

THE EXECUTIONER

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There's a peculiar fact about this story. It appeared in an *Astounding* with a van Dongen cover about Christmas. It had superb interior illustrations by Kelly Freas. Simultaneously, the old *If* had a Christmas issue that featured a story called "The Executioner," by Frank Riley, I think. The *If* executioner had a Freas cover, showing a man in a suit of lights checking his pistol, and the story had superb interior illustrations by Kelly Freas.

The answer is that I had written "The Executioner," around a Kelly Freas cover painting, for *If*, and they had bounced it. John Campbell promptly bought it, for more money. Jim Quinn, the editor and publisher of *If*, had immediately paid Frank Riley to write a new "The Executioner." So the two magazines came out simultaneously, both featuring a lead story called "The Executioner." Jim Quinn was livid--how did I dare to sell a story he'd rejected? John Campbell laughed his head off. Kelly kept his mouth shut.

THE EXECUTIONER

Late in the morning, just before noon, Samson Joyce sat in a folding chair placed behind the high, granite judges' bench which faced the plaza. In a few minutes, he would be climbing up the steps of the bench to its top, where he would stand behind the solid parapet and look down at the Accused's box in the plaza. Now he was checking his gun.

He worked the slide, watching the breech open and the extractor reach with its metal fingertip. The bolt drew back; hesitated; jumped forward. He took out a silk rag and wiped off the excess oil, spreading it in a thin, uniform film over the metal. He thumbed the cartridges out of the clip, oiled the clip action, and reloaded. He did all this with patient care and long practice.

The sun had been breaking in and out of clouds all morning, and there was a fitful wind. The pennants and family standards around the plaza were twisting restlessly. It was an uncertain day.

The gun was his old favorite; a gas-operated 10-millimeter Grennell that had been with him since his old days as Associate Justice of Utica. It fitted comfortably into his hand, as well it might after all these years. It was not the jeweled, plated and engraved antique they expected him to use at the big trials in New York City or Buffalo. It was just a gun; it did what it was meant for, cleanly and efficiently, and he used it whenever he could. It didn't pretend to be more than it was. It never failed.

He scowled, looking down at it. He scowled at feelings he knew were foolish and wished he did not have.

Once he'd been in his twenties, looking forward. Now he was a shade past fifty, and what he looked back on was subtly less satisfactory than what he had looked forward to.

He raised his head and looked at the three men who were his Associate Justices today, as they walked toward him from the hotel. Blanding, with his brief case, Pedersen, with his brief case, and Kallimer with his frown.

Joyce's heavy lower lip tightened in a fleeting touch of amusement that slackened and was gone without a trace. All of them were younger than he'd been at Utica, and all three were farther along. Blanding was the Associate Justice here in Nyack, which meant his next appointment would take him out of the suburbs and into the city proper. Pedersen was waiting for the results of the Manhattan by-election to be officially confirmed. When they were, he'd take his seat in the Legislature. And Kallimer was Special Associate Justice to the Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Mr. Justice Samson Ezra Joyce. Perhaps it was the strain of remembering his full title that gave him the permanent frown, drawing his thin eyebrows closer together and pinching the bridge of his bony nose. Or perhaps he was rehearsing the sound of "Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Mr. Justice Ethan Benoni Kallimer."

All three of them were fortunate young men, in the early flower of their careers. But, being young men, they were not quite capable of enjoying their good fortune. Joyce could guess what they must be feeling as they walked toward him.

They'd be thinking Joyce was a crusty old fool who was hopelessly conservative in his administration of justice--that younger men were more capable.

They'd be thinking he wanted to live forever, without giving someone else a chance. They were sure he thought he was the only one fit to wear a Chief Justice's Trial Suit.

And they called him Old Knock-Knees whenever they saw him in his Suit tights.

Every trial saw them with their brief cases, each with its gun inside. Each of them waited for the day The Messire reversed Joyce's human and, therefore, fallible verdict. There'd be a new Chief Justice needed for the next trial, and promotions all along the line.

He worked the Grennell's slide again, nodded with satisfaction, and replaced the clip. In the thirty years since he'd began, The Messire had not reversed his verdicts. He had come close--Joyce had scars enough--but, in the end, he'd done no more than raise a formal objection, as it were, before substantiating Joyce's decisions.

Blanding, Pedersen, and Kallimer, in their plain, unfigured black vests, the stark white lace frothing at their wrists, stopped in front of him.

Somber men. Jealous men--even Pedersen, who was leaving the bench. Impatient men.

Joyce put away his gun. Young men, who failed to realize their good fortune in still having a goal to attain, and a dream to fulfill. Who did not foresee that it was the men at the top--the men who had reached the goal--who had to dedicate themselves unceasingly to the preservation of the ideal; who, with The Messire's help, labored each minute of their lives to keep the purpose of their lives untarnished. The young men never knew, until they reached the top, that the joy was in the struggle, and the drudgery in the maintenance of the victory. The young men served the ideal, without a thought to wondering what kept the ideal high and firm in its purpose.

Some day, they might learn.

"Good morning, Justice," almost in chorus.

"Good morning, Just ices. I imagine you slept well?"

From the sound of the spectators, he judged that the Accused had just been brought into the plaza. It was interesting to note the change in crowd voices over the years. Lately, it had been easy to differentiate between the sound from the family boxes and the noise of the people, which was a full octave lower.

Joyce looked up at the plaza tower clock. A few moments remained.

Dissatisfaction? Was that what he felt?

He imagined himself trying to explain what he felt to one of these youngsters, and--yes--"dissatisfaction" was the word he would use.

But that wouldn't ever happen. Blanding was too young to do anything but sneer at the knock-kneed old fool with his swollen ankles. Pedersen was out of it. And Kallimer, of course, whose intelligence he respected, was too intelligent to listen. He had his own ideas.

Joyce stood up. Touched the figure of The Messire buried under his neckpiece, straightened the hang of his vest, adjusted his wig, and turned toward his Associates. In so doing, he allowed his glance to quickly sweep over the Accused for the first time. She was standing in her box, waiting. Just one glance, before she could realize he'd compromised his dignity by looking at her.

"Well, Justices, it's time."

He waited to follow them up the steps which would be hard on his ankles.

First, Blanding had to relinquish his right to try the case, since it was in his jurisdiction.

Joyce, standing by himself on the higher central section of the platform, leaned forward slightly until his thighs were pressed against the cool stone of the bench's back. It took some of the weight off his ankles.

No one would notice it from the plaza below. Looking up at the bluff gray wall of the bench's face, all anyone could see were the torsos of four men; two in black, then one standing somewhat taller in his brilliant Suit, and then another in black. That last was Blanding, and now he stepped around the end of the bench, forward onto the overhanging slab that was the bailiffs rostrum at ordinary trials, and stopped, slim, motionless, and black, standing out over the plaza below.

Joyce was grateful for the breeze. The Suit was heavy with its embroidered encrustations, and the thick collar, together with his neckpiece, was already making him perspire. Still and all, he did not regret coming here to Nyack. In New York and Buffalo, his trials were ostentatious ceremonials, overrun with minor functionaries and elaborate protocol toward the First Families. Here in Nyack, there were no functionaries. The ceremony of trial could be stripped down to its simple but beautiful essentials. Blanding would handle the statements of charges, Pedersen would keep track, and Kallimer...

Kallimer would wait to see whether The Messire approved.

Joyce looked down at the crowd. Scarlet, gold, and azure blue struck his eyes from the family boxes. He saw the flash of light on rings and earrings, the soft, warm color of the ladies' wimples.

The people were a dun mass, dressed in the dark, subdued colors they had been affecting lately. Joyce reflected that, without their contrast, the family members might not appear so brilliant in their boxes. But that was only a hasty digression, fluttering across his mind like an uneasy bird at sunset. He understood from Blanding that the people had some unusual interest in this trial. Looking down, he could see the crowd was large.

Joyce plainly heard Blanding draw breath before he began to speak. When he did, he spoke slowly, and the acoustic amplifiers inside the stone bench made his voice grave and sonorous.

"People of Nyack--"

The crowd became absolutely still, all of them watching the straight, motionless black figure standing above them.

