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# I Hope My Daddy Dies, Mister

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I  
HOPE  
MY DADDY DIES,  
MISTER

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Kenneth J. Herrmann, Jr.

*Dorrance & Company*

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*Philadelphia*

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To my wife, Kathleen

"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

—Mark 10:14

"I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child."

—R. Tagore, *The Crescent Moon*

"How dear to this heart are the scenes of my childhood,  
When fond recollection recalls them to view;  
The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,  
And every loved spot which my infancy knew."

—Samuel Woodworth, *The Old Oaken Bucket*

"Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them."

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

"The evidence of the extent of child abuse and neglect is sufficient, the preferable methods of intervention are known; but apathy, ignorance, and lack of commitment of policymakers prevail."

—H. E. Simmons, *Protective Services for Children*

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K. J. H.

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# INTRODUCTION

Spend a week with me. See the children I have seen. Witness the problems with which I have struggled. Live with me through experiences which will shock and alarm you. They have become part of my everyday life. Enter into my personal battle between emotional collapse and dedicated warfare against an evil which victimizes thousands of families every day in every community and neighborhood of our nation. Listen to my story.

This is a factual account of my encounter with the problems of child neglect and child abuse. I was a social worker for six years working for two child protection agencies. Here I tell the story of the human grief and misery which exists in your neighborhood at the very moment you are reading these words. It is also the account of those who combat this human tragedy.

This book certainly will not correct the problem of child maltreatment, but it hopefully will act as a stimulus for those who are apathetic toward that problem. The facts speak for themselves. The children scream for relief, for attention, for love.

I challenge you to read an unpleasant story for the sake of the children who weep throughout these pages and, possibly,

in the house next to your own. This is the exposition of a problem rarely told fully by the news media. I can only hope that this book will broaden the awareness of the public and increase the concern of our leaders who, though possibly knowledgeable, have failed to provide the troops and the ammunition to combat this sinister threat to the family and society.



# 1

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## MONDAY

When the telephone rang at four in the morning, I was much too tired to be angry. It had been a busy weekend on emergency service.

"You've had quite a number of calls tonight, Mr. Herrmann."

She expected me to talk, but I really felt like telling her to go to hell. "Yes, I've had twenty-three calls so far. What's up now?"

"You have a call from a Mrs. Morton, 193 Jasper Street, 909-6487. The lady was crying and said something about an overdose and two grandchildren. I told her that you would call her right back."

"Thanks." I put the kettle on the stove. I had gone to bed at one, and a cup of coffee might help me to wake up.

As I dialed Mrs. Morton's number, I cursed the answering service for not getting more information. Most of the operators knew enough to get as much as possible before calling the caseworker who was on duty.

"Mrs. Morton?"

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Herrmann, emergency caseworker for Children's Aid. I understand that you called for some help. What's the problem?"

She started to cry and said that someone had to do something immediately. It took several minutes to find out that Mrs. Morton had called regarding her grandchildren. Her daughter-in-law, Betty, had apparently taken several prescription pills and had been drinking beer at a party. Betty lived in an old cottage that was serving as the headquarters for a motorcycle club, "The Road Devils." Mrs. Morton had called her daughter-in-law, and a male member of the gang had told her that Betty had overdosed, the children were bathing in beer, and that she should mind her own business. She had heard the children crying in the background. Mrs. Morton mentioned that it was difficult to hear the young man who answered the phone because of the loud music and yelling in Betty's home.

On the way to the house, thoughts raced through my mind. Am I reacting too quickly to this grandmother's call? Maybe the police should check this out. What if this is more than I can handle? What if my arriving on the scene creates a disturbance when there really isn't a problem at all? Well, I still have to look in, just to be sure.

There was a police car parked in front of the cottage. "That takes care of one problem," I thought. "Damn, I'm still half-asleep."

I identified myself to the two police officers and told them of the complaint I was investigating. They noted that they were responding to a call about a truck blocking a neighbor's driveway.

"Would you take time to help me check out this child neglect complaint?"

"Sure. We've had a lot of trouble from these bastards anyway, but we didn't know there were kids in there. They probably won't let us in. What do we do then?"

This was a question that used to upset me, but I had grown

used to it. The police should know the law, but they always bring up warrants, reports, and angry desk lieutenants. I explained that the state law gives me the right to use any means necessary to protect a child who seems to be in imminent danger, and that includes entering a home without a search warrant. I explained that they also have that right under the law.

They looked at each other quizzically. "Say, I don't know, Mr. Herrmann. We'd be taking quite a chance."

"Look, officer, I'm talking about section 1024 of the Family Court Act. Want me to show it to you? I have a copy in my car." Their reluctance irritated me.

I keep a copy with me when I go out on calls. This is necessary because the police had refused to help me remove a six-year-old child whose father had punched him repeatedly and had smashed the boy's head on the concrete stairs leading to his home. There also had been a problem when another caseworker and I had to take a child from his mother after she had poured blue paint all over him. She had broken all of the windows in the home and had set fire to a pile of trash in the back yard. When she hit me with a fence post, the police finally stepped in to help.

The officers called in for permission to assist "the man from Children's Aid." With the OK from whomever was on the radio, they agreed to help, but only if I would accept full responsibility.

"I'll be glad to, but let's get in there."

There was no noise coming from the cottage. The house was in poor repair, and I was struck by its rather gothic appearance. The lights were on and the windows were open. When I knocked on the door, a young woman's voice responded in slurred words, "Go away and leave us alone." I explained who I was and requested that she open the door.

Nothing. Then the police's turn. They were more forceful in their request, and a girl of eighteen or nineteen opened the door. She was an attractive girl, or, at least, she had been at one time. Her hair was dirty and straight. She reeked of beer and her clothes were soaking wet, torn, and disheveled. The door was opened just enough so that we could see the living room. It was strewn with unconscious men and women in various states of undress.

She refused us entry, and I explained that I would have to see the children. However, she was in no condition to be reasoned with. I tried to make it clear that I had not come to remove the children, only to make sure that they were not in danger. We pushed open the door and walked past her as she cursed and protested.

"Will you look at this?" asked the previously reluctant officer.

My adrenalin began to flow. A three-year-old girl was sleeping on a couch in the corner of the living room. She was absolutely filthy. Her hair was matted and lice-infested. Her clothes were sticky and smelled of beer. I found out later that a highlight of the party had been pouring beer over the child.

There were fifteen gang members who had passed out. Some had vomited where they lay. Others slept in pools of beer on the floor in the living room and in the kitchen. Young men and women were asleep on chairs, on the floor, on couches, and on beds. They had drunk enough beer and had taken enough drugs to satisfy their need that night.

The little girl was quite frail, and she was shaking as she slept. She seemed frightened of the dreams which she was experiencing. They probably mirrored the reality of her life.

I asked the young woman who had opened the door if there were any other children in the cottage. She was leaning on the back of a worn, stuffed chair, attempting to remain standing.

"You better get out of here 'cause their mother is gonna be real mad."

A policeman uttered an obscenity.

"Look, if there are any other children, I have to see if they are all right. OK?" My tone must have sounded desperate.

"Are ya gonna take them away? 'Cause ya ain't, ya know."

She then began to rally the troops. The woman staggered from one fallen soldier to another trying to awaken each from his stupor.

A policeman called from a small bedroom that I should come and take a look. "How old do you think he is?"

"About six months," I said. I felt sick.

The baby was sleeping in a crib. He also had been bathed in beer. His diaper was wet and filthy. It obviously had been days since it had been changed. The baby had a terrible diaper rash, and he was quite pale and lethargic.

The bedroom had no light, but an officer's flashlight sought out piles of garbage and trash. An occasional rat would run from the light. Old clothes covered the floor and were carelessly draped on the broken crib.

It began to rain. Thunder startled me and all I wanted to do was to walk in the rain and feel clean again.

"I have to get these kids out of here."

The policeman nodded. He uttered a few obscenities about the gang members.

