

# Suitable for Framing by C. M. Caterer

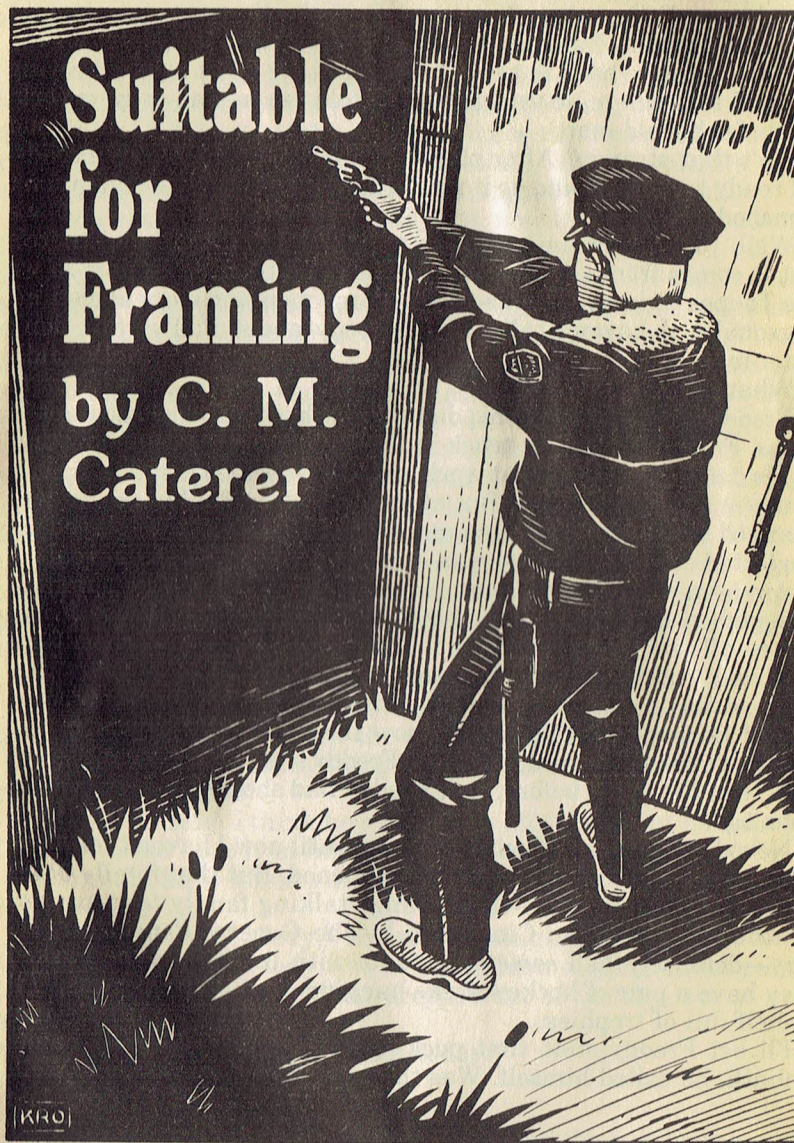


Illustration by Dan Krovat

I have dragged more men—and women—kicking and scratching into jail than you'd ever want to sit up and count on a winter's night, even if you had nothing to do. I've handled some tough ones: drunks who can't walk straight, types that like to play John Wayne with their little penny shooters, kids who seem just aching to get themselves hurt. Most do go quietly, knowing as any idiot does that any trouble they cause is their own, not mine. But the truly tough ones are not, mark me, the strugglers. Greg Olsen was just such a one.

When I read him his rights there in his little shack up on West Lighthouse Road, near the Point, he stood as still as a bee perched on a flower. The silhouette of his ex-wife lay behind him, chalked onto the wooden floor, but he didn't give it a glance. He just looked at his shoes like he had no idea he was being spoken to, much less arrested for murder in the first degree, and finally I gave him a little poke and said, "Greg, you understand what I've been saying to you?" And he looked up right away and said, "Sure, sheriff. But I'm not worried." And that's when I started to do the worrying for him.

Olsen had nothing on his side. Strike number one, he

wasn't a native to Garth's Reach. Islanders in general have little but contempt for the summer folk: always blowing in from Boston or New York, driving their cars fast and loud on our little windy roads, moaning about how we don't have this and why don't we have that, and how there's hardly any parking and do we think they can eat seafood *all* the blamed time, so why don't we get ourselves a McDonald's or one of those joints? Not to mention that the locals got it into their brains somehow that the tourists are killers—I mean literally. Even though it was one of their own who played accomplice to killing that real estate bum earlier this summer. Well, you can't tell these people anything. I've been sheriff going on twenty-three years, but it's always, "MacReady, my mother remembers you in the cradle"—like that means something.

Strike number two, Greg wouldn't talk—that's what made him so troublesome to me. He's one of that school that thinks every cop is out to get the average citizen. Every time I asked a question, all he said was, "I'll wait for my lawyer, Mac"—like a P.O.W. giving out name, rank, and serial number. Well, I'm no Nazi interrogator. And even if a cop ain't always your



friend, I was a friend of Greg's and I thought I could help him if he'd just open up. But he was going to do it his way.

Once we got Olsen safely in the cell—I asked Hillary, my secretary, to keep her good eye on him—I took Riley back with me to West Lighthouse. I didn't want to, mind you; Riley gets under my skin plenty. But he is supposed to be the deputy, and I try to keep him from noticing how I never give him anything to do.

"Why even bother looking around?" he asked me. I glanced over at the passenger seat. His little black ponytail was bobbing up and down to something or other.

"Take off those damned ear-phones if you're going to say something." I never know if he's listening to me or the junk in his head.

He slid the headset off his temples but kept it round his neck with the phones pointed up so we could both hear the clashing and moaning coming from his tape. I grunted and shifted weight. My old gimp leg was beginning to talk, and that machine only made it talk the louder.

"What I said was, why even bother looking around? Looks like Greg Olsen's fate is sealed." Riley made the motions of licking an envelope and

fastening it shut. "Besides, it'll be out of our hands pretty soon."

"Nothing's ever that open-shut." I eased the car up the hill of Garth's Drive. The transmission dragged some and then coughed into gear. "I don't care what it looks like. He just don't seem like the killer type."

Riley gave a little yip of a laugh, the kind where the body leaps up out of the seat for a second. The kind that sets a normal fellow's teeth on edge. "That's really scientific, Mac. You're a regular Columbus."