This was justice, Joyce thought as he always did when a trial began, the mood slipping over him. This was the personification of the ideal. The straight, unbending figure; the grave voice.

"The Nyack Court of Common Justice, of Sovereign New York, is now in Session."

He disliked Blanding, Joyce reflected, watching the Associate half-turn and extend an arm toward him. He disliked Pedersen, and Kallimer made him uneasy. But they were together in this. This was above personality, and above humanity. The Messire, the four of them, the families and the people; together, what they did here today was their bond-and heritage. This was their bulwark against savagery.

Blanding had held the gesture just long enough. "Mr. Justice Joyce, Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Presiding."

There was a burst of excited applause from the families. They'd expected him to preside at a trial of this nature, of course, but they were excited now, nevertheless. This was the official stamp. This was the recognition of their importance, and of the importance of this case. Joyce bowed his head in acknowledgment.

"Mr. Justice Kallimer, Chief Associate Justice."

Joyce noted that Kallimer's applause was much more sparse. But then, he had almost no reputation here. He'd originally come from Waverly, which was far across the nation at the Pennsylvania border. He'd been noticed by the Bar Association, but until he'd presided at some trials in the Hudson area, very few people would recognize his name.

"Mr. Justice Pedersen, Recording Justice."

Pedersen drew a better hand than Kallimer. That was because he was a New York City judge.

Joyce did not permit his thin smile to touch his face. For all of that, it was Kallimer who would

succeed him, even if Pedersen had stayed on the bench. Kallimer was not a crowdpleaser, but he had been efficient in Waverly, and he could be efficient here, too, if he had to.

Joyce waited for the proper amount of expectant silence to accumulate. Then he raised his head.

"Let trial begin."

There was a fresh burst of applause. When it subsided, he turned to Blanding. "Justice Blanding will state the ease." Joyce's tone, too, was deep and majestic. Part of that was the amplifiers, doing their invisible work within the bench, but part of it was in him, and he found himself submerging in the mood of the trial, his back stiffening and his ankles taking his full weight. His head was erect, and he felt his slow pulse moving regularly through his veins, beating with the gratification of the act of trial.

Blanding looked down at the Accused's box.

"The case of John Doe in complaint against Clarissa Jones. The concurrent case of the People of Sovereign New York against Clarissa Jones."

Joyce could now look at the Accused. She was obviously in poor control of herself, gripping the railing before her with tight hands. Then he turned toward Pedersen.

"Justice Pedersen, what has been the progress of this case?"

"Mr. Justice, the complaint of John Doe has been withdrawn in cognizance of the superior claim of the People."

That was ritual, too. Once the attention of Justice had been drawn to the crime, the original complainant withdrew. Otherwise, the name of the complaining family member would have had to be revealed in open court.

Joyce turned back toward Blanding.

"Justice Blanding will proceed with the statement of the People's case."

Blanding paused for another breath. "We, the People of Sovereign New York, accuse Clarissa Jones of attempting to usurp a place not her own; of deliberately and maliciously using the wiles of her sex to claim recognition from a member of a family, said family member being of minor age and hereinafter designated as "John Doe." We further accuse Clarissa Jones, People's woman, of fomenting anarchy--"

The indictment continued. Joyce watched the Accused's face, noting that despite her emotional strain, she at least retained sufficient propriety not to interrupt with useless exclamations or gestures. The girl had some steel in her, somewhere. He was pleased at her restraint; interruptions destroyed the rhythm of Trial. She'd have her chance to appeal.

He turned to Pedersen with an inquiring lift of his eyebrows. Pedersen moved closer, keeping his mouth carefully out of the pickup area.

"The girl was young Normandy's mistress. He's got a summer lodge on the river, here," he whispered.

"Joshua Normandy's boy?" Joyce asked in some surprise.

"That's right." Pedersen grimaced. "He might have been more astute, and investigated her a little. She's got a number of relatives in the local craft guilds and whatnot."

Joyce frowned. "Illegitimate relationships don't mean anything."

Pedersen shrugged the shoulder away from the crowd. "Legally, no. But in practice the People have taken to recognizing these things among themselves. I understand their couples refer to each other as husband and wife when among groups of their own kind. I know that's of no weight in court," he went on hastily, "but the girl's apparently an aristocrat among them. It could be natural for her to assume certain privileges. Normandy's specific complaint was that she came up to him on a public street and addressed him by his first name. Well, there she was going a little too far."

Pedersen hooked his mouth into a knowing smile.

"Yes," Joyce answered sharply, his cheeks flattening with rage, as he looked down at the Accused. "She was."

The youngsters didn't yet understand. They could smile at it. Joyce couldn't. The fact that this was just a thoughtless girl in love made no difference. What had to be judged here was the legal situation, not the human emotions involved.

Centuries ago, The Messire had established this society, speaking through His prophets, and it was that society which Joyce defended here, just as hundreds of Justices defended it every day throughout the land.

There were those worthy of marriage, and those who were not. Those with the mental capacity to rule, administer, judge, and choose the sick to be healed, and those without it. The notion had long ago been exploded that all human beings were equal.

The blunt facts of life were that talent and mental capacity were hereditary. Some human beings were better equipped than others to judge what was best for the human race as a whole, but, with unrestricted marriage, these superior qualities were in grave danger of dilution.

To have attempted to breed the ordinary people out of existence would have been impossible. The sea is not dried up with blotting paper. But the building of dikes was possible.

Out of the rubble and flame of the Twenty-first Century, The Messire had handed down the answer, and the Law. The Law was the dike that penned the sea of ordinary people away from the wellsprings of the families.

Through His prophets, The Messire had ordained his First Families, and they, in turn, had chosen others. To all of these were given the sacrament of marriage and the heritage of name and property for their children. For centuries, the families had been preserved, their members choosing wives and husbands only out of their own kind.

It was unnecessary to enforce childlessness on the remaining people. Neither superior intelligence nor talent were required for the world's routine work.

Nor had "enforcement," as such, of The Messire's Law been required for many years, now. It was not that the people were impious or heretical. Rather it was that, being human, they were prone to error. In their untutored minds, the purpose and meaning of the Law sometimes became unclear.

Despite that simple piety, if young Normandy had been even more of a fool, and let the incident pass, some members of the people might mistakenly have felt such behavior was permissible. The precedent would have been established. If, after that, some other error had been allowed to go uncorrected, yet another step away from the Law might be taken. And after that, another--

Anarchy. And the widening erosion in the dike.

Joyce scowled down at the Accused. He only wished it hadn't been a girl.

Blanding reached the end of his indictment and paused, with a gesture to Joyce.

Joyce looked down at the Accused again, partly because he wished to study her again and partly because it lent weight to his opinion.

The girl's trembling confirmed his previous tentative decision. There was no purpose in dragging this on. The quickest conclusion was the best.

"Thank you, Justice," he said to Blanding. He addressed the Accused.

"Young woman, we have heard your indictment. Justice Blanding will now repeat the etiquette of Trial, in order that there may be no doubt in your mind of your rights."

"The Messire is your judge," Blanding told her gravely. "The verdict we deliver here is not conclusive. If you wish to appeal, make your appeal to Him."

There was a stir and rustle in the crowd, as there always was. Joyce saw a number of people touch the images at their throats.

"We shall deliberate on this verdict, each separately determining the degree of your guilt. When we have reached a verdict, our separate opinions shall determine the degree of mundane appeal granted you."

Joyce threw a quick glance at the girl. She was looking up at Blanding with her hands on the rail of her box, her arms stiffly extended.

"If your case has been misrepresented to this Court, The Messire will intervene in your behalf. If you are innocent, you have nothing to fear."

Having completed the recital, he stopped and looked out over the heads of the crowd.

Joyce stepped back, and saw that Kallimer and Pedersen were looking down at his hands, hidden from the crowd. He signaled for a verdict of "Completely Guilty." Giving the girl a weapon to defend herself would be ridiculous. If she succeeded in firing at all, she was sure to miss him and injure someone in the crowd. It was best to get this case out of the way quickly and efficiently. The thing had to be squashed right here.

To his surprise, he saw Kallimer signal back "reconsider."