When I went back into the living room, I saw that a number of the soldiers were about to do battle. Several other policemen had arrived, and they were trying to calm down the groggy gang members who seemed to wear their shaggy beards and decorated dungaree clothes with a swaggering defiance. One of them kept shouting, "She's the mother, and she should have them."

A twenty-year-old woman stumbled into the living room from a rear bedroom. She seemed to find it difficult to stand,

as she had taken a number of barbiturates and had drunk too much beer.

"My name is Betty Morton." Her speech was slurred and difficult, but her tone was almost boasting. "What the hell do you want in my home? Get out, damnit! Who let them in? We're just having a little party here."

"Mrs. Morton, my name is Mr. Herrmann. I'm from Children's Aid. We had a call that you and the children were in need of our help tonight, and I came to investigate."

She quickly lost her defiant stance. The young mother was visibly frightened. She held onto the arm of the man who had previously defended her parental rights.

"Mrs. Morton, wouldn't it be better for the kids to stay with a relative until this can be cleared up? I mean, they do seem to be in pretty poor condition, and I'm sure that you would like to see them out of here."

"What the hell do you mean? Sure they're a little dirty. My kids ain't happy unless they're a little dirty, and nobody's takin' my kids anywhere." At that, she passed out.

The men who had been revived began to advance in defense of their hostess's honor. The police took over and restrained the gang while I picked up the children and carried them to my car. More police were arriving as I drove away with the children.

As I drove to the hospital, my mind was racing. The little girl was terrified, and she screamed and cried all of the time she was in the car. The rain was letting up.

The nurses and doctors saw no need for admitting the children. Their efforts to calm the girl were fruitless. The baby would alternately cry and sleep. While they were being examined, I received the name and address of relatives from the grandmother. They agreed to keep the children overnight.

When the aunt and uncle greeted me at the door, their con-

cern was readily apparent. The little girl responded warmly and almost desperately to the two friendly faces she recognized.

"How is Betty? She teamed up with that bunch last month when her husband was locked-up for stealing a car." The uncle seemed like he was about to cry. The aunt had already begun to cry. She wiped away an occasional tear and repeated, "God, these poor kids."

I assured them that the children had just been seen at the hospital and that, aside from head lice and their suffering from generally poor care, they were fine. This felt like such a stupid thing to say, knowing full well what emotional damage probably had been done by their mother and her newly-found friends, and the probable effect of the unavoidable trauma of tonight's events.

The aunt and uncle listened attentively as I explained that I was only handling the case as an emergency caseworker and that another social worker would be contacting them later in the day. That social worker would be working on the case for Child Welfare. Children's Aid only handles these problems at night and on weekends when Child Welfare is closed.

I thanked them for taking the children, who were sleeping when I left.

On the way home, I stopped at the local police precinct and was told that Betty had been taken to the hospital.

"She overdosed. The others have been locked-up or sent to the hospital with the Morton dame. You know, Mr. Herrmann, we've had maybe ten or fifteen complaints about that place in the last week or so. Never knew there were kids in there. It's really a shame."

I nodded my head in agreement. "Good night and thanks, officer." The rain started again, and it seemed to lend poignancy to the tragedy. It was 5:30 a.m. and there was little

traffic. I was confused, exhausted, and dirty. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to cry, scream, or intellectualize that this was just one of hundreds of such cases I had seen.

When I arrived home, I found that the water that had been put on the stove for coffee was still hot. Coffee was the last thing I needed now. I showered and went to bed thinking that in just three hours I would have to be in the office. I slept, not knowing that the day would be worse than the night.

God, I was tired when I walked into the office at nine. Waiting on my desk was a note from an intake worker asking me what I knew about the Morton case. Betty Morton had called from City Hospital requesting information regarding the whereabouts of her children. She stated that they had wandered off during the night and that she was worried about them. The number she had left where she could be reached was for the psychiatric ward's pay phone. I jotted a request to the intake worker that she check last night's reports and forward the mother's message to the receiving caseworker. The case should be assigned sometime today.

Nine o'clock Monday morning is an unpleasant time of the week for anyone who is gainfully employed. For me, it was an especially hateful time when it followed my turn on emergency service. Every third weekend for four years I had cursed Monday morning at nine. Children's Aid caseworker at night, and Child Welfare caseworker during the day. It was all the same, just a different label.

There had been quiet times, but these were becoming rare. No one seemed to know if more child maltreatment reports were being received because of increased public awareness or whether the increase was due to an actual increase in the number of maltreated children. For whatever reason, we



were being deluged with new cases.

"I had a bad weekend, Joan; and I would like to avoid your lovely but vicious temperament. OK? Just bug off." That after our secretary, Joan, had played her favorite trick of ignoring the "good mornings" we tried to share with her.

Joan had been termed a frustrated woman whose spirit of cooperation and camaraderie was in the same league as the love of Eva Braun and the religious spirit of Stalin. There were times when I felt sorry for Joan, but this was not one of those times. She lived alone, but perhaps that was best for other people. Her efficiency was never in question, but her legitimacy was frequently in doubt. There were times when she confided in me, and these seemed attempts at being human, but they eventually were shown as attempts at manipulation.

Joan worked for five other caseworkers, some of whom were more irked than I when Joan made nasty remarks or ignored attempts at pleasantries.

"Ken, your paperwork is up-to-date. I wish everyone else could be as efficient." Her voice echoed off the office walls. "Oh, my arthritis is acting up. I have so much pain most of the time."

"Joan, have you taken any medication?"

"It wouldn't help."

"Joan, why don't you ask the other caseworkers for their work instead of playing games?" She went back to ignoring me.

"Someday, I'll clobber that bitch." Ron was angry. "You know, I'm sitting here trying to figure out how the hell I can get two lousy parents to make some changes before court action breaks up the family, and that bitch starts with her nagging."

Ron was a pleasant colleague with little experience but a

genuine enthusiasm. His desk was next to mine, and I tried to help him along. Ron's background as a student teacher and real estate salesman was not exactly training for social work, but he had the knack for this work.

Marie came in late, but she was being consistent. She had been around for six years, which was more than most of the protection staff, as the turnover was considerable. When Marie, an attractive yet stocky girl in her late twenties, came in, Joan started all over again. Marie was her favorite target. However, she was used to Joan, and she treated the tirade with cold silence. The secretary soon gave up.

"Hi, Ken, have fun on service?"

"It was a delight, Marie. Twenty-four calls, six kids placed, and one D.O.A. They should all be so much fun."

Marie sensed my sarcasm and chuckled a little. However, her laugh was tainted with apprehension. She'd probably be assigned at least one or two of those cases to provide follow-up and, possibly, long-term service. Marie, like the rest of us, serviced about eighty children. This was double the number of cases the state mandated a county child protection caseworker to service. However, when the agency provided sixteen caseworkers to deliver child protective services to a county of over one million people, the case count was considerably higher. They said that it would lower personnel expenses not to hire more caseworkers, and, of course, they were correct. However, an estimate was made that at least an extra one-hundred thousand dollars each year was being spent because children were being placed in foster care and in institutions because enough protection workers were not available to deal with family problems and to provide services which were geared to keep children at home. The staff just was not available to rehabilitate a neurotic family. The toll in human grief and suffering never entered into the county budget.

It was last month when we began to send petitions to the commissioner requesting additional caseworkers. He said that he would send us more clerical staff. There was talk of providing him with a hearing aid.

"Ken, come in here when you have a chance." Mrs. Quinn was a supervisor whose frustration could be appreciated. She had the mission of overseeing a staff of six caseworkers, four hundred cases of child maltreatment, and Joan. Her varied roles of administrator, teacher, counselor, social worker, and advocate were approached with practical skill and, oftentimes, with caution. A display of initiative and genuine concern might be interpreted, not as an ethical and professional response to human need, but rather as an affront to the bureaucratic civil service system—a challenge to those who had found security in government employment. This security seemed more satisfying to many of the agency employees than did adherence to the code of ethics in the field of social work. This may have been one reason why so few sought professional degrees, belonged to professional associations, or read related journals and books. So many seemed to feel that they needed no help in doing their job. Perhaps that's why so many couldn't.

