his eye adjust. Then a hand grabbed his shoulder.

Jerry jerked away. His instincts said FIGHT, and he swung around to deliver a roundhouse punch that would knock that Nunes S.O.B. clear into Lake Erie.

The girl froze. A tiny gasp issued from her throat and Jerry pulled his punch an inch short of tragedy. His knees buckled and he fell toward the handrail to keep from tumbling off the steps, choked out the words "Oh God, I'm sorry!" then stumbled into the parking lot, leaving her standing there stunned and speechless.