Joyce looked at the Associate. He might have expected something of the sort from Blanding, but a man of Kallimer's intelligence should have arrived at the proper conclusion.

Perhaps the Bar Association had been very wise to give him this trial, instead of letting some lesser Justice handle it. He'd had his doubts, but this wiped them out.

Without looking at Kallimer, but letting him plainly see the angry swell of the set jaw muscle that tightened his cheek, Joyce signaled "imperative!"

Kallimer sighed inaudibly, and his "acquiesce" was limpfingered, as though he were trying to convey resignation, as well.

Joyce faced front, still furious, but with his voice under control.

"Justice Blanding, have you reached a verdict?" He moved his left shoulder slightly.

Blanding, from his position on the rostrum, turned and saw the signal.

"I find the Accused completely guilty, Mr. Justice," he said.

Joyce turned to Pedersen in the absolute silence that always fell over a plaza during the rendering of the verdict.

"Completely guilty, Mr. Justice."

Joyce turned to Kallimer.

The man's lips twitched in a faint, sardonic smile. "Completely guilty, Mr. Justice."

Joyce looked down at the Accused. "I also find you completely guilty as charged," he said. "You will not be allowed a weapon with which to make mundane appeal. Your only recourse is to The Messire's mercy. I pray that our verdict is correct."

He stepped back to a new outburst of applause from the family boxes, satisfied that he had done his best. So far, it was a good trial. Even Kallimer's rebelliousness had been evident only here on the bench. The majesty and unanimity of Justice had been preserved as far as the crowd could tell.

He turned and walked slowly down the platform steps, through the deep hush that locked the plaza.

It had been a good trial. The Bar Association would detail it and its significance in the Closed Archives, and, generations from now, the older Justices would be reading about it, seeing how his action today had choked off the incipient attack on this culture and this civilization.

But that was not uppermost in Joyce's mind. What men a hundred years from now would say could not have much personal significance to him. What made his pulse beat more and more strongly as he descended the steps, turned the corner of the bench, and walked out into the plaza, was the knowledge that his contemporaries--the other Justices of the Bar Association--the men who had also come to the top, and who understood what the burden was--would know he had not failed the ideal.

He stopped just short of the Ground of Trial and gestured to the attendants around the Accused. They removed the Accused's clothing to guard against armor or concealed weapons, and stepped aside.

Joyce took the final stride that placed him on the Justice's Square, where other amplifiers once more took up his voice.

"The Accused will come forward to make her appeal."

The girl stumbled a bit coming out of the box, and he heard a slight sound of disappointment from the family boxes. It was not a good Entrance. But that could be forgotten.

He reached down, and the gun slipped out of its holster in one smooth sweep of his arm that was pure line of motion as he simultaneously half-turned, his vest standing out in a perfect straight-up-and-down cylindrical fall from his neck to its hem. He came up slightly on his toes, and there was a scattering of "bravo!" from the family boxes as well as the more reserved "excellent" which was really all a lame man deserved for his draw, no matter how perfect his arm motion.

The Accused was standing, pale of face, in the Square of Appeal.

Holding his draw, Joyce waited to speak the ultimate sentence.

He was growing old. The number of trials remaining to him was low. Some day soon, on a verdict of "probably guilty," perhaps, when the Accused had a fully loaded weapon, The Messire would reverse the verdict.

Not because of his physical slowness. The lameness and hitch in the draw would be merely symptomatic of his advancing slowness of mind. He would not have interpreted the case correctly.

He knew that, expected it, and felt only acceptance for it. A Justice who rendered an incorrect verdict deserved the penalty just as much as a guilty member of the people.

Meanwhile, this was the upheld ideal.

"You have been adjudged completely guilty as charged," he said, listening to the old words roll out over the plaza. "You have not been granted pardon by this Court. Make your appeal to The Messire."

The Accused looked at him wide-eyed out of her pallor. There was no certainty she was praying, but Joyce presumed she was.

Justice rested in The Messire. He knew the guilty and the innocent; punished the one and protected the other. Joyce was only His instrument, and Trial was only the opportunity for His judgment to become apparent. Men could judge each other, and pass sentence. But men could be wise or foolish in their decisions. That was the fallible nature of Man.

Here was where the test came; here where the Accused prayed to The Messire for the ultimate, infallible judgment. This was Trial.

His finger tightened on the trigger while his arm came slowly down and forward. This, too,

was where Joyce prayed to the Ultimate Judge, asking whether he had done wisely, whether he had once more done well. Each trial was his Trial, too. This was his contact with The Messire. This was Truth.

Something whirled out of the silent crowd of people and landed at the girl's feet. It was a gun, and the girl scrambled for it.

As soon as she picked it up, Joyce knew he'd lost his advantage. His reflexes were too slow, and he'd lost two decisive seconds by stopping, paralyzed, and staring at it.

He shook his head to clear away the momentary shock. He gave up paying attention to the confused noise and blind milling of the crowd. He narrowed his concentration down to the girl and her gun. As far as he could permit himself to be concerned, he and she were alone in a private universe, each trying to overcome panic long enough to act.

He'd lost his aim, and his arm had dropped below the line of fire. He brought it up, deliberately slowing his impulse to fling it into position. If he missed, the odds would be all against a second shot.

It was a better aim than the conventional method, in any case. It permitted no elaboration; it had no grace or beauty, but it was a steadier method of aiming.

Her shot struck his forearm, and his hand slapped up into the air from the shock. His fingers almost lost their grip on the butt, and he clenched them convulsively.

The girl was tugging at her weapon, doing something with the buttplate.

His gun discharged into the air, and his arm shook with fresh pain from the recoil.

He could see the Accused was as wrought up as he was. He clutched his forearm with his left hand and steadied down. Before she could fire again, his gun burst into life, throwing her backward and down to the ground. She was obviously dead.

He took a deep, shuddering breath. The gun started to fall out of his weak fingers, but he caught it with his left hand and dropped it into its holster.

The world around him slowly filtered back into his senses. He became aware of angry shouts in the crowd of people, and of attendants struggling to hold them in check. There was a knot of people clustered around a family box, but before he could investigate that, he felt Kallimer put an arm around his waist and hold him up. He hadn't even realized he was swaying.

"We can't worry about the crowd," Kallimer said in a peculiar voice. It was urgent, but he sounded calm under it. There was no hysteria in him, and Joyce noted that to his credit.

"Did you see who threw the gun?" Joyce demanded.

Kallimer shook his head. "No. Doesn't matter. We've got to get back to New York."

Joyce looked up at the bench. Blanding wasn't in sight, but Pedersen was hanging by his hands, dangling down over its face, and dropping to the plaza. He bent, picked up the brief case he'd thrown down ahead of him, ripped it open, and pulled out his gun.

That was idiotic. What did he think he was doing?

"Joyce!" Kallimer was pulling at him.

"All right!" Joyce snapped in annoyance. He began to run toward Pedersen before the fool could disgrace himself. As he ran, he realized Kallimer was right. The three of them had to get back to New York as quickly as possible. The Bar Association had to know.

Pedersen sat far back in his corner of the train compartment, his eyes closed and his head against the paneling as though he was listening to the sound of the trolley running along the overhead cable. The Messire only knew what he was really listening to. His face was pale.

Joyce turned stiffly toward Kallimer, hampered by the sling and cast on his arm. The Associate was staring out the window, and neither he nor Pedersen had said a word since they'd boarded the train, fifteen minutes ago. At that time, there had still been noise coming from the plaza.

There'd been a twenty-minute wait for the train. That meant more than three-quarters of an hour had passed since the start of it all, and Joyce still did not understand exactly what had happened. He had only disconnected impressions of the entire incident, and, for the life of him, he could find no basic significance behind it, although he knew there had to be one.

"Kallimer."

The Associate turned away from the window. "What?"

Joyce gestured, conscious of his sudden inability to find the proper phrasing.

"You want to know what touched it off. Is that it?"

Joyce nodded, relieved at not having to say it after all.

Kallimer shook his head. "I don't know, exactly. Somebody in the crowd felt strongly enough to throw her the gun. One of her relatives, I suppose."

"But--" Joyce gestured inarticulately. "It...it was a legal execution! Who would interfere with justice? Who'd take the risk of eternal damnation by interfering with The Messire's obvious will?"