Mrs. Quinn was noticeably upset. She had undergone another session with the director, an older woman without formal training but with years of experience and with functional political influence. Some say that the political influence assured her the position in the agency which she presently held.

"Do you know what that woman said today?" The word "that" was more of an expletive than an adjective in Mrs. Quinn's vocabulary. Her sense of integrity was respected by her workers, but was often a source of aggravation to the administrators.

"I imagine that she was upset over delinquent reports or

that another politician has complained or that someone disagreed with her over some minor matter at this morning's meeting." Each Monday the supervisors met with the director to receive orders for the week. The meetings originally were begun with the announced purpose of improving communication within the agency. They had become another opportunity for the director to exert her control.

"No, wait until you hear this." Mrs. Quinn's back would arch when she was angry. "Mrs. Tate, our leader in the field of social change, clinical technique, and human growth and behavior, told us this morning that we should stop fooling around with group treatment, innovative concepts, and other such nonsense since we must realize that nothing new has been written about social work since Charles Dickens. She told us to junk the journals and to read *Oliver Twist*." Mrs. Quinn's eyes were fiery.

"Maybe she was just making the point about our forgetting basics."

"Are you kidding? Mrs. Tate's basics are limited to a thick girdle and a long-line bra. She refuses to back us in any attempt to increase staffing, and she's terminating our group treatment program because she says that we don't have enough time to fool around with such things."

I was furious. It had become obvious a year ago that maltreated children were being removed from their homes following family court hearings, which were initiated without much in the way of social services being provided to the families involved. However, state regulations were quite clear. We had an obligation to provide rehabilitative services to all of the families victimized by this problem. Parents didn't enjoy fracturing babies' skulls or throwing children down stairs. This was not premeditated violence. Maltreating parents needed help just as much as their children. The group

treatment program saved time and kept families together as it brought these victimized parents together and helped them grow in a therapeutic atmosphere. They grew out of their hostility and frustrations. Children were living in safe and healthy homes, but Charles Dickens didn't write about such programs.

"Ken, you have a call from Mrs. Simmons." Joan was still upset over my remarks to her earlier, and I was somewhat out of line. The lack of sleep had left me with a short temper.

"I'll be right there, Joan, thanks."

"Well, I wish you'd hurry." Perhaps I hadn't been too harsh with Joan after all. I excused myself and left Mrs. Quinn, who was lighting another cigarette. She would take quite awhile to calm down today.

Mrs. Simmons was an elderly black lady who had referred her daughter, Hattie, and her grandchildren for protective services. Hattie had left the children alone on innumerable occasions. She was always apologetic and friendly enough, but she had systematically found excuses to avoid any intensive service I could provide.

Mrs. Simmons was excited. "I got 'em, Mr. Herrmann. That dang Hattie done left 'em alone while she and Martin took off for Ohio, but I ain't keepin' 'em. Hattie gonna be real mad when she comes home and finds out I called you."

Martin was Hattie's boyfriend. The two of them were irresponsible, but they seemed harmless enough. This time Hattie had left her children, ages seven years to five months, with no care at all. Mrs. Simmons had stopped by to visit, had discovered the problem, and had taken the children home with her. I told her that I would be out later in the morning.

"By the way, Mrs. Simmons, I presume the children are all right."

"Don't you worry none, Mr. Herrmann. They is fine. Joe was seen, and he's gonna be just fine."

"Joe? Mrs. Simmons, what happened to Joe?"

Joe was a four-year-old child and his mother had been actively rejecting him. Hattie had been working reluctantly on her negative feelings toward the child in counseling. I had arranged for another agency to provide that service, and she was sporadically attending her counseling sessions. This was the only cooperation she had displayed.

"Ain't nothin', Mr. Herrmann. Seems that Hattie been burnin' the boy with cigarettes." I told her that I was on my way.

Mrs. Simmons had a public health nurse look at the boy this morning, but I felt it best to take him to the hospital. Joe was literally covered with small circular scars where, it later was discovered, his mother and her boyfriend had butted out cigarettes on the child's face, neck, arms, legs, stomach, and buttocks. There were lateral scars on his lower back, buttocks, and legs from repeated floggings with a belt. The other children had no signs of abuse. After I had left the child in the hospital, I returned to the grandmother's home to pick-up the other children and to place them in foster care.

After I had returned to my office, I was still thinking of little Joe. He must have experienced innumerable horrors in his short life. We had attributed his condition to parental rejection and unexplained autism. He had had physical exams at an area clinic, but no abuse had ever been reported. Joe could not speak, was not yet toilet trained, and he cried most of the night. At other times he could be quite hyperactive. I began to draw up the petition for Family Court charging Hattie with child neglect. Lunch would have to wait today. It didn't really matter since my ulcer was acting up.

The office was quite busy. One of the other workers was looking for a foster home for three children who had been abandoned in the bus terminal. Their mother had left a note with them stating that she just couldn't take care of them anymore. Two other workers were interviewing clients. Ron was in conference with Mrs. Quinn. Marie was in court with one of her clients.

Joan still hadn't calmed down from this morning. "Ken, you have two clients in the reception room waiting to see you, and you should have seen them earlier. They came in with appointments."

"Did you let them know that I was called out on a case and would be late?"

"They said that you were to see them at 10:30 and at 11:30. I didn't know where you were."

"Joan, I signed out and left a note where I would be."

"They are quite impatient, those clients of yours."

I mumbled an obscenity, sarcastically thanked Joan for her concern over the welfare of my clients, and took two antacid tablets.

Mrs. Johnson was waiting impatiently. She was the mother of ten children who had been reported to the agency by her children's school social worker. The children had been habitually truant, inadequately clothed, and experienced a chronic head lice problem. Mrs. Johnson had refused to cooperate with the school authorities in rectifying these problems. Other children were asking that they not have to sit next to the Johnson children in class because of their body odor. The children ranged in age from one to ten. The older children were quite aggressive and were always fighting with each other and with other children. I had been working with Mrs. Johnson for two months in order to get her to the point where she would be willing to work on her family problems.

She had borne a child every year for the last ten years, and her husband had left her. She seemed physically and emotionally exhausted.

The family lived in an older house next to a steel plant in a heavily industrialized section of the city. Most of the other houses on her dead-end street had been abandoned. When I first visited their home, I was struck by a building's ability to mirror the feelings and attitudes of those living within it. The old gray paint was peeling, and the porch was beginning to fall from its own weight. Broken windows admitted both sun and rain.

Mr. Johnson had deserted his family before I had received the case. He left one night, after chronic unemployment and a bout of heavy drinking. No one had been able to locate him since that night. The children said that they were glad that he had left because it meant an end to their parents' heated battles.

The Johnson children had begun to pick away at their bedroom walls. The holes were quite large now and cockroaches and rats could be seen scurrying by the openings. Their mother didn't bother to clean anymore. "I know that it's been months, but why bother? The kids will just mess it up anyway." Windows broken during pillow fights remained broken. Old food on the kitchen floor testified to the family's menu for the last few weeks. Rats cleaned up some scraps at night. As Mrs. Johnson suffered from isolation, loneliness, and despair and her children felt less loved and less wanted, the home deteriorated. This was not a new problem, but one which had been present for years. The new crisis of desertion had only made the situation more acute and more hopeless.