"It's Columbo, you idiot."

"Whatever."

Garth's Drive began to narrow, and the sea, on our left, dropped down farther. The coast looks awful lonely in October, especially in New England. Our Garth's is no Carmel-by-the-Sea is what I mean. The sea just thrashes the harder as autumn draws up, almost like it's using up all its energy before winter. Even the reeds look to be standing up straighter.

A half mile farther on, that road collapses into sandy gravel. A quarter mile past that, just before you get to Lighthouse Point, is the little saltbox Greg Olson had been fixing to buy before his ex-wife wound up dead on the living room floor.

"I don't know what you expect to find," Riley said as he unlocked the door.

"I just want to take another look round, if it's all the same to you." I pushed past him and my bad leg locked on me. Ruined my entrance, what there was of it, but I didn't let Riley see me grimace. On top of the rheumatism, I got a bullet wound there not two months ago that the weather just won't let rest.

Greg's place was nothing but a living room, kitchen, and back bedroom, with the bath somewhere behind the bedroom. It was cosy, with a big old stone fireplace and Greg's fishing gear strung all round. I'm one who likes to see a man's hobbies out, not hid away in a glass case someplace. Greg had invested in some of that "natural" type woodframe furniture they sell in Caren's Collectibles, but just the necessities—sofa, rocker, couple of Alpine chairs. No TV in the place; just a shortwave radio sitting on the dinner table at one end of the room.

Riley rubbed his hands together. "Heat in here's pretty bad."

"Hmmp"—by which I meant I agreed. You could almost see your breath in there.

"Hey, looka this, Mac." I walked over to where Riley was

craning his neck up the wall. Greg had some glass cases, after all, those fancy bookshelves with the glass doors and little wooden handles, all chock full of some of the oldest books you'd like to see. All leather bound and gold-stamped, even though some were cracked along the spines. About two hundred of them.

*"Leaves of Grass, Paradise Lost, The Complete Robert Frost—"*

"I can read 'em."

"I didn't know he was such a brainy guy," said Riley.

"He's a professor of something," I said. "I think he was fixing to write a book."

Riley gave me his aren't-you-a-dope-Mac smile. "He's no professor. He told you that?"

"He said so at the Seahorse not a month ago. We had a beer."

"Shows how long it's been since you were in school. He's a student, that's what. He's getting his Ph.D. He just teaches sometimes. He's no professor."

"Okay, okay." I hate getting my facts wrong, and what I hate most is getting them wrong when Riley gets them right.

"He goes to some school in western Mass. He used to be a big deal tennis player there. That's what Todd Draker said."



"There's a source. Kid's brain must be Swiss cheese after all that pot he did in school."

"You don't *do* pot. You smoke it." Riley wandered away from the bookcase. "Come on, Mac. Let's just let the state guys deal with it."

"They're more interested in nailing Greg Olsen than in finding out who really strangled his wife."

"Look, Madeline Creighton heard them fighting from a quarter mile off at her house. Greg's prints are on that scarf back at the station. The house was locked up tight. Sorry, Mac. I thought he was an okay guy, too, but use your head."

"Chain lock wasn't on the door. Someone could've gotten in. Madeline Creighton's an idiot. And what about the autopsy?"

"What about it? She had some abrasions on her neck—that's normal. She died from strangulation." Riley loves words like *abrasions*. It's why he got into police work.

"Well, if there were some abrasions, as you say, there ought to be some blood on that scarf. And they found those brown fibers, too."

"Could be anything. Maybe she didn't bleed."

"Too easy. The murder weapon just happens to be lying right near her with Greg's

prints on it? In black? His hands were clean when we brought him in."

Riley scratched his one eyebrow—the eyebrow that covers both his eyes. "So he washed his hands. I would've, too. Come on, there's no big mystery here, Mac." He put a hand on my arm and spoke about as kindly as he can manage. "You're not going to find anything in here. We checked the place clean, and that shed outside's locked. Even Greg doesn't have a key to it. I think it's pretty simple. Ex-wife comes over, they have a fight; the storm kicks in, so she stays over. Later he kills her. She was fooling around on him, Mac, he had a good motive."

Faintly the sound of the sea thrashing the rocks below floated up to us. The sky turned gray as I looked at it from the window. My breath wafted out in little puffs. "Too damned cold in here. Let's go."

That made Riley happy. He'll do anything to get back to that toasty station, prop his feet up on the desk, and pretend to be working when what he's really doing is shooting the bull with Hillary.

Why I ever let my deputy question witnesses is beyond me. I always end up going back and doing it over myself, just to

be sure he got everything. He had taken down Madeline Creighton's statement, and reading over it, I noticed a few things that gnawed at me. Things I would've cleared up if I'd been running the show.

Madeline lived just down the road from Greg Olsen, right about the place where West Lighthouse turns into Garth's Drive. She and her husband had a little bungalow set back from the road like all those places are, where she kept a vegetable garden and a small boy. She had about as much sense as Riley, but she was all we had.

"Sheriff MacReady, now you just come in! In, that's right, and give me that wet coat. Don't step out of the hall yet. Look at your shoes! Could you take them off? Starting to rain, is it?"

Starting? I was dripping a flood onto her parquet floor.

Her boy, one fist in his mouth, stared at me from behind one of her legs. "Brigham, you go play now. Sheriff and me've got to talk." She shooed him into the TV room and then nestled her ample self into a chair opposite where she planted me. She leaned forward and I took that unlucky moment to sneeze. I was sure I was catching my death out there.

"You really ought to do something about that. You know you can spread germs just shaking hands with somebody? Brigham told me that the other day. Learned it in school." She sat up and smirked. "Remembered it, too."

I wasn't sure if she meant her or the boy. "I don't guess you'd have a cup of coffee or tea?"

Madeline gave a quick, puffy sigh and stood up. "Sheriff, I thought you were here to talk about this killing, not take refreshments! Isn't this just like the PTA!"

"If it's any trouble—"

"Oh, it's no trouble. God knows I'm used to it," she shouted from the kitchen, where I heard her filling the kettle. When it was safe on the burner, she raced back to me. "All right now. Let's talk us up some murder."

I brought out my notebook and flipped till I found a dry page. My pencil was only a stub, but seeing as she wasn't about to offer me a better one, I made do. "Now, Deputy Riley tells me you heard something the night of this incident? That would be—"

"Wednesday, October the tenth. Oh yes, I sure did. I was witness to quite a bit of it, if you want the truth."