Pedersen, in his corner, made a very peculiar sound. Kallimer shot him a cryptic glare. He turned back to Joyce and seemed to be searching for words.

"Joyce," he said finally, "how do you imagine The Messire would reverse a verdict of 'Completely Guilty?'"

Joyce frowned. "Well...I don't know. My gun might jam. Or Joyce frowned. "Well...I don't know. My gun might jam. Or I might fire and unaccountably miss."

"You don't know for certain, because it's never happened. Am I correct?"

"Substantially."

"Now. How many reversals have there been on verdicts of 'Apparently Guilty?' When the Accused was given a gun with one cartridge in the chamber."

"A few."

"But it's never happened to any Justice you know, has it?"

Joyce shook his head. "No, but there are recorded cases. A few, as I said."

"Very well. What about 'Possibly Guilty?' Many reversals on those verdicts?"

"An appreciable number."

"Almost had a few of those yourself, didn't you?"

"A few."

"Very well." Kallimer held up his hand, bending one finger for each point. "Now--first we have the case in which the Accused is weaponless. No reversals. Next we have the case in which the Accused has one shot to fire. A few reversals. And finally we have the case in which the Accused has as much of a weapon as the Presiding Justice. An appreciable number of reversals.

"Does it not seem to you, Justice Joyce, that this series of statistics might well occur without the intervention of any Divine Will whatsoever?"

Joyce stared at him, but Kallimer gave him no chance to reply.

"Furthermore, Joyce; do the people have the right to bear arms? That is to say, can you imagine an Accused who was acquainted with the firing and aiming of an automatic pistol? The answer--you asked, now hear me out--the answer is No.

"More. Have you ever heard of The Messire reversing a verdict of 'Not Guilty?'"

Joyce bridled. "There aren't two of those a year!"

Kallimer's mouth hooked. "I know. But they do exist. Explain this, then; how do you reconcile Divine Will with the curious fact that verdicts of 'Not Guilty' and 'Completely Guilty' are never reversed, and never have been reversed, though Messire knows we came close this afternoon? Are you claiming that in those cases, every Justice who ever lived was right every time? Are you attempting to claim, for mortal men, the infallibility which is The Messire's particular province?"

Kallimer's face was tense with emotion, and Joyce received a distinct impression that the Associate was speaking with excessive violence; actually his voice was still under control.

"Mr. Joyce, if you can't see the point I'm driving at, I am sorry. But, rest assured, somebody in that crowd of people finally realized it, after all these years. Somebody wasn't afraid of The Messire." Kallimer turned his head sharply and looked out the window at the Hudson, running silver far below as the train swung over to the east shore. "I'm not sure Pedersen wasn't right in drawing his gun. And, Mr. Joyce, if what I've said hasn't shaken you, it certainly should have."

Kallimer took a deep breath and seemed to calm down a little.

"Mr. Joyce," he said softly, "I believe there's something you haven't thought of. I imagine it'll make you unhappy when I tell you.

"Talking in your terms, now--you don't have to give an inch, Mr. Joyce; in fact, you have to hang on to your beliefs with absolute rigidity to appreciate the full impact--looking at it from your point of view: You can't imagine how The Messire would go about reversing an unjust verdict of 'Completely Guilty.' But The Messire is omniscient and omnipotent. His ways are complex and unknowable. Am I correct? Well, then, how do you know that what happened today wasn't a hint of how He'd manage it?"

The blood drained out of Joyce's face.

"Sam! But you never--" She stopped. "Come in, Sam. You surprised me."

Joyce kissed her cheek and strode nervously into her apartment. He knew what had startled her. He never called on nights following trials; in the fifteen years they'd been together, she would naturally have noticed that. He considered the problem while on his way over, and the only thing to do, he'd decided, was to act as though nothing unusual were taking place. He reasoned that a woman, being a woman, would shrug her shoulders over it after the first few minutes. Probably, after a short time, she'd even begin to doubt her memory.

"Sam, what's the matter with your arm?"

He spun around and saw her still standing by the door, wearing a dressing gown, with her hair in curlers.

"Trial," he bit off shortly. He paced across the room, took a pear out of a bowl, and bit into it. "I'm hungry," he said with false vigor.

She seemed to collect herself. "Of course, Sam. I'll put something on the stove. It won't be more than a few moments. Excuse me." She went into the kitchen, leaving him standing alone in the semidarkness surrounding the one light she'd switched on near the door. Impatiently, he snapped the switches of the other lamps in the room and stood in the middle of it, chewing the pear and bouncing it in his palm between bites.

He heard Emily put a pan on a burner. He moved abruptly, and strode into the kitchen, stopping just inside the door and dropping the pear down the disposal chute.

"Finished it," he said, explaining his presence. He looked around. "Anything I can do?"

Emily looked up at him, a look of amused disbelief on her face, "Sam, what's gotten into you?"

Joyce scowled. "Anything wrong with coming up to see my girl?"

Saying it made the scowl disappear. He looked down at Emily, who was bent over the stove again. Fifteen years had touched her hair, and put little lines on her forehead and the

corners of her mouth. They added a good bit to her hips and waist. But there was an earthy, commonsense comfort in her. He could put his key in the door at any time of night, and she'd hear the sound and be there to meet him.

He reached down and pulled her up. His arm twinged a bit, but that was unimportant at the moment. He folded his arms around her and cupped the back of her head in one palm. The warmth and security of her made his clutch tighter than he'd intended at the start. Suddenly he found himself wishing he'd never have to go back to his own ascetic flat.

Emily smiled faintly and kissed his chin. "Sam, what did happen? I heard the trial results over the radio this afternoon, and all they announced for Nyack was a successful conclusion to a verdict of 'Completely Guilty.' Was there some trouble they didn't want to talk about?"

His mood burst, and he dropped his arms.

"What kind of trouble?" he asked sharply.

Her eyes opened, and she looked at him in fresh surprise. "I didn't mean anything by it, Sam. Just ordinary trouble...you know, a lucky shot by the Accused--" She looked at the light cast on his arm. "But that couldn't be it, with an unarmed Accused--"

Joyce took an angry breath. "I thought we had that clear between us," he said in a voice he realized was too angry. "From the very beginning, I've made it plain that your province is yours and my province is mine. If I don't tell you about it, you can assume I don't feel you should know."

Emily stepped back and quickly bent over the stove again. "All right, Sam," she said in a low voice. "I'm sorry." She lifted the lid of a pan. "Supper'll be ready in a minute. It'll be pretty busy in here when all these pots come to a boil at the same time."

"I'll be waiting in the living room." Joyce turned and walked out.

He paced back and forth over the rug, his lips in a tight line, conscious now of the pain in his arm.

One more scar. One more objection from The Messire. All safe in the end, but one more objection, nevertheless, and what did it mean?

And the Bar Association.

"A hearing!" he muttered. "A full hearing tomorrow!" As though his report hadn't been adequate. He'd told them what happened. It should have been enough. But Kallimer, with his allegations that there was more to the incident--

Well, all right. Tomorrow he'd see about Kallimer.

Emily came into the living room. "Supper's ready, Sam." Her voice and expression were careful to be normal. She didn't want to provoke him again.

She was hurt, and he didn't like to see her that way. He laughed suddenly and put his arm around her shoulders, squeezing. "Well, let's eat, eh, girl?"

"Of course, Sam."

He frowned slightly, dissatisfied. But there was no point in trying to patch it up and only making it worse. He kept still as they went into the dining room.

They ate silently. Or rather, to be honest with himself, Joyce had to admit that he ate and Emily toyed with a small portion, keeping him company out of politeness.

The act of sitting still for twenty minutes quieted his nerves a bit. And he appreciated Emily's courtesy. As he pushed his coffee cup away, he looked up at her and smiled.

"That was very good. Thank you, Emily."

She smiled faintly. "Thank you, Sam. I'm glad you liked it. I'm afraid it wasn't much. I hadn't planned--" She broke off.

So, she had continued to wonder about his calling tonight. He smiled ruefully. And now she thought she'd offended him again. He'd been pretty grumpy tonight.

He reached out and took her hand. "That's all right, Emily."