Today Mrs. Johnson was here to reply to an ultimatum. The family presented so many problems that I had selected a problem which would be easy to deal with initially. None of the children who were pre-school had seen a doctor since



birth, nor had they received immunizations. Mrs. Johnson had come today either to produce verification of her having provided physical examinations for her children or for me to notify her of the date we would take her into Family Court. We had provided homemakers, day care, counseling, and volunteers to repair her home, but nothing had worked. She had resisted all of my attempts to help her family, and pressures were being brought to bear on the person presently perceived by my agency as responsible for what happened to the family—me. Therefore, threat was not beyond me. Some called it aggressive casework. I called it what it was: threat. Since threat of court action was not an idle threat, it should have been used sparingly. However, the mere involvement of a child protection caseworker was reminder enough that children could be removed from their homes. Some caseworkers in the agency used this threat explicitly and authoritatively during their first contact. That was unethical, but it was done.

In this case the school complained daily, and public health nurses were on the phone a few times each week. Today was Mrs. Johnson's last chance to show some attempt at change. I still felt that it was sheer nonsense to expect overt changes in such a short time when this was a problem with roots which had been developing for years. However, the agency administration had received complaints from the school and the health department. What would Charles Dickens say? Administration ordered my supervisor to order me to order Mrs. Johnson to change, or we would take her to court. This was a hell of a way to do social work. Any change would have to be purely cosmetic. The children loved their mother, and she loved them. Mrs. Johnson was just beginning to see the problem through all of the obfuscation of her emotional barriers.

The mother of ten looked drained this afternoon. Her short

brown hair was dirty and windblown. Her old housedress was spotted and worn. When I approached Mrs. Johnson, she began to smile and seemed excited.

"Mr. Herrmann, wait until you see what I have." She handed me the forms I had given her for the doctor to complete when she took her children for physical examinations.

I looked at the forms. "Mrs. Johnson, you're the greatest. You not only took all of the children in for physical exams, but you also started them on their immunizations. You must have been busy."

She stood there smiling. It had been quite awhile since she had looked happy.

"There's more, Mr. Herrmann. I'd sure like you to stop at the house today so that I can show you something."

Mrs. Johnson became visibly excited. I'm sure that I picked up some of that excitement. "I'd be glad to stop by. However, it will be late this afternoon. Would five o'clock be OK?"

She said that the time was fine, and with some apprehension, "We won't have to go to court now, will we? I mean, everything's OK now, right?"

"Mrs. Johnson, things are looking better. Let's not worry about that now. If things keep improving, of course we won't have to go to court. I'll see you later."

She smiled and shook her head approvingly as she turned and left.

The receptionist remarked that a Mary Howard was in to see me. The Howard family was a new case, and I had not yet had a chance to read the referral. The young girl sitting in the chair was an attractive, slightly built and very nervous teenager. She looked apprehensively at me as I approached.

"Mary Howard?"

"Yes, yes, sir." She was folding and refolding a piece of paper.

"Mary, my name is Mr. Herrmann, and I'll be working on your case." The word "case" seemed so cold, so routine, and so formal. It was routine. Child protection work became routine. This was one reason that the turnover in caseworkers was so high. It was easy to become cold and unfeeling. It began to affect your professional attitude and approach, but even your personal life was affected.

"Would you wait in this interviewing room, and I'll be right back." The rooms were small, having barely enough room for a small table and two chairs. The paint was institutional green. This was hardly conducive to decent communication, but the conditions in the children's division of the welfare department were better than in the public assistance division. There the interviewing rooms consisted of long tables where several clients and caseworkers would be having interviews at the same time.

I returned to my office and picked up the Howard case record. Glancing at the referral, it became clear that this was to be a difficult and complex case. The referral dealt with a problem involving incest.

There were the usual papers and forms in the folder. It also contained two letters, one from Mary and another from Veronica Maxwell, her older sister. Both letters spoke of a similar problem. They had been raped by their father.

The Howard family consisted of both parents and four daughters, ages nine to sixteen. Veronica, age nineteen, was married and lived in another city. The letters alleged that Mr. Howard, an employed factory worker, had been sexually molesting all of his daughters for years. They described particular incidents with little detail but sufficient clarity to paint a picture of a very sick man, an apathetic and equally sick mother, and five exploited children. I read the record as I walked down the hall on my way back to the reception room. I took two more antacid tablets.

As I reentered the interviewing room, Mary was in tears. She dried her eyes as I sat down.

"Mary, I've read your letter and your sister's letter. I think that we can help your family. May I ask why you wrote us instead of just calling or coming in?"

There was a moment of silence, and then, "Because Veronica told me to."

"I'm sorry; I don't understand."

"I can't stand it at home anymore. None of my friends would come over because my father would try to fool around with them and because of the weird things he does. I called my sister, and we talked for a long time. She told me to come to this agency, but I was afraid of what my father would do. We decided that both of us would send letters and then I would come in. In the letter I asked Child Welfare to contact me in school so my family wouldn't know what I had done. Some lady from here called me Friday and here I am. I'm not going back home." She began to cry again.

"Mary, you're sixteen, and if you don't want to go back home, you don't have to. That's the law in this state." There was silence, and then, "I can find a place for you to stay if you'll feel safer there, but let's talk a little first."

She seemed reassured. "Mr. Herrmann, it's awful. Terrible things are going on there."

"Mary, I wonder if you could tell me more about what's going on at home, and what makes you so afraid to go back there."

—She was hesitant, and it was necessary to prod her for details. The interview was quite long. Mary had to be continually reassured that she would not be sent home. She also wanted reassurance that it was possible for her younger sisters, ages nine, twelve, and thirteen, to be taken out of the home in order to protect them from their father.

The child described a chaotic home situation in which her mother rarely interacted with the other family members. Her father had apparently subjected the family to a series of horrors. As I listened to her story, it struck me that I was not shocked. I had heard similar stories several times before from children and from mothers, neighbors, and relatives of victimized children. Undoubtedly, I would hear this story again.

"As far back as I can remember, he was fooling with us." Mary was beginning to tear her folded paper. "When I was six or seven or so, he used to walk into the bathroom when I was taking a bath, and he'd be naked."

"What happened?"

"He'd first stand there and laugh. It was weird. Then he'd make me touch him where I shouldn't, and then he'd touch me." She was looking at the floor, and her body was quite tense.

"Would you like a coke or something, Mary?" She shook her head. There was a period of silence, and then, "My father makes us pray with him at night. Not really pray, but rather take part in his cult stuff."

"What do you mean 'cult stuff'?"

"He tells us that he is from the planet Venus and that he came here many years ago. Each Saturday night, he puts on a black robe, lights black candles, and says some chants. Then . . ." Mary was more nervous now. "Then he . . ."

"Mary, I know that this must be very difficult for you, but I have to know what he did if I am to help you." I think that my own anxiety was showing.

"He makes us, my sisters and I, take off all of our clothes and do things to each other."

"What things, Mary?"

"Sex stuff." She stopped speaking, and then, "Maybe I'd better leave, Mr. Herrmann. I mean, I'm going to be sick."

"Mary, go to the rest room across the hall and calm down a little. There's no hurry. You take your time."

She rushed out of the room, and I took another antacid tablet. A few minutes later the teenager returned to the interviewing room. She appeared to be somewhat more composed. I sat waiting for her to begin again.

Mary was quite uneasy and she obviously was trying to say something. She would start to speak and then would lapse into silence. I knew that I would have to ask for as much detail as possible if legal action was to be taken, but this was difficult because I felt so sorry for this girl.

"Mr. Herrmann, would it be enough for me to say that he made us play with each other and to do things to him?"

"Mary, for now that's enough." I felt like apologizing to the girl. She was exhausted. "Do you have a place where you would like to stay?" I felt completely inadequate in meeting her needs. There were so many more questions, but they would have to wait. She had gone through enough.

"No, sir, I don't know where to go."

"If you would like, I could find a family who would be delighted to have you stay with them." She began to weep. I reached out and held her hand. There were times when words served no purpose. Touching often meant more than did a treatise on human empathy.

I left Mary for a few minutes and arranged for a foster home placement. While the paperwork was being processed, I called her parents.

"Mrs. Howard, my name is Mr. Herrmann, and I'm a caseworker at Child Welfare. Your daughter, Mary, is here, and I think it might be necessary for you and your husband to come down."