"That'd be nice."



"Well, what did you *think* I was going to tell you? Some pack of lies? First off, I saw that pesky Mrs. Olsen going up to see him—the killer, I mean. Saw her drive right by in that fancy car. The BMU."

"Maybe you mean BMW?"

"I never was a car person, sheriff, I won't lie to you. Got too much to do to worry about *that*." She jumped up when the kettle started to sing. "I just can't believe this day—rain and all, and tea, and it's the housekeeper's day off, wouldn't you know?" She clattered out a couple of cups and brought them out brimming, then ran back to the kitchen. "I just have the feeling you're a sugar person," she shouted. "It would figure, on Patty's day off."

"I'm not a sugar person, but I put in a couple of spoons to make her happy. 'What time would it be that the BMW went by your place on Wednesday? Do you remember?'"

"Sure do. I was out tending my vegetables, and this car came roaring by—setting up a racket like you wouldn't believe—so I couldn't hear what my Patty shouted to me from the kitchen. I said to Patty, 'Sorry, I couldn't hear you, on account of that car.' And she says, '*Jeopardy's* on in half an hour, you want me to start the dinner?' 'Cause that's when we

like to have it, when *Jeopardy's* on. I told her sure, what did she think, we were going to change our routine right now? So I figure this was about six thirty." She took a sip of tea. "At night."

"Fine." It took me three words to note down what it took her about fifty to say.

"And a few minutes later—I'm still out in my yard—the yelling started. It was the fiercest thing you ever heard, sheriff. The language! I'm only too glad my Brigham was so engrossed in his cartoons that he didn't hear."

"You're saying you could hear these people yelling at each other inside their own house a quarter mile away?"

She pinked a bit. "I'm not saying they were in the house. I think they must've been out in the drive, 'cause it was clear as a bell. You know how there was that big storm that night, and it was windy as anything just before it hit. So the wind musta carried their voices so's I could hear 'em."

"You knew for sure this was Greg Olsen and his wife doing the shouting?"

"Well now, who else could it a been? Nobody was out driving that night. They all knew the storm was coming. The road was empty. I know, 'cause I took a peek up the road when

I heard 'em yelling. Besides, I know his voice. I talked to him often enough."

"Hmmmph." I tried to keep from grimacing as I took a little tea. Stuff was so damned sweet I could hardly drink it. "How long did this yelling go on?"

"Oh, I'd say a good ten minutes, maybe. And then—" she nodded and blinked slowly "*—it just stopped*. Made me wonder."

"You didn't wonder enough to give me a call about it."

That got her good. She started stammering all over the place and fixing her dress over her knees and fiddling with her earring. "Now that's not exactly true. I *did* think about it, but Ray thought I'd better not, that it wasn't any of my business. And I don't like sticking my nose into other people's personal matters. I was following his advice is all."

"Did you hear anything else?"

"Well, the storm started up soon after. There was so much rain and wind whipping around I wasn't really paying any mind. I had to shut the window, too, and they musta gone inside."

"So," I said, taking my notes, "nothing else that night?"

"Oh no, there was more," she said. Too eager, I thought. "About eleven Ray and I went to bed. And then sometime in the

middle of the night—I don't know when—there was a big noise, a big bang. I thought a tree had fallen 'cause of all the wind. But I went to the window and the storm was over. I looked out, but I couldn't see anything. Then I heard it—the shouting again. Louder, seemed like. More lovely language. I got mad then and shut the window. Then I went back to sleep."

She crossed her legs and smiled. Her shakes were gone, and I wished I could put them back into her. I folded up the notebook. "Are you sure those were the same voices you'd heard earlier in the evening? Could've been some kids, maybe, having a fight by the road?"

"I know a voice when I hear it, sheriff," said Madeline, and fixed her mouth at me. "Are you saying I don't?"

"Just double-checking. Pays to check everything twice. Thanks for the tea." I closed my eyes and gave it a brave swallow.

Madeline led the way to the door. "I always knew that Greg Olsen was a killer. Those college types often are. I guess you know about the Loeb and Leopold case, don't you? It was on TV last spring. *Those* two were very smart. Oh yes sir. But just two common murderers, even so."



"Thanks very much, Mrs. Creighton. You've been quite a help."

Little Brigham reappeared by her leg as she waved to me. "Oh, anytime, sheriff. You come by anytime you got a crime. I'm here to serve my community, that's how I feel."

The boy stuck his fist in his mouth again and waved at me a bit from his mother's hip. Somehow I felt like I was leaving the poor kid alone in a cell to serve a life sentence.

The rain had let up some by the time I got back to the station. I figured a strong cup of coffee to wash out the taste of that sweet tea was what I needed. When I walked in, Riley for once didn't have his grimy feet up on his desk. He was leaning forward—looking *interested*, actually—talking to a couple of strangers who looked mighty uneasy sitting there.

I flapped my hat against the side of the door jamb as Riley walked over. Water flew every which way. "Raining, huh?"

I shook the hat in his direction. "Yeah. Raining."

"Sheriff MacReady, these two are Mr. and Mrs. Hainey from Boston." The fellow stood up to shake my hand. He had a hard handshake, but the skin of his palms was a bit too soft

for my taste. He wore his hair in that greased-back way and had on a dark suit that must've set him back a sum. His wife, a wispy thing with wavy dishwater hair, just gave a little wave and whispered, "Nice to meet you."

"Bad weather to be traveling in," I noted, sitting on the edge of Riley's desk.

"Oh, we've been staying here," Mr. Hainey said, crossing his skinny legs. "We've been vacationing. In fact, we're getting ready to leave in the next few days." He had long, skinny white fingers that he kept crossing and uncrossing too.

"Haven't seen you about," I said.

Riley leaned around me. "They come and go, Mac. They've been staying in the Seaside B&B."

"Hainey . . . Hainey . . . aren't you . . ."

"Yep, that's them," Riley said.

"Do you mind?"

"We own the house that Mr. Olsen is going to buy, up on West Lighthouse Road," Mr. Hainey said.

"That's right, that's what I remember. Riley, will you get your shoulder out of my backside?" Instead of waiting, I got myself a regular chair.

Mrs. Hainey coughed very softly and added, "We came about the—situation there up at the house. I was a witness." She smoothed back her wavy hair and even gave a kind of smile.