After she'd washed the dishes, she came in and sat down beside him on the couch, where he was slumped with his feet on a hassock. His ankles and calves were aching. It was all right as long as he kept moving, but once he sat down the ache always began. He smiled at her wanly.

Smiling back, she bent wordlessly and began to massage his calves, working the muscles with her fingers.

"Emily--"

"Yes, Sam?"

"If... Nothing, Emily. There's not much point in talking about it." He found himself caught between the desire to speak to someone and the urgent sense that this afternoon was best forgotten. He stared down past his feet without looking at anything. Perhaps there was some way to maneuver her into telling him what he wanted to know, without his having to tell her about it.

Why was he reluctant to talk about this afternoon? He didn't know, exactly; but he couldn't bring himself to do it, no more than he could have discussed some character defect he might have accidentally observed in a lady or gentleman.

"What else did they say over the radio?" he asked without any special intonation. "About Nyack."

"Nothing, Sam, except for the bare results."

He grunted in disappointment.

Perhaps there was some better angle of approach. "Emily, suppose...suppose you knew of a case involving a people's girl and a family man. Suppose the girl had come up to the man on a public street and addressed him by his first name."

He stopped uncomfortably.

"Yes, Sam?"

"Uh...well, what would you think?"

Emily's hands became still for a moment, then began working on his calves again.

"What would I think?" she asked in a low voice, looking down at the floor. "I'd think she was very foolish."

He grimaced. That wasn't what he wanted. But did he know what he wanted from her? What was the answer he was looking for? He tried again.

"Yes, of course. But, aside from that, what else?"

He saw Emily bite her lip. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean, Sam."

A tinge of his earlier anger put a bite in his voice. "You're not that unintelligent, Emily."

She took a deep breath and looked at him. "Sam, something drastic went wrong today, didn't it? Something very bad. You were terribly upset when you came in--"

"Upset? I don't think so," he interrupted quickly.

"Sam, I've been your mistress for fifteen years."

He knew his face was betraying him. In her flashes of shrewdness, she always did this to him. She'd put her finger exactly on the vulnerable truth, disarming his ability to cover up.

He sighed and spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "All right, Emily. Yes, I am upset." The irritation welled up again. "That's why I want some help from you, instead of this evasiveness."

She straightened up, taking her hands off his aching legs, and half-turned on the couch, so that she was looking directly into his eyes. She held his gaze without hesitation.

"Maybe you're asking too much of me. Perhaps not. This is important, isn't it? I've never seen you quite as troubled as this."

She was tense, he realized. Tense, and apprehensive. But he saw, as well, that she had decided to go ahead, despite whatever her private doubts might be.

"Yes," he admitted, "it's important."

"Very well. You want to know what I think about that girl? Suppose you tell me what you think, first. Do you believe she did it out of spite, or malice, or impulse?"

He shook his head. "Of course not! She was in love with him, and forgot herself."

Emily's eyes welled up with a sudden trace of tears. Joyce stared at her, dumbfounded, for the few seconds before she wiped one hand across her eyes in annoyance.

"Well?" she asked in a low voice.

"I'm afraid it's my turn not to understand," he said after a moment. He frowned. What was she driving at?

"What distinguishes me from that girl, Sam? A few years? What do you expect me to think?"

"It's not the same thing at all, Emily!" he shot back in honest anger. "Why...why you're a mature woman. We're--"

He couldn't really point out the difference, but he knew it was there. She'd never said or done anything--

"Emily, you know very well you'd never do what that girl did!"

"Only because I'm more conscious of the rules," she answered in a low voice. "What real difference is there between her and myself? It is that it's you and I, rather than two other people; rather than any one of the scores of similar couples we know? What distinguishes us in your eyes? The fact that we're not a case for you to try?"

"Emily, this is ridiculous!"

She shook her head slowly. "That girl broke the law. I haven't. But I haven't only because I realized, from the very start, just what kind of tight-rope I'd be walking for the rest of our lives. I couldn't leave you and go back to the people, now; I've grown too used to living as I do. But I'll always be no more than I was born to.

"Suppose I were a People's man--a mechanic, or perhaps even an engineer if I'd bound myself to some family. I'd know that all my skill and training wouldn't be of any use if I were accused of some crime in a court of law. I'd know that addressing my patron in public by his first name would be a crime--a different kind of crime than if I were my patron's mistress, certainly, but a crime, nevertheless. Let's assume that, as my patron's engineer, I overrode his will on the specifications for whatever product my patron manufactured. Or that I attempted to redesign a product or develop a new one without first getting his approval and suggestions; that would be legally analogous to what the girl did, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and properly so," Joyce retorted.

Emily looked at him and nodded slowly. She went on:

"If I were that engineer, and I had any common sense, I'd be constantly aware of the difference between myself and my patron. I would remind myself, every day, that my patron was born to a family, and that my patron would, in turn, be permitted the sacrament of marriage when he desired it with a lady. I would understand that engineers were members of the people, and that my patron was a member of one of the First Families, or a Legislator, or a Justice. Realizing all this, I would always be careful never to encroach on the difference between us, accepting my fate in having been born to the people, and his having been born to a family."

Joyce frowned. "That sounds a little bit as though you considered birth a blind accident."

Emily looked at him silently. She took a deep breath "Being an intelligent person, I, as that

engineer, would attribute my station at birth to the direction of The Messire. You'll hear no heresies from me, Sam." She reached out and took his hand.

"That's why I'll say, again, that the girl in Nyack was foolish. That was the case in Nyack, wasn't it? She did what none of us, in our right minds, would consider doing. Certainly, she did what I'd never do, but then, I'm older than she. I was older when I came to you, or I at least assume so, since you called her a girl."

Suddenly, she bit her lip. "Young people in love are not necessarily in their right minds, just as people enraged are not acting logically. Who's to say what their punishment should be?"

"There is Someone," Joyce answered firmly.

Emily nodded, looking at him, her expression abstracted, Suddenly she said:

"Sam, have you ever really looked at yourself in a mirror? Not to see whether you'd shaved properly, or whether your wig was crooked on the morning before a trial, but just to look at yourself."

He couldn't understand this new tack.

"Do you know you have a very young face, Sam? Under that black beard-shadow, with the scowl gone, you've got the face of a troubled adolescent. You've taught yourself dignity, and put flesh on your body, but you're still a young boy, searching for the key that will wind the world up to run accurately forever. Perhaps you believe you've found it. You believe in what you're doing. You believe that justice is the most important thing in the world. What you do, you do as a crusade. There's no wanton malice or cruelty in you. I don't believe I've ever known you to do anything purely for yourself.

"I love you for it, Sam. But, except sometimes with me, you've submerged yourself in your ideal, until you've learned to ignore Sam Joyce entirely. You're Mister Justice Joyce all the time."

She closed her hand on his. "Something happened this afternoon, and I suspect it was drastic. You've come to me after facing an unarmed Accused--a girl, young and unskilled--but there's a cast on your arm, and what must be a bullet hole under it. I don't know what happened. I do know there's a news blackout on Nyack.

"Sam, if the system's been finally challenged, then you're in terrible danger. Other men aren't like you. Other men--people's men and family men--act in rage, or fear, or love. If they tear down your world and your ideal--"

"Tear down--!"

"...If they tear down what you have given your life to, there will be nothing left of you. If the system goes, it takes Justice Joyce's lifeblood with it, and only I know where the little fragment of Sam Joyce lives. It won't be enough."

"Emily, you're exaggerating beyond all reason!"

Emily clutched his hand. He saw, to his complete amazement, that she'd shut her eyes against the tears, but that streaks of silent moisture were trickling down her cheeks.

"You've come to me for help, but I'm part of the world, too, and I have to live the way it lets me. After all these years, you want to know whether you've been right, and I'm supposed to tell you.

"I told you I thought the girl was foolish. Sam, I love you, but I don't dare give you your answer. I told you: you won't hear any heretical statements from me."

Joyce's eyes were burning, and the short stubble of his graying natural hair was thick with perspiration. The night had been sleepless for him.

His arm was much better this morning, but he still remembered the shock of the bullet.

If you believed, as you must believe, that The Messire saw every human deed, knew every human thought, and caused every human event, then what had He meant in Nyack?