"What's the problem? What's she been saying?" Her ques-

tions were lethargically asked. Mrs. Howard didn't sound the least bit upset.

"Mrs. Howard, Mary is refusing to return home. She wants foster care placement."

"So? She's always been queer. I don't really care if she comes back home or not." Her tone was emotionless and cold.

She was making me angry. "Look, Mrs. Howard, it seems that you don't understand."

"I understand all right. Mary doesn't want to live with us, and that's OK with me. The school has been poisoning her mind. She's refused to obey us for months, and the school has been screwing up all we have tried to do with her. I really don't give a damn if she ever comes home again." Mrs. Howard hung up the phone. I was livid with anger, took two antacid tablets, realized that I had been taking too many tablets, and told myself to calm down. It was time to speak with Mrs. Quinn.

"Place the girl in a foster home, call the school, and see the other children. Oh, do whatever you think best, Ken." Mrs. Quinn was not usually controlling and sometimes was not too helpful. She was just tired of the whole game, but at least I had told her what was happening in this case. As caseworkers we were somewhat independent; perhaps, we were too independent. This would have been acceptable had we had proper training and had we achieved a certain level of professional competence. However, there was no in-service training in our agency. We read books on our own, and attended a one day professional conference every year or two. These conferences had to be paid for by the individual caseworkers. Training and professional competence were not ostensible concerns of the agency.

After finding a foster home, I placed Mary. I believed the

child's story; but even if she was not telling the truth, it was best not to take a chance. In a foster home she would receive warm, supportive, and protective care. Our foster parents seemed to respond instinctively when a child was placed in their home. They had little or no training, but I doubt that more professional child care was available.

— It was three o'clock when I drove up to P.S. 98, Mary's sisters' school. While walking up the sidewalk, the girl's story ran through my mind. It seemed so strange that no one had ever reported this situation before. It had been going on for so many years. However, this was often the way it was. Children had been seen several times with unexplained burns, bruises, and broken bones. Then maybe a report might be made. Neighbors so often were aware of neglect and abuse of children, but they feared becoming involved. Their neutrality often caused death when their involvement might have saved a life. It was always the same when a child was harmed seriously or a neglect situation hit the newspapers. "How could this be? Where are the authorities?" What did the public expect us to do when they failed to alert us to the problem or would refuse to be witnesses in court after calling in a complaint? I wondered what the school would have to say about the Howard girls.

"Mr. Herrmann, this is incredible. I've never met the children's parents. They haven't been too cooperative. You know, they haven't responded to notes and letters; but, this type of problem? It's incredible. The girls have been pretty poor students, but we've never had any serious problems." The principal seemed perturbed. While we spoke, his secretary went to look for the Howard children.

"If there is anything we can do, please let us know. By the way, do you have the right, I mean, the legal right to see the girls in school?"

"I do. We have great latitude under the law in investigating



situations where a child might be endangered. We sent literature from the agency to all of the schools explaining the problem of child maltreatment and the agency's legal authority in these matters. Didn't you receive that information?"

"We probably did, but you know how it is. A school receives so much literature of that kind. I suppose we just overlooked it." He shrugged his shoulders.

The secretary returned to tell us that the Howard girls were outside the principal's office.

I was given an unoccupied office in which to conduct the interview. The three girls seemed quite apprehensive when we sat down. Jean, age nine, was an attractive child with long, brown hair. She was thin, but seemed to be in good health. Karen, age twelve, was heavier than her two sisters, but she also seemed healthy. Her short brown hair was neatly combed. Martha, age thirteen, sat loudly chewing gum while she pulled at her unruly hair. Her complexion was poor.

I introduced myself and told the children what agency I was from. "Girls, I was visited by your sister, Mary, this afternoon. She asked me to see you about some things she says have been going on at home."

"Nothing's going on at home, mister. Nothing at all." Karen spoke quickly and to the point. "Whatever Mary said to you isn't true."

Jean and Martha joined the impromptu defense. Jean calmly seconded Karen, "We are a happy family, and Mary has been causing trouble."

"Yes, she always starts fights," added Martha.

"Well, what sort of things would Mary be saying that are not true?" Their statements seemed inappropriately timed and too defensive. It was normal in incest cases for most of the victims to deny what had happened, but the attitude of these girls seemed rehearsed.

"Look, we don't have to say anything to you, and our

mother said we don't even have to speak to you." Martha was becoming belligerent.

"Martha, when did your mother tell you this?"

"Just a little while ago. She called me at school. Our family's business is our concern." Martha stood, and her sisters followed her example. "Mister, we're leaving."

"I would appreciate it if we could talk for a few minutes." Their behavior and the knowledge of the mother's phone call caught me off guard.

They turned and walked out of the office without another word. I was disconcerted.

When I returned to the principal's office, I described the interview. He told me that he had been told of the mother's call after he and I had spoken.

"May I use your phone?"

"Anything, anything at all."

I called Mrs. Howard and told her that a visit with her husband and herself seemed to be in order.

"I'll tell you what, social worker, you can just stay away from us. We don't want to visit with you here or anywhere." She sounded angry this time.

"Mrs. Howard, all I want to do is to speak with you and your husband about Mary. I'm not accusing either of you of having done anything wrong."

"You can speak with Mr. Jeffrey Gould, our lawyer; and, as for Mary, you can do whatever you want with her. Send her to hell for all I care." Mrs. Howard slammed down the receiver.

I asked the principal to keep me informed if anything unusual happened regarding the girls. He agreed to do this.

On the way back to the office, I stopped for a glass of milk. "Hey, mister, you looked pooped." The counterman was observant, but, at least he was friendly.

"Ken, you've had calls all day long. The messages are on your desk. You caseworkers must think I am a telephone operator. I can't answer phones all day with all this work that I have to do, and nobody cooperates." It was not a delight to hear Joan's voice.

"Thanks, Joan." I decided not to argue. "Mrs. Quinn?"

"How did you make out on the Howard case?" My supervisor was smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of coffee. She was waiting for the end of the day.

I described my interview with Mary, the phone conversations with Mrs. Howard, and the school visit. Mrs. Quinn paged through a telephone directory.

"It sounds like the girls are frightened to death, Ken, but it looks like neither the children nor the parents are going to cooperate. You might just as well call Mr. Gould. The attorney might be a little more sensible. Sounds like the parents are nutty, anyway."

I used Mrs. Quinn's phone.

"Look, I've told my clients not to say anything to you and not to let their children speak with you or with anyone else from your agency. The story that girl, Mary, has told you is preposterous."

"Mr. Gould, if I could talk with your clients, perhaps this could be cleared up. I'm hopeful that no legal action will be taken at all."

"Mr. Herrmann, if you are going to take Mr. and Mrs. Howard to court, then do so. Don't harass them. I know that any conversation they have with you can be entered into evidence."

"An interview request is harassment? I have a sixteen-year-old girl in a foster home because of her refusal to return home. She's making very serious charges, and all I want to

do is to find out if they are true. I want to make sure that the other children are safe. That's all."

"If you want any more information, take us to court, Mr. Herrmann. Quite simply, the Howards deny any wrongdoing. I have nothing else to say."

Mrs. Quinn was upset. "Talk to that other daughter who wrote a letter. What's her name?"

"Veronica."

"That's it. If she corroborates Mary's story, then take them to court. That's what they want, and that's what we'll give them."

I made a note to call Veronica Maxwell first thing in the morning.

Mrs. Quinn looked tired. "Well, it's half past four. I'm leaving early. This should be a great week. Monday was terrible, but most days are terrible lately. You know, I can retire soon. Maybe, very soon." She was tired. Most of her time in the agency had been spent in supervising units in the foster care division. When she was transferred to the protection unit two years ago, Mrs. Quinn fought it all the way. When she told the director that she would refuse the transfer, Mrs. Tate said, "You'll love it in protection." Mrs. Quinn was transferred.