"A witness? What to, exactly?"

"Why, the murder, of course."

Riley threw me a look. "That's as far as we'd got before you came in, Mac."

"All right now, Mrs. Hainey, you just tell us everything you remember, nice and slow." My pencil was shot by this time. "Take it down, Riley."

"That's what I was *doing*."

"I wish I'd never seen a thing like that," Mrs. Hainey said, looking down at her hands in her lap.

"You were up near the Point on Wednesday, October tenth?" I pressed.

"That's right. I was visiting a friend of mine who lives on Seaside Way. Kyle had to go to Boston—" she stopped there and gave her husband a kind of sick puppydog look "—and I hate to be alone. So my friend Janet and I had dinner and then we played some cards. I was going to go home around nine, but then the storm sprang up and I didn't want to do any driving."

"That'd be Janet Burrows," I muttered to Riley, who gave me a little scowl.

"Right!" said Mrs. Hainey, pointing a long fingernail at me. "That's right. So I stayed a bit longer. I was going to sleep over, but then I saw the storm'd let up, and I didn't like to leave Reggie alone—"

"Reggie?"

"He's our little cocker, sheriff." Mr. Hainey patted his wife and smiled like a man does when he's talking about how his son struck out the last batter and won the Little League championship.

"Go on."

"It must've been about midnight or one o'clock. I drove across to West Lighthouse and noticed Greg's lights were on. I could see him there in the living room, standing up, with his back to the window. He was throwing his arms around, shouting. I guess his windows were open because I could hear some things he was saying—I wouldn't like to repeat them here."

"Was he alone?" I asked her.

"Alone?"

"Yes, ma'am. Was he waving his arms around at himself? Shouting at himself?"

"Oh no, there was Mrs. Olsen, too. Standing in front of him."



Riley stopped to sharpen his pencil. I got up from my chair to stretch a bit and get the coffee that somehow I'd been distracted from. The wind whined through the planks of our little shingled station. "How'd you know it was Mrs. Olsen there with him?" I asked Mrs. Hainey. Her head jerked round like a rabbit's.

"Wasn't she the one who was killed?" Her voice had gotten a lot louder.

"That's not the point," I said. "I don't want to hear what you read in the papers. I want to hear what you saw there."

"I—I'd met her once before, I think. I *think*." Mrs. Hainey scrambled behind her shoulder for her husband's hand, which found hers.

"When was that?"

"I don't know." She craned her neck round to Mr. Hainey for some help. He put on a great show of concentration. "Well, we'd talked to Greg about buying the place, of course. I think she stopped by one day when we were there talking to Greg. She brought her lawyer. I guess that was the summer sometime."

"She was tall, with red hair, long red hair," Mrs. Hainey jumped in.

"Young? Old?"

"About my age." Mrs. Hainey smiled with a little blush. "That's about thirty, sheriff."

I coughed into my coffee cup. I didn't argue with her, but she was about as close to thirty as my big toe.

"Did you stop the car when you saw these two in the window?" Riley asked. I grunted, but I've got to let him ask something once in a while.

"I slowed down," she said. "That's when I saw it. Mrs. Olsen said something—shouted something—and then turned around. Then Mr. Olsen pulled something off the chair and threw it around her neck and strangled her from behind."

Mrs. Hainey gave a bit of a shudder. Her husband patted her shoulder. She even covered her eyes for further effect, but this performance didn't move me much.

Riley kept taking it down like it was the answers to a final exam. "Did you see what he grabbed off the chair?"

She shrugged. Having a hard time keeping back the tears, it looked like. "Something long and white," she managed to say. Her voice had got small again.

Enough was enough. I pulled my coat off the rack. "You can finish up here, Riley. I think I need something to eat."

"But, Mac, what about—"

"Go on, now. You just sum it up, write a report, I'll look at it later." I gave him a grin he

didn't see too often. "I leave it all in your capable hands."

That shocked him enough so he couldn't say anything, not until I was safe out the door and in my warm car.

It's not my habit to bug out on a witness's statement—especially since I'm usually taking them myself, not relying on Riley—but sometimes I need to get away from all the chatter and just think the thing through. A chat between sheriff and witness is no damned tea social, after all. You're discussing some poor fellow's welfare who everybody's already got cold guilty in their mind, which isn't the way it's supposed to work. I'll tell you something else about witnesses, too: they get to feeling pretty important, having seen something like a murder. They read about it in the paper, how the cops're all perplexed, and then they start thinking maybe they saw something they didn't. Maybe what Mrs. Hainey, driving through a drizzly night, saw from the road—which isn't right next to the house—was Greg Olsen coming up behind his wife to comfort her, placate her. I don't know anything about marital matters—never wanted to—and even less about divorce matters. I just hate to see a fellow like Greg get some-

thing pinned on him by some prissy forty-five-year-old woman who's trying to be thirty. You see what I mean.

I drove around a bit and then found myself at Janet Burrows' place, confirming what Mrs. Hainey had said. Janet told me yes, Mrs. Hainey had come up to play canasta or some such dopey game, and she had left about midnight. Not that she would, or should, but she hadn't heard any shouting. Her windows were shut up tight because of the storm. She was surprised, though, that her friend hadn't told her anything about witnessing a murder—here it was two days later and they'd talked on the phone. "You won't tell her I said this, sheriff," said Janet, "but Vicky's a bit of a gossip. If she knows something hot like that, she doesn't keep it a secret. She must have been worried about the security of the matter."

Must have, all right. But I doubted that would stop her.

Plymouth Harbor, on the east side of Garth's Reach, is the busiest port we have. It's where the ferryboats coming over from Massachusetts dock and pick up passengers. Hence the Seahorse, a nice little tavern right on the water, does a happy business. But even the Seahorse was quiet that day.



Winds left over from Wednesday's storm still kept the waters uneasy, and in October, visitors come less and less frequently anyway. The whole island was quieting down to its dreary stretch of winter.

"Got yourself a hot one, hey, Mac?" said Lil as she slid me over my usual Sam Adams. Lil's okay—could stand to lose about a hundred pounds, but as two old unmarrieds, we're kindred spirits.

"I guess so."

"Now what's the long face? You always said you like 'em neat and clean. No complications. For once you got yourself one. Even heard you got a witness."

I sat up at that. "Where'd you hear? Who said?"

Lil settled her generous backside against the sink. "I'd be out of a job if I started telling you that sort of thing."