If the sentence was correct, why did The Messire permit her that one shot? Why hadn't whoever threw the gun been stopped before he could do it? If the sentence was unjust, why hadn't she killed him?

Was it that The Messire approved of him, but not of the basis of his judgment? But his basis was the Law, and The Messire had handed down the Law!

Was it, as Kallimer had said, that The Messire was not as Joyce conceived of him?

What did Emily think?

He reminded himself that what Emily thought was irrelevant, as he had hastily reminded himself many times during the past night. Her opinion did not govern the truth or falsehood of justice. Justice was an absolute; it was either right, no matter what the opinions of Mankind, or it was worthless.

Was it, as Kallimer had said viciously, that The Messire was trying to make him understand something?

What?

What had He meant in Nyack?

Joyce lay on the bed, exhausted. He knew he was thinking wildly. He'd gone over and over this ground, trying to find the proper logic, and accomplishing nothing. He was in no condition to reason correctly. He only hoped he could act wisely at the hearing this afternoon.

He slipped cautiously out of bed, hesitating at every rustle of the sheets. Once out, he dressed hastily, and left the apartment as quietly as he could. He didn't want Emily to wake up and see what condition he was in.

This, too, was part of the task, and the young, ambitious Associate Justice of Utica hadn't

had the faintest inkling of it, just as, throughout his dedicated advancement through the ranks of his profession, he could not have dreamed how difficult it would some day be to walk steadily through a door when sleepless legs and aching ankles dragged at every step.

He saw the tension rampant in every Member. No one was sitting down quietly, waiting for the hearing to begin. Knots of men stood everywhere, talking sharply, and there was a continual movement from one group to another.

Joyce scowled in annoyance and nodded shortly as most of the faces in the room were turned toward him. He looked around for Joshua Normandy, but the Bar Association's Chairman had not yet come in. He saw Kallimer, standing to one side, wearing his frown and talking alone to a whitefaced Pedersen.

Joyce went over to them. He hadn't decided yet what to do with Kallimer. The man was arrogant. He seemed to derive genuine pleasure from talking in terms Joyce was unable to understand. But the man was intelligent, and ambitious. His ambition would lead him to defend the same principles that Joyce defended, and his intelligence would make him a superlative Chief Justice, once Joyce was gone.

For the sake of that, Joyce was willing to let yesterday's questionable behavior go. Perhaps, after all, Kallimer had been right in asking for a reconsideration of the verdict.

Once again, Joyce was painfully conscious of his inability to arrive at any firm opinion on yesterday's events. He stopped in front of Kallimer and Pedersen with a shake of his head, and only then realized how peculiar the gesture must look to them.

"Good afternoon, Justice," Kallimer said dryly.

Joyce searched his face for some indication of his state of mind, but there was nothing beyond the omnipresent frown.

"Good afternoon, Justices," he said finally. "Or have the election results been confirmed, Legislator?" he asked Pedersen.

Pedersen's face was strained. "Yes, sir. The results were confirmed. But I resigned."

Joyce's eyebrows shot up. Recovering, he tried to smile pleasantly. "Then you're returning to the Bar?"

Pedersen shook his head. "No...uh--" he husked in a dry voice, "I'm here simply as a witness to...uh...yesterday." He was deathly pale.

Kallimer smiled coldly. "Mr. Pedersen has decided to retire from public life, Justice Joyce. He now considers that his first attempt to dissociate himself from the Bar was inadequate."

Joyce looked from Kallimer back to Pedersen. The younger man, he suddenly realized, was terrified.

"Blanding's dead, you know," Kallimer said without inflection. "A paving block was thrown at his head yesterday afternoon. It's uncertain just what the circumstances were, but a member of the Civil Guard brought the word out." Kallimer smiled at Pedersen. "And now our former Associate, his earlier presentiments proven correct, is shortly taking a trip abroad--the Lakes Confederation, I believe?"

"I have distant relations in St. Paul," Pedersen confirmed huskily. "And there is an Ontario branch of the family in Toronto. I plan to be away for some time. A tour."

Kallimer still smiled. "The key word in that statement would be 'distant,' would it not, Mr. Pedersen?"

Pedersen flushed angrily, but Joyce seized on Kallimer's attitude as a reassuring sign. At least, Pedersen's cowardice wasn't general. For the moment, that seemed more important than the news of Blanding's death.

His lack of astonishment made him look at himself in wonder. Was he that much upset, that a Justice's murder failed to shock him? Was he really that far gone in his acceptance of the incredible?

He knew, with a calmly logical part of his mind, that before yesterday he would have considered himself insane to even think of anyone's attacking the Law. Today, he could pass over it. Not lightly, but, nevertheless, pass over it.

"You're sure of your information, Kallimer?" he asked.

Kallimer nodded, looking at him curiously. "The witness is reliable. And he brought out the gun, too. That's an astonishing item in itself. You'll be interested."

Joyce raised his eyebrows politely. "Really?" He saw Joshua Normandy come into the hearing room, and nodded in the Chairman's direction. "The hearing's about to begin. It'll be brought up, of course?"

Kallimer was frankly puzzled by his attitude. Joyce's head was erect, and his shoulders had abruptly straightened out of their unconscious slump.

"Yes, of course."

"Good. Shall we take our places? Good afternoon, Mr. Pedersen. It was a pleasure having you on my bench." He took Kallimer's arm, and, together, they strolled up to the long table facing the chairs of the lesser Justices.

Joyce knew what was happening to him, and the calm, judicial part of his mind, at last given something it understood to work with, approved.

He had been in a panic. At noon, yesterday, the foundations of his logic had been destroyed. The integrity of justice and Justices had been attacked, and his belief in the universal acceptance of The Messire's Law had been proved false. He had discovered, in one climactic instant, that there were people willing to deliberately attack the Law.

He had been beyond his depth. He had no precedent for such a crime; no basis on which to judge the situation. Someone else, perhaps, such as Kallimer or Justice Normandy, might have the reach of mind to encompass it. But Joyce knew he was not a brilliant man. He was only an honest man, and he knew what was beyond him. In the instant that he had stopped, staring dumfounded at the gun lying on the plaza stones, with the Accused reaching for it eagerly, he had stopped being capable of evaluating the legal situation and taking steps to rectify it. Panic could warp a man's judgment completely.

That was what The Messire had been trying to make him realize. The world was changing, and the Chief Justice was not equipped to deal with the change.

As an honest man; as a man sincere in his beliefs, he was ready to give up his responsibilities and let the better suited men take them up.

He nodded to Justice Normandy and the other Bar Association officers. Then he sat down calmly, with Kallimer beside him, and waited to see what the more intelligent men had made of the situation.

Kallimer was holding up the gun brought out of Nyack. Joyce looked at it curiously. It was late in the afternoon, and a good deal of testimony had already been recorded. Pedersen stated that he was aware of angry movement in the crowd as Joyce made his draw, but that the gun had been thrown by an unidentified man before anything could be done. After the shooting, the man and a surrounding group of other men had been lost in the crowd. The crowd itself had been bewildered at first, and then divided in its reactions. That early in the riot, there had been no signs of unanimous effort.

The Civil Guardsman had testified that, as far as he knew, he was the only survivor of the squad detailed to keep order during the trial. He had seized the gun after the executed Accused dropped it, and run to Guard headquarters for help. It was his impression that the immediate deaths among family members at the trial were the result of spontaneous riot in the crowd, and not of any organized plan of assassination.

Justice Kallimer had commented that this was also his impression. The only traces of intelligent planning, he stated, had shown themselves in the cutting of the train cables out of Nyack and the attack on the radio station, where the supervising family man had smashed the transmitter before it could be captured. Note was made of the loyalty of the station engineering staff.

Now, Kallimer said: "Hearing previous testimony in mind, I'd like to call this hearing's attention to the construction and design of this illegal weapon."

Joyce bent closer. There were a number of peculiarities in the gun, and they interested him.