There was little time, and I began paging through the messages on my desk. One was from Mrs. Walterson. She was caring for the two young children of a heroin addict, Annie Walterson, her daughter. Annie had been off of drugs for three months. I had to take her to the City Hospital one day after she had staggered into my office, because she was going through heroin withdrawal. Since that time, I had been seeing the twenty-three-year-old mother once a week. She had taken the job as a waitress that I had arranged for her, and she had seemed to be getting herself straightened out. Lately,

however, she had been gravitating toward her old friends, and they were pressuring her to go back to drugs. We had been working on that problem in our counseling sessions.

"Mr. Herrmann, I been tryin' to get to you all day. It's Annie; she died this mornin'."

"Mrs. Walterson, what happened?" I was stunned.

"The police found her on Morris Street in an old wreck of a place. She'd overdosed on heroin. Had to happen, Mr. Herrmann. Had to happen. Guess she was no good. The kids is OK, and they'll stay with me."

She had already answered my next question. "Thank you for calling, Mrs. Walterson. I'm very sorry about what happened. Just let me know if there is anything that I can do."

Her mother was wrong. Annie was a good person, but she was not strong enough to survive. I stared out of the office window. I was going to be late for my appointment at the Johnson home.

On my way to the Johnson's, the traffic was quite heavy. I didn't mind; it gave me time to think. I wondered if I had made a mistake with Annie Walterson. What more could I have done? Perhaps I wasn't objective enough to see her problems. Sometimes you could be so involved that you lost sight of what you were doing and of what the client needed. I gripped the steering wheel tighter.

Walking up the stairs to the Johnsons' apartment, I took two antacid tablets. I was exhausted when I knocked on the door. What could she have wanted me to see when she was in the office this morning?

"Please come in." Mrs. Johnson was smiling broadly.

I was surprised when I entered the apartment. Her ten children were lined up according to height. They were clean and were wearing neat, freshly laundered clothes. The children seemed quite proud, and they stood erect like little

soldiers. The apartment had been swept, and someone had begun to paint the kitchen.

"Mrs. Johnson, you are a wonder. Last week I didn't hold out much hope. Today? Well, this is just tremendous. You've had it in you all along."

Jimmy, the six-year-old, took me by the hand, at his mother's prodding. The little boy took me on a tour of the apartment. Mrs. Johnson and the other children followed me from room to room, and everyone was excited and responded happily each time I would comment on an improvement.

"We've had a lot to do, but this place will never be the same. Believe me."

"I do. Your family has done a lot of hard work. Remember, if you need help, I can get a volunteer over. All you have to do is to call me. You might have some heavy work to do."

Mrs. Johnson was attempting to impress me and to avoid court action. She had succeeded. I hoped that progress would continue.

Driving home, my fatigue was heavy, and my emotions were mixed. I arrived home at seven o'clock, and ate a light meal. My bed would be welcome tonight, and I hoped that I could unwind enough to sleep. Happily, I fell asleep easily.

## 2

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## TUESDAY

I wasn't particularly apprehensive as I drove out to visit the Bronowskis. A call had come from the sheriff's department asking that we see the Bronowski family and offer them services. I was handed the case as I walked into the office this morning with the instructions that I should go out immediately.

Last night, a deputy went to the home following a complaint from a neighbor. Mr. and Mrs. Bronowski had been fighting, and their battle had disturbed the people across the road. The deputies felt that the living conditions were poor enough to necessitate a referral of child neglect to Child Welfare. However, this type of case was common. I had no way of knowing what I was about to see. It seemed like so many other cases of dirty homes and dirty kids.

This family lived in one of the few rural areas left in the county. The ride was a fine opportunity to relax. Traffic was quite light, and the scenery was beautiful. I wondered how long these farms would last as the city and its adjacent suburbs continued to grow with a seemingly voracious need to devour more open land. Rows upon rows of identically dull houses would replace fields and wooded areas. The process seemed unnatural, but people did unnatural things all the time. The unnatural was not unusual.

Thoughts of what I had to do after this call were unrelenting. Call Veronica Maxwell and discuss her letter. Check the messages from yesterday and any new ones today, etc., etc. There wouldn't be enough time to do it all.

The sign read, "Morgan Corners." This was the town. I turned left at the gas station. Only thirty miles from the city and so enjoyably quiet and restful. Another three miles down the road, and I pulled my car into the dirt driveway of the Bronowski home.

The home was an old shack situated on a picturesque, grassy knoll. The shack appeared to have two stories. It was covered by old scraps of lumber and tar paper. The windows were broken and covered with sun bleached and water stained cardboard. Next to the house were three old automobiles which had been stripped of anything of value. Their empty frames lay rusting. A rabbit scurried between two of them. There were two large dogs tied to a dilapidated shed behind the house. Their yelping and angry barking were the only sounds I could hear. It was an incredibly quiet spot. Across the road, but quite a distance away, was a farm house. "They must have been the people who called the sheriff last night." I think that I spoke for the mere assurance that some human being was in the area even if it was just myself. I wasn't used to country tranquility.

At the back of the shack, I found a small door made of scraps of lumber. This seemed to be the only entrance and exit. I knocked. There was a sound from inside, but no one answered. After a few minutes, I knocked again. Nothing. Finally, "Mrs. Bronowski, I'm from Child Welfare. May I speak with you for a minute?" I knocked again. There was a rattling of cans, and a latch was raised on the door.

When the door opened, I smelled a putrid odor. A woman in her late forties peered out.



"I'm Mrs. Bronowski. What, what do you want?" The woman was quite nervous. Her voice quavered. Mrs. Bronowski's hair was short and uncombed. Her light brown housedress was soiled and ill-fitting. I was immediately struck by the appearance of her teeth. They were discolored and quite crooked. A few were missing. Strange, what you first noticed when meeting someone.

"Mrs. Bronowski, my name is Mr. Herrmann. I'm a case-worker from Child Welfare. The sheriff's department called us this morning saying that you and your husband have been having some problems, and they asked us to see if we could help." I tried to be pleasant.

"No problem. Thank you." She closed the door.

"Mrs. Bronowski, one more thing." The door reopened. "Apparently the sheriff's deputies were concerned about your children. If I may, I'd like to come in and talk with you."

"I've been cleaning the house today, and I'm very busy. Besides, I haven't been feeling well. Could you come back next week?"

"No, I'm sorry. I have to see the children today. May I please come in?"

"Well, I guess you're going to get in anyway." She seemed less nervous now. It was as if she was resigned to the inevitable. "Come in."

While I was following Mrs. Bronowski into her home, I found myself reaching for an antacid tablet.

"Remember, I haven't been feeling well, and it's been a week or two since I've cleaned." My mouth opened, but I didn't reply.

We walked over a board which led from the doorway into the living room. The board acted as a bridge over a mud floor. Once inside the living room, my stomach sank. Before me was a home which, as I found out later, had not been

cleaned in literally twenty years. There were piles of trash, garbage, old papers, dirty clothes, and assorted litter. Some of the trash was waist deep. A path through the garbage led from the couch to the kitchen to the bathroom to some stairs which seemed to lead to the second floor. There were swarms of flies in the home, and I found myself waving my notebook in the air in order to see across the room. There were thousands of them everywhere. I could not see the floor because of the accumulation of trash. The path was not a cleared area. It had been beaten down by constant foot traffic.

Sitting on the couch were three children, ages six, seven, and nine. Their stares were haunting; no smiles, no greetings, no replies to my hello. The children looked anxious as they stared at me from the old, worn, and shabby couch.

Mrs. Bronowski said nothing, but nodded her head when I asked if I might see the rest of the house. The bathroom consisted of a wash basin and a toilet. They had no shower or bath. The septic system was not working. My visit to that room was brief. Human waste overflowed from the toilet onto the floor. I was appalled. The stench was overwhelming. The room had neither a window for ventilation nor a light, and the darkness added a rank quality to the offensive sight.