"Oh, I suppose it doesn't make a difference. I'd swear this whole island was bugged the way people know things the minute they happen." I took a sip of the beer. The only sounds were the wind creaking against the building and the cool tap of the pool cues. The place was dead. "It's just that I liked old Greg. And he's not the *type*."

She raised her eyebrows.

"I know what they say. But there is a type, I think. Now,

think about it: a mild-mannered fellow like Greg, teaches poetry and all, does some kind of writing—a sweet guy. His wife walks out on him. So he leaves town for the summer and comes out to Garth's Reach to rent a little place and do some fishing. He likes it all right, so he thinks he might like to buy it—maybe even take a break from school and stay awhile. Now is that a killer?"

"Could be." Lil ruffled her salt-and-pepper curls. "You never know what somebody's capable of in a romantic situation."

"I guess I don't."

"Hey, I'm no expert myself." The sink gave a creak when Lil stood up. "But even the sweetest of folks, when they get burned, a whole other side of them comes up. What about that girl, Jolene Murray? Seemed like a sweetheart, yet she covered up for the murder of that fellow who dumped her."

"Mercy, don't get me started on Jo. That one hurt." I was still nursing grief over that.

"You're making it more complicated than it is." Lil ran the tap into my mug again. "This wife comes over, they get in a fight, all that hurt comes back to him, and that's that."

"But they got in *two* fights, that's what I don't get. She comes down—and what for, anyway? all the way from Boston for what?—they scream at each other in the drive for a bit, and then instead of her taking off, she stays all night. Until around midnight, when suddenly they have another fight and he kills her. That make sense to you?"

"Maybe she couldn't leave because of the storm," said Lil. "That was a fierce one, the first one of the fall. She sure couldn't have gone back on the ferry and didn't want to drive down to one of the inns." Lil squeezed herself a seltzer water. "The whole west side of the island got its power knocked out. Mine was gone for most of the night."

"Wait a minute—what's that?"

"What's the matter, you live in a cocoon out at your place? From about ten to dawn it was out. Probably a lot of people never knew it. You know how they are around here—early to bed."

I picked up my hat from the bar and laid a few bills down. "I better get going."

"What's your hurry? Don't you want to finish your beer?"

"No time. I got to go talk to Greg Olsen."

As I was running out the door into the new drizzle, I caught a glance of Lil tipping up the dregs of my Sam Adams into her own mouth. I guess she'd earned it.

"He won't talk to you," Riley said, pulling the keys from his belt. "I've been trying to strike up a conversation. He wants to wait for his lawyer."

"He won't need a lawyer if he talks to me," I said. "When are they coming to pick him up?"

"First thing tomorrow. That gives you about another fourteen hours." Riley sniffed. It's no small sniffer he has, and it does its job. "What's that on your breath? Beer?"

"Mind your own business. And get me that scarf. The one with Greg's prints on it."

I opened the door to the back room, where the jail cell is. Piti-ful way to design a sheriff's office, I've told the mayor, to lock up a suspect away from the rest of the world, not even out in the open where he can see daylight coming and going. All's I get is a grunt for a reply.

Greg sat on the lower bunk, leaning forward, chin in his hands. He reminded me of a picture I'd once seen of Abe Lincoln—tall and skinny like Abe, he is, too—before he'd got his beard, leaning forward like that. Only the picture shows



Abe with a book in his hands, reading by the light of an oil lamp. Poor Greg wasn't even doing that. Aside from the Lincoln resemblance, Greg was a handsome fellow, glasses, wavy blond hair, good build if a bit slight. That wife of his didn't know what she was giving up.

"How're you doing?" I said, extending him a hand.

"I'd stand up," he said, "but you took my belt, and—"

"No explanations needed." Riley came back with the scarf and opened the cell as I pulled up a chair. He gave me a look that I took to mean "Good luck, you'll need it" and went back to his crossword or whatever the hell he'd been doing.

"If you're here to grill me again, forget it," said Greg. "I told you I wasn't worried, and I'm not. When my lawyer gets here this whole thing will be cleared up."

"I'd like to think that was the case," I told him. I pulled the scarf out and wound it around my hand. "But it doesn't matter if you're innocent as can be. What matters is what the jury thinks. And right now, if they were to listen to me rattle off the facts, they'd hang you."

Greg just shrugged.

"Do you even know what the facts against you are?"

"I guess."

"I guess not." I stood up to stretch the gimpy leg. The rain was bugging it something fierce. "Here's the situation: You were the last person to see Mrs. Olsen alive. We have a witness who saw her driving up to your place. The same witness claims to have heard a fight you had with her out on your driveway about six P.M. Then we have a witness who was driving by and saw you strangle your wife. That's at about midnight. We come over the next day when you phone us and find the murder weapon—" I held up the scarf "—on your premises with your fingerprints on it. Now, no one broke into your house or broke out of it. Nothing's disturbed. No motive for anyone else to be killing your wife. You tell me: Is that a rosy picture or not?"

Greg looked up at me finally. His mouth hung open a little. "I didn't hear about any witnesses."

"New development."

He sat quietly.

"Circumstantial evidence is one thing," I said. "Good lawyer can sometimes—*sometimes*, that is—convince a jury that without a witness the case's no good. But a witness *and* circumstance—" I paused a second to dig out my pipe and tobacco "—that's bad." I spent about five minutes loading and tamp-

ing this idiot pipe I'm trying to smoke. I thought Greg might think us a little closer, a little more kindred, if he saw me with my pipe. Still he said nothing. Finally I went on, "Just seems to me that you and me're all right friends. I'm on your side—I still don't think you did it, not even in the face of all that's come out. It'd be nice if you'd help out a little, though. Even if you could just tell me why your wife came all this way when you're not even married any more, for instance."

"She came over to throw it in my face," Greg shot out all of a sudden. "How she's got a job and I don't. How she's going to marry somebody great and I'm not. How she knows everything and I'm a fool." He blinked and looked at his shoes.

"Hold on a second—I thought you were teaching at that college in western Mass."

"Check your calendar, Mac. The school year's started. Funding's down, and they cut me." He started kicking the floor with his laceless tennis shoes. "It's been a hell of a year for me. Here I am, no wife, no job, no real writing talent that's going to go anywhere. I sold one poem two years ago and nothing since. My wife got the house in the settlement. That's why I was going to buy this place. I

just wanted to get away. Even though this weather is murder on my arm." He rubbed his right elbow as he spoke.