"First," Kallimer went on, "the weapon is obviously handmade. Its frame consists of a solid metal piece--steel, I'm told by a competent engineer--which bears obvious file marks. Moreover, it is of almost primitive design. It has a smoothbore barrel, drilled through from muzzle to breech, and is mortised at the breech to accommodate one hand-inserted cartridge and a spring-loaded hammer. Additional cartridges are stored in the butt, covered by a friction plate. It is fired by thumbing back the hammer and releasing it, after which the fired cartridge case must be removed by hand before it can be reloaded.

"A hasty weapon. A weapon of desperation, thrown together by someone with only a few hours to work in."

Kallimer put the gun down. "A hopelessly inefficient and inadequate weapon. I am informed that the barrel was not even drilled parallel to the frame's long axis, and that the crude sights were also askew, further complicating the error in aiming. It is remarkable that Mr. Justice Joyce was struck at all, and it is no wonder at all that the Accused was never able to fire a second shot."

Joyce shook his head slightly. It was perfectly obvious how the girl had managed to hit him.

But then, Kallimer, with his slightly eccentric viewpoint, would not be likely to take The Messire into account.
Kallimer was speaking again.

"The point, however, isn't relevant here. It is the nature of this weapon which concerns us. Obviously, it was not constructed by anyone particularly skilled in the craft, and its design is hopelessly unimaginative. It is unlikely that any others exist. It follows, then, that the rebellion, if I may call it such for the moment, is largely confined to the Accused's immediate...ah...relations. No actual large-scale, organized effort exists.

"We have the testimony of Mr. Pedersen and the Guardsman. It seems obvious that the gun-throwers' plans culminated in the delivery of the weapon to the Accused. What followed was a spontaneous demonstration. This, together with some other relevant data already mentioned in testimony, is the basis on which we have formulated our program of rectification."

Kallimer turned toward the center of the table. "Justice Normandy."

Normandy was an aged, gray-headed man whose heavy brows hung low over his eyes. He rose out of his chair and supported his weight on his hands, leaning out over the table and looking toward the lesser Justices in their seats.

Joyce looked at him curiously.

Normandy had never been Chief Justice. He'd risen to Chief Associate under Kemple, the Chief Justice before the one Joyce had replaced. The oldest son of one of the First Families, Normandy had then retired from active work, becoming first Recorder and then Chairman of the Bar Association. He'd held the position longer than Joyce had been Chief Justice, and he was at least seventy.

Joyce wondered what he and Kallimer had decided to do.

Normandy's voice was harsh with age. He forced each word out of his throat.

"Justice Kallimer has summed up very well. A purely personal rebellion against the Law in Nyack has touched off a spontaneous demonstration. You've noticed the lack of evidence implicating any ringleaders except the Accused's relations. They're nothing but woodworkers. There was some later participation by engineers, because it took training to see the importance of cutting off communications. But that wasn't until this emotional upheaval had a chance to get contagious.

"There's a certain rebellious feeling, yes. But it's hardly born yet. It won't spread unless we let it, and we won't. By tomorrow afternoon, we'll be back to normal.

"Thank you, Justices. This hearing's concluded, and Mr. Joyce, Mr. Kallimer, and I will stay behind for further discussion."

Joyce watched the lesser Justices file out of the hearing room, their manner much less nervous than it had been. Normandy had put some starch back into their spines.

Joyce, too, felt better. He'd been right in expecting Kallimer and Normandy to have a

solution. He was leaving the Law in capable hands.

"Well, they believed it. I'd be happier if a few of them hadn't."

Kallimer shrugged. "There's no telling. If any of them saw through it, they'd be intelligent enough not to show it."

Normandy cocked an eyebrow, pursed his lips, and, after a moment, grinned. "That's a good point."

Joyce looked blankly at both of them. "I gather," he said finally, "that the situation is more serious than was divulged." He felt a slight return of his old disquiet, but nothing near panic.

Normandy and Kallimer turned in their chairs. Both of them looked at him speculatively.

Normandy nodded. "By quite a good bit. It took the engineers a while to realize what was happening, but they took over the rebellion within the first hour. They're directing it now. We had to bomb the radio station and establish a false transmitter on the same wave length. It looks very much as though the engineers had a plan ready to use, but not quite this soon. They were caught a little short."

Normandy grimaced. "Not short enough, though. We anticipated a little trouble down there, but we were unprepared for the discovery of anything like that. The Guard can't handle it. I sent in the Army this morning."

Kallimer grunted. "You know," he told Normandy, "I asked Joyce to reconsider his verdict."

Normandy's eyes snapped open. "You did? Why?"

"We didn't need any tests, after all. I could smell the trouble in that crowd. It was that thick. They didn't know it themselves, but they were spoiling for a riot." He shrugged. "Joyce overruled me, of course. It's a good thing, too, or we'd never have found out in time just how deep the trouble had dug."

Normandy stared thoughtfully off into distance, his head barely moving as he nodded to himself. "Yes," he whispered under his breath.

He looked sharply at Joyce. "How much of this shocks you, Justice?"

Joyce was looking at the expression on Kallimer's face. It had become coldly sardonic.

"I--" He broke off and shrugged in reply to Normandy's question. "I don't really know. But I'm sure you're aware of what you're doing." Nevertheless, he was bewildered. He couldn't quite make out what Kallimer had meant.

Normandy looked at him steadily, his black eyes watchful. "I've always been of two minds about you," he said in a thoughtful voice. "I believe I chose wisely, but there's no certainty, with individuals like you." He grinned in his abrupt way. "But sometimes a calculated risk is justified. Sometimes, only an honest man will do."

Joyce's bewilderment was growing. He understood that Normandy was being much more candid with him than he had ever been before. Vaguely, he was aware that the situation had forced Normandy into it.

But if Normandy was being forced into drastic steps, then what did that say about Sam Joyce's ability to do the proper thing in this crisis?

"There's something I believe I should tell you," he said quickly, conscious of a return to his earlier panic. He had to state his position as early in this discussion as possible, before Normandy and Kallimer assumed he could be counted on. "I'm...not sure of exactly what you mean about me," he went on as Normandy and Kallimer looked at him curiously. "But there's something you should know."

He stopped to choose his words carefully. He had to convince these men that he wasn't acting on impulse; that he'd thought this out. They deserved an explanation, after having assumed he'd help them. And, too, it was important to him personally. Possibly this was the most important decision of his life.

"I've been Chief Justice for a comparatively long time," he began. He had; he'd always felt The Messire had a good servant in him, and, up until yesterday, The Messire had seemed to agree.

He looked down at his hands. "I have a good record. I've done my best.

"You know my history. I began years ago, on a minor bench, and I rose step by step. No one has the skill with his gun or is better in the ritual of Trial than I was in my prime." He looked up at Normandy and Kallimer, trying to see whether they understood him. "I feel that I've been a good Justice; that I've served The Messire's Law as He desired it. But I've always known I wasn't the most brilliant man on the bench. I haven't delivered many famous opinions, and I'm no lawyer's lawyer. I've simply"--he gestured indecisively--"been a Justice for a long time." He paused momentarily.

"But this," he went on in a low voice, "is beyond my capabilities." He looked down again. "I know I haven't the capacity to do my duty properly in this situation. I'd like to resign in Justice Kallimer's favor."

There was a long silence. Joyce did not look up, but sat thinking of the foolish things he'd done and thought during the past two days.

He looked up, finally, and saw Normandy's quizzical expression. Kallimer's face was a nonplussed blank.

Normandy tented his fingers and blew out a breath over them. "I see." He looked cryptically at Kallimer, and Kallimer seemed to exchange some silent message with him.

Kallimer spoke slowly. "Mr. Joyce, I know you well enough to realize this hasn't been a hasty decision. Would you mind telling me what led you to it?"

Joyce shook his head. "Not at all. I've decided that this is the only possible interpretation of yesterday's events in the plaza. It seems clear to me that The Messire's intent was to have me do what I've just done."

Normandy jerked his head violently, and stared at Joyce. "I'll be damned!" he exploded.

Kallimer's mouth twisted. "This is hardly what I expected to result from our talk yesterday," he muttered. He looked at Joyce with perverse admiration. Then he spoke to Normandy. "Well, Justice, there's your honest man."

Normandy shot Kallimer one sour look before he turned back to Joyce. His voice grated harshly.