The kitchen was my last stop on the first floor. There were the ever-present flies, a gas stove, a refrigerator, and a sink. The sink had running cold water, but no hot water. Old food and moldy plates covered the counter and the top of the refrigerator. The stove was crusted with grease and caked food. Some canned goods were scattered among the dirty dishes.

"Mrs. Bronowski . . ." I didn't know what to say. "Mrs. Bronowski, I . . . I . . . You said that you've been ill . . ."

"A cold or the flu or something I ate. I don't know."

The entire scene was macabre. "The deputies said that you have five children. Are the other two home?"

"Cindy lives with my parents in the city. She's too big for her britches."

"How old is she, Mrs. Bronowski?"

"Sixteen and real nasty. She thinks she's too good for us. You're a social worker, right?" I nodded. "Maybe you can talk to her and straighten her out."

"Your other child?"

"Joanie is only six months. She's sleeping upstairs."

"May I see her?"

"No. She's sleeping, and I don't want you waking her."

"I'll do my best not to wake her, but I have to see her."

The mother relented, and she followed me up the worn and shaky stairs that led to the two bedrooms on the second floor.

"She's in there." I saw a baby in a broken crib. The mattress was slanted at an angle.

The upstairs was not as ghastly as the first floor. However, it was not much better. The smell of urine was overpowering. The trash was at least a foot deep, and I had to climb over old lumber and broken bedroom furniture to get to the baby. The flies were everywhere.

Joanie was cleanly diapered and seemed in good health. This was indeed an enigma.

"My God, Mrs. Bronowski, what is going on here?" My tone was more desperate than angry, and the words came out without thinking.

There were tears in the mother's eyes, and she began slowly to shake her head. The weary woman sat down on an old stool and began to cry. She slowly repeated over and over again, "Thank God, someone's come. Oh my God! Oh my God!"

I reached out and touched her shoulder. "Maybe we can help you change all this." She wept. Only the flies could be heard as they swarmed about us. The baby slept peacefully, and the other children silently waited in the living room.

Mrs. Bronowski and I spoke for quite awhile before I left. We discussed the years of near silence between her and her husband. He was employed as a laborer in a factory in the town. Recently their silence had turned to violent arguments. Mrs. Bronowski said that she would talk with him about my visit. She seemed to feel that things might be better now. I asked that she and her husband come to see me tomorrow. She agreed. We made an appointment for nine.

While driving back to the city, I could think of little other than the incredible scene I had just witnessed. Somewhere along the way this woman had given up. She had become accustomed to sitting in her horror of a home doing nothing. Occasionally she would start to clean, but then, she would retreat within herself. Her fantasies had made a terrible reality even more untenable than it really was. This was a tragic situation which had been developing for many years.

The children seemed in good health, as incredible as it may seem. Their clothing was even relatively decent. After their mother had calmed down and had seemed to accept my intervention, they had become less shy and readily spoke of school and games. Toward the end of my visit, they had gone outside to play.

With all the rural beauty I drove through, the visit was even more unsettling in contrast. No matter how unusual this family seemed, they were still part of society. The Bronowskis lived in suburban, urban, and rural homes. They were quite common. The tragedy was that they went unhelped. Perhaps this family could now change; at least, they now had the opportunity to change. Many others, countless others, faded from life without even a sigh from their neighbors.

I was bracing myself for other cases when I entered the office, but the experience with Mrs. Bronowski troubled me. The graphic sight of her plight was difficult to handle objectively, but that was the name of the game. "If you can't be objective, find another job." Mrs. Quinn could be repetitious about this point, but she was correct. Our clients didn't need sympathy; they needed, and often desperately, understanding and genuine empathy. These virtues could be destroyed by uncontrolled subjective emotion. "You're not there to change people. You can help them change. If they don't want to, well, it's their life, not yours. Adults can live anyway they choose. The kids shouldn't have to suffer along with poor parental choices." Again, she was correct. It was difficult for the staff to always accept this, but it was nothing less than realistic.

"Ken, would you come in here right away?" Mrs. Quinn sounded like she was in a hurry.

"That case you gave me this morning will be a tough one. It looks like a lot of area resources could . . ." Before I could finish, Mrs. Quinn interrupted me.

"Later, Ken. Things have been booming here while you were out. All kinds of emergencies and I've got to give you another."

This was too much. "Wait a minute. Look, there's just too damn much. I . . ."

"Ken, I know what you've got to do, but you're not alone. We all have too much to handle. The other caseworkers have the same problems, the same kind of clients, and the same numbers of cases to deal with." She looked at me sternly. I had to agree. However, Mrs. Quinn did understand that the pressure could sometimes be unbearable. We all shouted sometimes. Tempers became short, but outbursts were accepted for the reactions they were.

The supervisor explained that an anonymous complainant

had called while I was at the Bronowskis. He alleged that a sick child was in a neighbor's house, and that the child's mother was "nutsy."

"Did he say what he meant by 'nutsy'?"

"No, that's all the information he gave besides the name and address." Mrs. Quinn handed me a slip of paper with "Mrs. Mildred Hartley, 104½ Peters Street" written on it. I thought that I heard her wish me luck as I left the office.

"Hey, Ken! Need a hand with your emergency?" Ron's offer was accepted gladly. I gave him the little information available, and we were on our way.

"If the complainant was right, it might take two of us to handle this call. I'm glad that you've got a few minutes."

"You're lucky. I had a client cancel a home visit, and the call I just went on was a crank complaint. Some neighborhood feud or something. Imagine a woman complaining about the care her neighbor's kids are getting just because the kids walk on her lawn." Ron seemed more relieved at not finding a problem in child care than upset over having been inconvenienced.

"There it is—104½." Ron had spotted the Hartley house. It was in a middle class neighborhood in the city. The lawns were manicured with pride, and evenings were spent with talk of the evils of crabgrass and taxes. The Hartleys lived in a cottage which had been built as an addition to an older, two-family house. It was an afterthought, but it was comfortable looking enough.

Walking down the driveway, Ron noted, "Ken, do you smell something?"

"Wait a minute, Ron." I took an antacid tablet. "This smells like the garbage dump I was in this morning."

"Maybe they're related." Ron smiled nervously.

I knocked on the screen door, but there was no response.

The inside door was open, and we could see a woman sitting in the living room. She was a very thin, middle-aged woman whose hair was uncombed and whose clothes seemed gray from age rather than intent. The woman was watching television in a room which bore a startling resemblance to the Bronowskis.

"Told you, Ken. Must be related."

"Come on, Ron. Damn, that stench is too much. No wonder a neighbor called. What is it?"

Ron shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, maybe death." Neither of us smiled.

I knocked again. "Mrs. Hartley?" The woman remained in front of her television.

"Let's go in." Ron looked reluctant, but nodded in agreement. We walked into the living room.

"Mrs. Hartley?" She turned and looked at us. "Mrs. Hartley, we're from Child Welfare. May we speak with you?"

"Oh my, go away. Don't take George. I didn't do nothin'. Why are you here? Oh! He's OK. I didn't do nothin'." She came to life suddenly and began to speak incessantly, uttering defenses and denials.

"Mrs. Harley, calm down. My name is Mr. Herrmann, and this is Mr. Baker. We are both caseworkers. Someone called us this morning and asked us to come out and see if your child was all right. The caller said that your son was ill."

Mrs. Hartley was now extremely agitated. She began to pace about the apartment. In a continual, loud monotone, she began again, "George is OK. He's slow, that's all. He's OK. Nothin' done wrong here. He's OK. My son is OK. I'm OK. Nothin' wrong so go away! I didn't do nothin'."

Ron and I followed her about as she spoke. "Mrs. Hartley, where is George?"

"Sleepin', mister. He's OK."

"Ken, I'll look for him."

"Wait a second, Ron. Let her show us." Then to Mrs. Hartley, "How old is George?"