"What's that?"

"Tennis injury," he said. "Both arms, really. I can hardly pick up a racquet any more. My biceps are in tatters." He gave a grim smile and waved his hand around the jail cell. "And now this whole situation."

The pipe finally began to take, and I puffed a little. I wanted to take it slow. "You're telling me those people were going to sell you a house and you didn't even have a job?"

He shrugged. "Yeah. I guess I got lucky. I told them I'd find another teaching position. They seemed to believe that."

"But here it is, October, and no job. They're still going to sell it to you?"

He gave a little cough of a laugh. "Not too likely now, Mac."

"Maybe you'd better tell me a bit more. Check me for bugs if you like. This is off the record, between you and me. Friend to friend. How about it?"

"Does a sheriff have any friends?" Greg asked.

He had me there, but I'd meant what I'd said. I didn't push, I just sat, puffing my pipe, holding my gimp leg out straight. Waiting. I had a feeling he was going to come



through, and after a minute, he started, his voice still quiet, just like you'd think the voice of a poet might be.

"She called me around noon to say she had something important to talk to me about. She'd heard I was going to buy that house, and she said I shouldn't trust the Haineys—that they had had some crooked real estate deals in the past in Massachusetts. She should know—she's a crackerjack agent, Mac. She really knows—knew—what she was talking about."

He paused and I looked away, to be polite. No way, I thought, did this fellow kill that girl. You could tell from his tone of voice. He held no hate for her. Nothing but a little bitterness.

"I didn't want her to come," he said at last. "She hurt me pretty badly, and I wanted to avoid seeing her. But she insisted. She's a licensed house inspector, too, and she wanted to do an inspection. For free. I told her I didn't need it. I knew she knew her stuff, but she's pulled some pretty cute tricks the last year." His voice caught again. "I thought she was trying to make a fool out of me, just flaunting her know-how. I thought she wanted to interfere, didn't want me to have my nice life out here on Garth's

Reach. She'd taken everything else of mine already."

I puffed on the pipe. It seemed to be working. "So you told her not to come?"

He nodded. "I told her, but I knew she'd come anyway. She got there sometime between six and seven."

"And you passed a few words between you?"

"I met her out on the driveway," Greg said. "The wind was strong enough nearly to knock us over. I was mad. My lawyer would faint to hear me say it, but I started yelling and screaming at her to butt out of my life. You don't know what she put me through. The humiliation." His eyes glazed over, and he looked down at his shoes.

"You don't have to go into all that if you don't want to," I said. I wasn't crazy about hearing it anyway.

"Well, after a few minutes it started to rain, and she ran inside ahead of me. So I was stuck with her, so to speak. At least I had been hosed down, if you will. I could be civil. She looked around the house and wrinkled her nose—that was a famous trick of hers—and said, 'I just can't believe you want to buy this place.' As if it were a dump. She started in again about how I haven't changed any, I'm still too trusting, and I don't check

into things, I'm not thorough. All the same crap she's been saying for the last year."

"Was she still willing to do this inspection for you?"

"Oh yes." Greg stood up and wandered over to the straight metal bars. "She was sure there was something wrong with the house and that's why the Haineys were willing to sell it so cheaply, especially since I was out of a job and my credit rating was shot. She said it was too good to be true."

I was beginning to think the same.

"I got mad again then. I told her the Haineys had been very kind to me throughout the whole divorce, and even let me stay here a couple of months for free. I told her the only odd thing about the place was that it seemed to be haunted."

I tried to keep my grin down. "I'll bet she bought into that straightaway."

"I shouldn't have said it, I realize. It only fed the fire. She laughed right in my face. She started in about my imagination and how I'm always dreaming my life away. But I'm telling you, Mac: I lived there, and there is something strange about it."

"What kind of strange?"

"Noises. In the middle of the night. Creakings and almost a moaning sort of sound. I hear it

all the time. I told Ronnie all about this, and she started laughing again. 'I'm just here for your own good, I don't mean to laugh,' she said, but she didn't try very hard to control herself. 'That's the foundation, Greg. The foundation is probably about to cave in. It could be termites.' I suppose it could be true." Greg scratched his chin and looked at me with watery eyes. "She was trying to do me a good turn, I suppose. She said I was a lot of things—irresponsible, undisciplined—but she didn't want to see me get taken. She almost apologized for everything. She said it was too bad things didn't work out for us. For a few minutes there she was really quite sweet."

"Just for a few minutes, huh?"

I saw his face turn red out of the corner of my eye. "Well, maybe longer. I told her I'd let her do the inspection in the morning, and she started wondering where she'd stay with the storm raging as it was. I suppose it was my idea to let her stay at the house. Once the power went out and all—"

I looked up at him quick. "So your power went out? When was that?"

"About twenty till ten. I know because my clock froze in that position. I brought out my



oil lamps and—well—I suppose it got very romantic.”

I didn't need to hear all about it. “I get the picture. When did you actually fall asleep?”

“Well, the clocks were out, as I say. It was after ten. Maybe around eleven.”

“Did you hear your wife get up?”

“That was another thing,” said Greg. “When the lights went, we sat in front of the fire and had some brandy. I had more than she did. I was out good for the night. I didn't hear anything or see anything until I woke up that morning. I saw she wasn't there, so I thought she'd woken up early and gone home. But then I went out into the living room and found her—as I told you at first.”

“You didn't hear anyone come in?”

“No. But I was out cold, as I said.”

I pulled the white scarf out of my pocket. Greg's fingerprints dotted one entire edge. “How about telling me where this came from? Was Mrs. Olsen wearing it when she came in?”

“No. It . . .”

“Yeah?”

“I don't want to get anyone else mixed up in this, Mac.”

“I'd say it's crucial that you do.”

He took off his glasses and started cleaning them with his

shirttail. “It was earlier in the day. Before Ronnie got to the house, Mrs. Hainey called me up to ask me something about the house, and I mentioned that Ronnie was coming out. I told her that Ronnie's very smart about real estate, so I thought I'd get her opinions.”

“How did Mrs. Hainey like that?”

“Like it? Oh, she thought it was a good idea. She told me how lucky I was to know someone in the real estate game.” Greg smiled grimly. “I feel terribly lucky these days.”

“You're saying she knew Mrs. Olsen was coming to see you?”

“That's right.”

“How did the scarf come up?”