"That's all well and good, but you're not resigning. Not now, at least, and never in Kallimer's favor. You've still got one Trial to run, and Kallimer's after my job, not yours."

"Not until after you've retired, Justice," Kallimer interjected, turning his sardonic smile on Normandy. "I've made it clear I have no intention of competing with you. Furthermore, I'm your only natural heir in any case." He chuckled for the first time in Joyce's experience. "There aren't many like us born to each generation, are there, Justice?"

Joyce sat numbly, unable to decide what he thought of Normandy's outburst.

"Justice Normandy--" he said finally.

"What?"

"You say I've still got one Trial."

"Yes!"

"But, if The Messire has indicated that He no longer considers me competent, the Trial will be prejudiced--"

Normandy thrust himself out of his chair and away from the table. His eyes were blazing, and his hands trembled. "Damn your Messire! He didn't meddle with your last trial, did he?"

"Sir?"

Normandy cursed again and turned away. "Kallimer, talk to this moron! I've had enough." He stalked out of the hearing room, and the door crashed behind him.

Kallimer was looking after him with a faint look of exasperation tingeing the amusement of his mouth.

"He's getting old, Joyce." Kallimer sighed. "Well, I suppose the day will come when I'll have no more patience, either. It's a shaky pedestal he sits on."

Joyce was in a turmoil. He knew his face was pale.

Kallimer turned back to him. "There's been an insertion made in your court calendar," he told him. "Tomorrow, you'll hold a special mass trial for the engineers the Army will be dragging out of Nyack. They'll be indicted as 'members of the people.' Their origin won't be specified--no use alarming the nation. Is there? And I suppose there'll be a variety of charges. I'll set them up tonight. But the verdict'll be 'Completely Guilty' in every case. You and I and a couple of other Justices will handle the executions."

Joyce found himself unable to argue with more than the last few statements. Too much was

happening.

"A mass trial? Here, in New York, you mean. For the Nyack rebels. But that's illegal!"

Kallimer nodded. "So are improper indictment and prejudged verdict. But so is rebellion.

"This folderol of Normandy's has a rather shrewd point. The rebels will be punished, but the general populace won't know what for. Only the other rebellious organizations scattered throughout the country will realize what's happened. It'll slow down their enthusiasm, giving us time to root them out."

Joyce looked down at the floor to hide the expression on his face. Kallimer seemed not at all concerned with breaking the spirit of the Law. Normandy was even more blunt than that.

It was a frightening step in his logic, but there was only one possible answer. Both of them were acting as though man made the Law, and men administered the final verdict; as though there were no Messire.

He looked up at Kallimer, wondering what his face was showing of the sudden emptiness in his stomach. He felt as though he was looking down at the Associate from a great height, or up from the bottom of a pit.

"What did Normandy mean about my last trial?" he asked in a low voice.

"First of all, Joyce, bear in mind that The Messire is omniscient. He knows of more crimes than we possibly can. Even if we judge a case incorrectly, it is possible our verdict is nevertheless justified by some other crime of the Accused's."

He looked at Joyce with a flicker of anxiety flashing subtly across his face, leaning even closer, and Joyce's first emptiness became a twinge of disgust and sickness.

"I accept that," Joyce said, the words tasting cottony in his mouth, but wanting to urge Kallimer on.

Kallimer twitched his shoulders. "Perhaps you do," he muttered. Joyce appreciated, with a deep, bitter amusement that never came to the surface, just how much Kallimer must hate Normandy for leaving him with this task to perform.

"In any case," Kallimer went on, "about the girl, yesterday; Normandy's son had heard some things from her. A lot of unrest in Nyack; talk; dissatisfaction; that sort of thing. He told his father.

"It wasn't the only place we'd heard that from, but it was our only real lead. It was decided that a trial, with a particularly controversial member of the people as the Accused, might bring enough of it to the surface for us to gauge its importance."

He stopped and shook his head. "It certainly did. We hadn't the faintest idea it was that strong, or that close to exploding. Sheer luck we found it out."

Joyce looked steadily at Kallimer, hoping his face was calm. "The girl wasn't guilty."

Kallimer's mouth twitched. "Not of the charge we tried her on, no. Normandy's son accused her on his father's orders. You were sent down to try the case because we could predict

you'd give us the verdict we wanted. I went along to observe."

Joyce nodded slowly. "I think I understand, now," he said.

In the middle of the day, just at noon, Samson Joyce stood at the foot of the high steps behind New York City's onyx judges' bench.

"Ready, Justice?" Kallimer asked him.

"Yes," Joyce answered. He replaced the ceremonial gun in its tooled holster.

Kallimer looked at him again and shook his head. "Justice, if we weren't in public, I'd offer you my hand. You hit bottom and you've come up swinging."

Joyce's lower lip tugged upward at the corners. "Thank you, Justice," he said, and prepared to walk up the steps on his aching legs.

Emily had been puzzled, too, as he prepared to leave her this morning.

"Sam, I can't understand you," she'd said worriedly, watching him scowl with pain as he stood up from putting on his boots.

He smiled at her, ignoring the ache in his legs. "Why?"

"You haven't slept in two nights, now. I know something new happened yesterday."

He bent and kissed her, still smiling

"Sam, what is it?" she asked, the tears beginning to show at the corners of her eyes. "You're too calm. And you won't talk to me."

He shrugged. "Perhaps I'll tell you about it later."

The steps seemed almost inhumanly high today, though he'd walked up them often. He reached the center of the bench gratefully, and leaned against the parapet. Looking down, he saw the Accused standing in their box. They'd been given new clothing, and an attempt had been made to hide their bandages. They were a sullen, dun-colored knot of men and women.

He looked across the plaza at the First Family boxes, crowded with the family men and their ladies, and the lesser family boxes flanking them. There was the usual overflow crowd of people, too, and a doubled force of Civil Guards.

The Accused, the First Families, the lesser families, the people, and even some of the Civil Guards, were all watching him. For all that a number of Justices would go through the full ritual of Trial today, he was the only one who wore the Suit.

When he'd come home to Emily last night, she'd asked him what had happened, looking up at his calm face.

"I went to Chapel after the hearing," he'd told her, and now he seemed to stand there again.

Lowery, one of Manhattan's Associate Justices, began to read the indictments. It was only then that Joyce realized there'd been applause for him and his Associates, and that he'd automatically instructed Lowery to begin.

He listened to the solemn beat of the words in the plaza. This was Trial. Once again, men stood before The Messire, and, once again, the Justices endeavored to act as proper instruments of His justice.

Thirty years of trials had brought him here, in his Suit. In that time, The Messire had thought well of him.

But Kallimer and Normandy had planted the dirty seed of doubt in his mind, and though he knew them for what they were, still, the doubt was there. If the girl had been innocent, how had he been permitted to execute his unjust sentence upon her?

Kallimer had given him an answer for that, but Kallimer had given him too many answers already. It wasn't until he stood in Chapel, watching the candles flicker, that he understood where the test would lie.

If there was no Messire--the thought bewildered him, but he clung to it for argument's sake--then every particle of his life was false, and the ideal he served was dust.

If there was an Ultimate Judge--and how many noons, in thirty years, had brought him the feeling of communion with his Judge--then Joyce knew where to make his appeal.

He looked across the plaza at Joshua Normandy's box, and reflected that Normandy could not begin to guess the magnitude of what was undergoing Trial today.

He put his hand inside his vest and closed his fingers around the butt of his Grennell. It was his gun. It had served him as he had served The Messire; efficiently, without question.

Here was where the test came; here where men prayed to The Messire for the ultimate, infallible judgment.

The Messire knew the guilty, and the innocent; punished the one and protected the other. Joyce was only His instrument, and Trial the opportunity for His judgment to become apparent.

He whispered to himself: "I pray my verdict is correct, but if it is not, I pray that justice prevail at this trial." He took out the gun.

He turned quickly, and fired in Kallimer's direction. He fired across the plaza at Joshua Normandy. Then he began to fire at random into the First Family boxes, seeing Normandy collapse in his box, hearing Kallimer's body tumble backward off the bench, and knowing, whether he was right or wrong, that whatever happened now, The Messire had not, at least, reversed his verdict.

This was the Truth he'd lived for.

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