“Well, I hung up the phone and went back to do some writing. About three hours later she called me again and said she was having some trouble with an old typewriter, and could I fix it for her? She knew I had this old portable and that I fiddled with it sometimes. I told her I'd be happy to.”

I let him finish but I knew what was coming.

“She came by with the typewriter. Turned out the ribbon was knotted up somehow, so I took it out and straightened it. I had to unspool most of it and then wind it back up again.”

“And my guess is your hands were plenty filthy by the time you were done,” I put in.

“Well, yes—”

“And at some point Mrs. Hainey handed you the scarf she was wearing. Right again?”

“I don't see your point, Mac,” Greg said, mighty cold for him.

“Yeah, you do. You see it crystal clear.” I let the pipe go out, since it seemed to be of a mind to. “She handed you the scarf because she knew your prints would get all over it. In a nice dark black ink, too.” I stood up, pretty angry at confirming what I'd been suspecting.

“That can't be what—”

“No? Then how come she said she saw you strangle that woman in a lit house when the power was off? She never could have identified you with the lights off, and because their place is on the east side of the island, she didn't know the power was off. So she told us the lights were blazing nice and bright. Goddamn, what an operator!”

Greg stood up, too. “I just can't believe Mrs. Hainey would do a thing like that.”

“Well, I know what it means. This isn't the murder weapon.”

“But who's to say it isn't? It could be. It could be unless the real weapon is found.”

I stood up, and the knee cracked loud. I grimaced, and Greg held out an arm to help me. “Riley, come get me, will you?” I called down to the office. “Thanks, Greg. I appreciate your saying something. And don't you worry about the murder weapon.” Riley arrived at his own sweet leisure and unlocked the cell. “I'm off to find it right now.”

Damn weather wouldn't disappear—it just pried out. The dark floated up, and the mist wafted down in a gentle kind of cloud as I urged the car up Garth's Drive. It's a mighty steep drop onto the rocks, but I know my way around. Besides, I didn't have much time before they were coming to get Greg, and I had a feeling all would not be quiet at that little shack near the Point.

Just my instincts said so as I wound the car up along Garth's Drive. Common sense told me that any killer worth his (or her) salt wouldn't leave the weapon there in plain sight—but then, if the killer had been Greg Olsen, would he leave that fingerprint scarf sitting there so handy next to the body? If there was something to be found, by God, I was going to find it. And with no Riley around to distract me or depress me.



Greg's little house sat on the rocks, gray and lonely, swallowed up almost completely in the mist. I let myself in and flicked the switch. The lights were working now. I had the scarf in one hand.

Even someone who left in a hurry, I figured, wouldn't leave a weapon out in the open. I checked the trash outside, all the wastebaskets, the closets. Nothing. I sat inside, smoking my own breath, disgusted. Greg was right. Without the real weapon, anything I said was pretty much supposition.

And then, after I'd been sitting three or four minutes in that thick quiet, a little sound floated by me. Nothing you'd notice in any other house, under any other circumstance; a rustle, maybe a quick run by a cold mouse, a shaking of boxes, a quick scamper over a stack of books. But I was going for any chance I could. I drew my gun and headed towards the garage, where the sound had come from.

The garage was separate from the house, no more than a shed out to one side. The padlock that had held the door closed a few days ago was missing. I stood in the wet grass with the sand caked on my boots and the tiniest drizzle going down the back of my neck. Then I burst through the door.

Dark. Windowless shed after sundown.

"I don't know who's there," I said, right into the black, "but this is Sheriff MacReady with a loaded gun, so don't be playing any games." I flicked the light switch but the bulb didn't even flicker. Another rustle floated out of the dark, uneasy. "Hainey, if that's you, don't be stupid. There's only one way out of here, and I'm blocking it."

Then all of a sudden the rustling got louder, and something crashed, like a pile of dusty books, and then something clanged, like a bicycle being knocked over. "Who's that?" came a squeaky kind of voice. "Sheriff? That's you?"

"You know damned well who it is. Get out here and show yourself."

The yard, what there was of it, was pretty murky, but even so I recognized Kyle Hainey's skinny face as he skulked out the door. "You frightened me, sheriff."

"What do you think you're doing in there?" I still held the gun out.

"I'm sorry—really. I was looking for some books I had stored in the shed here. We haven't cleared everything out yet." He held up a rusty key. "See? I didn't break in."

"No, you own the place. You got a right." He was shaking his head enough that I lowered the gun and then holstered it. I glanced down at the bag he was carrying. "You find what you were looking for?"

He raised his eyebrows at me like he hadn't heard. "What? Oh yes. Thanks. It's awfully dark in there. The bulb must have burned out. I'll have to fix that."

"Hmmmph."

"Well, sheriff, if you don't mind . . ."

"Matter of fact, I do mind just a little." I put a hand on his arm—not hard, but to mean business all the same—and said, "Would you mind coming back inside for just a minute? I want to clear a few things up about this Olsen thing."

"Well, I am due for an appointment . . ."

"On this island? On a Friday night?" I looked down at the bag again. "Must be some important books you had to come get before going to that appointment."

"Yes. Well—yes. Mrs. Hainey and I wanted to take them back to Boston tomorrow." He hugged the bag close to him.

"I'll only take a minute," I said, and led him inside the house. I pointed to one of Greg's Alpine chairs, and Mr. Hainey

took a seat, shoving his canvas bag back behind his ankles.

"As you know, sheriff, it was my wife who saw what happened. I don't think I can be of too much help to you."

"Funny how that was." I sat down on the sofa opposite him. "Seeing how the power was out, how she could've seen a light through this window."

"Was the power out?" Mr. Hainey shrugged and gave a little twitter that got under my skin. "Maybe it was. We keep the house stocked with oil lamps. Maybe it was an oil lamp she saw lighting the room."

"Could be. Could be." I pulled the scarf out of my pocket. "This look familiar to you, by any chance?"

I saw him change color just as sure as I saw his hands tremble, but he managed a troubled, bewildered sort of look. "No. Should it?"

"Belongs to your wife. She was wearing it when she brought a typewriter over to Mr. Olsen the afternoon of the murder." I leaned forward and spread the fibers out. "See the black stains? That's from the typewriter ribbon. She made sure Greg touched this scarf and got his prints all over it. I don't know if you know anything about police procedure, but prints are none too easy to



come by—not how the movies would have you believe. But this here—this is just too good to be true. Prints planted right on the scarf.”

A little strand of Mr. Hainey’s black hair came loose from the grease and fell down across his forehead as he shrugged. “You would know better than I. I suppose it could belong to Vicky. She could have left it here when she took the typewriter back home.”

I sniffed and rubbed my nose, which was chilled in that frosty house. “Could’ve. My guess is she did it pretty deliberately. All the more opportunity for Greg to put more prints on it.”

“And what would be the purpose of that?”

I laughed. “Now doesn’t that make it look a lot more like the murder weapon? And it makes Greg look a lot more like the killer.”

I was looking in Mr. Hainey’s eyes, but I still caught a glimpse of his foot pushing that canvas bag farther back behind his feet. “Sheriff, play Sherlock Holmes with someone else, if you like. The state is going to handle Greg Olsen. Why don’t you go back to busting your drunk drivers and those people who ride forty down Seaside Way?”

“I know that’s supposed to rile me, and it might work on

my deputy. But this isn’t the first setup I’ve ever been acquainted with, and knowing this place, it’s not going to be my last. I’ll tell you something interesting about the autopsy they did on Mrs. Olsen. Did you hear anything about it?”

“Of course not.”

I sat back now, kind of enjoying myself. “They found little tiny brown fibers in the collar of Mrs. Olsen’s nightgown and on her neck. Fibers that didn’t come from this scarf.”

“They could’ve come from anything.”

“Could’ve. But the marks on Mrs. Olsen’s neck show that whatever was used to choke her was wound around her neck quite a few times—like a noose.”

“Well, aren’t you the little detective?” he said in his snotty type voice, and then he stood up. “This is all fascinating, sheriff, and I commend you. May I go now?”

“Not just yet.” I held up the scarf. “Because, Mr. Hainey, if you take a look at this thing which your wife so conveniently left with Greg Olsen, it’s too short for that kind of a killing. No.” I wrapped the scarf around my hand a few times. “This thing is no more the murder weapon than my gun. The real weapon’s still around here someplace.”

Kyle Hainey took a half step towards the door. “Then don’t you think you ought to be spending your time searching for it?”

“Oh, I’ve got plenty of time. But even if I find it, there’s no way it could nail Greg Olsen.”

His blue eyes fixed on mine.

A weary web of pain crept through my leg, and suddenly I stretched out my arm, running a finger along my bicep muscle. “Greg’s got no strength in here,” I said. “His body looks strong—to the layman, maybe. But Greg hurt himself playing tennis in college a few years back, and any doctor’d be able to tell that he couldn’t strangle a fly, let alone a woman nearly as tall as him, not unless he could sit on her. Not standing up, that’s for sure. Which kind of blows the witness’s story away, don’t it?”

“All right, all right! So he didn’t kill his wife!” Mr. Hainey threw up his hands. His canvas bag swung about like a wild thing. “I don’t care one way or the other! Do you want the truth? I’m happy my wife was wrong. I hope Greg gets off the hook. You seem to think I want him to go to prison. I don’t! I don’t!”

“That’s good, Mr. Hainey. That’s fine.” I stood up. “So you’ll help us all you can in finding the real weapon?”

Hainey reached the door and laid his hand on the knob. “I can’t help you with that, sheriff. I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“My guess is that someone else wanted to get rid of Mrs. Olsen.”

The hand froze.

“Someone who knew that she was smart about things like real estate. Someone who knew that she was coming to inspect this place. Someone who knew why you always heard funny creakings and moanings coming from the foundation at night.” I smiled at Hainey’s back. “You know what would be even better? A couple. See, then they could stage a good rip-roaring fight in the middle of the night just far enough from Madeline Creighton’s house to make her think she heard something she didn’t. But people like that, they’d be smart.” His back flinched. “They’d come back to get the real weapon.”

Still Hainey didn’t move.

“I have a deputy waiting outside with a loaded gun,” I said to his back. “I wouldn’t try anything if I were you.”

Hainey turned around but kept his hand on the door. His voice cracked wide open. “What kind of a fool would leave a murder weapon lying around?” he managed to say. Even in



that frosty air, the sweat was beginning to trickle down his face.

I shrugged. "Someone who might have a key to the shed out there. A key that Greg Olsen didn't have." I held out my hand. "Suppose you show me what you got in that bag there. My guess is some kind of brown rope with maybe a few traces of blood on it. But let's have a look."

He opened the bag, all right. He even pulled something out, but his bullet had no hope of finding me. I was quicker than he was—I'd been doing my target practice—and gave him a shoulder wound that sent that gun to the floor.

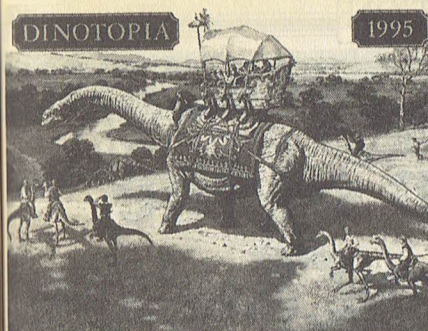
"Concealing a weapon," I said, picking up the gun with a corner of my jacket. I emptied his canvas bag, and the coil of rope slid out neat as you please. No books, I noticed. "That's not going to look too good on your record, either." I cuffed his wrists together.

"What in hell do you think you're doing? You're not dragging me into your filthy office! What about my shoulder? What are you going to do about that? And what about my phone call? I intend to speak to a lawyer! Oh yes! I intend to speak very loudly to a lawyer!"

I read him his rights as we walked out to the car. His head jerked around every which way at the shrubbery. "There's no deputy here. That was a little white lie I told."

"That's entrapment! Or something like it! It's something illegal!" Most of his hairs had come loose by now and were flying all over his head. From the driver's seat I could feel blobs of grease hitting the back of my neck. "I'm not saying anything, I'm not saying one word, until I see my lawyer! Do you hear me? Not one damned word!"

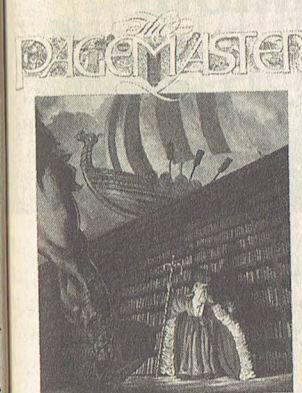
I smiled at him in the rear view mirror. As far as I was concerned, he could stay quiet as long as he liked.



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