"What? Sixteen. No problem. He's OK."

"Mrs. Hartley, I believe you, and you seem like a very nice person, but we would really appreciate it if you would let us meet your son."

"George? He's a good boy. He wouldn't do nothin' wrong."

"We're sure that that's true, Mrs. Hartley. May we meet him?"

She walked to the corner of the living room and sat on the couch. She became silent.

The apartment was chaotic. There were three rooms; a small bathroom, a kitchen with an old table and one chair, and a small living room with a couch, a television, a stuffed chair, and a floor lamp. Everything seemed old and musty. Dirt was not only in the form of grease and trash but it also seemed to pervade the very air. There was a sense of decay in the home. Mrs. Hartley's clothes were piled neatly next to the couch. They were filthy but neatly folded. Old pieces of bread, half-eaten, had been discarded on the clothing. Canned goods were lined up in an incongruously neat order on the kitchen counter. There were no cupboards. A closet door was closed next to the stove.

Mrs. Hartley sat silently and fidgeted. She seemed very distressed, and was obviously quite confused.

Ron whispered, "Ken, there's only one place the kid could be." He motioned toward the closet door in the kitchen.

"I know. There isn't anywhere else. Notice the smell?" I referred to the fact that the overpowering odor seemed to center around the corner of the kitchen where the closet was located. The door had taken on an instant air of mystery.



"Ken, is this stuff mud or human waste?" Ron had noticed the smears that covered everything.

I faltered, "I don't think it's mud."

The situation was charged by a few moments of silence. Then Mrs. Hartley looked at us with tears in her eyes. "George really is a nice boy." Her look was pleading. She slowly stood. As she agonizingly walked from the couch to the kitchen, she continued to tell us what a good boy she had. Her voice was much weaker now. She stood at the closet door. "George is sleepin', but I guess he'll have to wake up."

As she opened the door, a putrid odor of waste and rot filled the air with such an intensity that my eyes watered. The mother turned on a light. A single, bare bulb lit the tiny room which was furnished with an old army cot. On the bare cot lay an emaciated youngster. This was George Hartley. He was naked, and his arms and legs were nothing but flesh and bone. The boy's hair was long and matted. His eyes were large and staring. They had a strangely grotesque quality about them. He was barely alive, and the taut skin covering his ribs moved ever so slightly as he slowly breathed. Saliva ran from the corner of George's mouth and dripped from his chin. The child's innumerable bed sores hinted at the interminable time he must have been confined to this cot in the small room.

"Oh my God, Ken." Ron was shocked.

I was speechless for a few seconds. Then, "Ron, get the blanket from the car. We've got to get him to the hospital."

I turned away from the closet and went to the telephone. I had to alert the city hospital that we were coming. As I spoke to the nurse who answered, I noticed excrement on the receiver. I felt sick.

Driving to the hospital, Ron held George in his arms. The boy was wrapped in the blanket. The smell was revolting.

At the hospital we found that George weighed a mere thirty-four pounds, was mentally retarded, unable to speak, and completely unable to care for himself. His muscles had atrophied. His pulse was weak. The youngster was barely alive.

George's eyes followed the movements of the young intern who examined him. I could only remark. "You know, doctor, I wonder what he's thinking. Look at his eyes. They really seem alert, considering his condition. I wonder what he'd say if he could speak?"

The doctor surprised me. "Him? He's no more than a vegetable. There's nothing going on inside his head."

George stared at him and, then, closed his eyes.

I called from the hospital and arranged to have the mental health authorities visit the Hartley home. Mrs. Hartley was taken to the psychiatric ward at the city hospital.

"Thirty-four pounds and sixteen years old. Good Lord, Ken. It's almost unbelievable." Ron was no more upset than I. We returned to the Hartley home and spoke with neighbors after admitting George to the hospital. We waited just long enough for the doctors to tell us that he would live.

The neighbors had last seen the child a year before our visit. They did not seem to know what had happened to him. The mother was described as a bit queer but quite harmless. She usually kept to herself and shunned contact with neighbors. With the advent of spring and warmer weather, Mrs. Hartley had opened her door and windows. The offensive odor alerted the neighbors to a problem, and one of them had called in the complaint. He preferred to remain anonymous. We never did identify him. Through his anonymity he had preserved his privacy, but he had chosen to become involved just enough so that a life was saved, perhaps two lives.

Our discussion on the way downtown was mostly small

talk. "Ken, do you realize that it's four-thirty?"

"Four-thirty? Oh brother! All those things that I had to do today weren't even begun. I don't know how I'll ever catch up."

I dropped Ron at his car and decided to call it a day. Besides, I felt too dirty to go back to the office. On the way home, I realized that today was only Tuesday. I began to think of a schedule for the rest of the week. This was foolish since I knew that it never made any sense to schedule things because the unexpected always destroyed the schedule. "Three more days to go. Tomorrow I have to call Mary Howard's sister. The Bronowskis will be in at nine. I still haven't even looked at my messages from yesterday, let alone today." As I continued to make my way through heavy traffic, I remembered that Annie Walteson's funeral would be tomorrow morning. I wouldn't be there. Terminating service with a client was never easy for me; however, this way was always the most difficult. There was a feeling of guilt and a certain pathos when a client died like that, especially a client in whom I had invested so much. She had almost made it. So much had happened today, and what had happened to Annie was even more difficult to accept. At least, she had known that someone cared.

The phone was ringing as I entered my apartment. "Caught you sneaking home early!" Mrs. Quinn chuckled.

"Fire me, boss."

"Can't, we don't have enough people now. How did you make out on the Hartley case?" Before I could complete my description of what had happened, Mrs. Quinn interrupted me. "Ken, I know that it's ten to five, but this can't wait. I'm the only one in the office. The other workers are all out, and you're the only one I can locate."

I took an antacid tablet and poured a glass of milk as Mrs.

Quinn described the call from a Mrs. Johns, a rather distraught woman who had come home from the laundromat to find a young boy sleeping on her front porch. She took him in when he told her that he had run away from home. However, the child would give her no more information. Mrs. Johns called the police, and they had referred her to Child Welfare.

"Mrs. Quinn, do you know what I'm drinking?"

"Finish your milk before going on this call. Thanks, Ken. See you in the morning." There were times when Mrs. Quinn seemed positively psychic.

I passed my wife as I was leaving the apartment and explained where I was going. A kiss, "I'll wait dinner," and I was on my way to Mrs. Johns' home.

The home was in a middle class, black neighborhood. While ringing the bell, I was conscious of the work I had done during the day. However, dirt and perspiration made me feel worse than fatigue.

"You're from Child Welfare?"

"Yes, I'm Mr. Herrmann. Mrs. Johns?"

"Yes. May I speak with you a moment before you see the child?"

"Of course."

Mrs. Johns was an attractive woman, well-clothed and well-spoken. She described the circumstances of finding the boy, and her surprise and frustration. "After I called Child Welfare, I gave the boy some food, and he gave me more information. David is ten years old. He won't give me his last name or his address, but he did say that his mother has been beating him with a dog chain. He does have marks on his neck. The child told me that he ran away two days ago. He is very dirty and hungry. David is scared to death. I told him that you were coming, and he is afraid that you'll be taking him home."

"If what he says about his having been beaten is true, I won't be taking him home."

I followed Mrs. Johns into her apartment. David was sitting with his back to us.

"David, this is the social worker I told you was coming."

He was thin and very small for his age. His clothes were torn and very soiled. It obviously had been quite some time since he had bathed. When he turned to look at me from his chair at the table, he dropped his fork, slowly bent over, and put his head between his knees. He then fell to the floor. David had assumed a fetal position. He made no sound.

I walked quickly to the boy's side and knelt down next to him. Mrs. Johns was frightened, "What's wrong? What's he doing? Can I help?"

"Just have a seat and remain calm. David is OK. Aren't you, David?" His eyes were open, but he made no response.

For the next several minutes, I tried to assure the child that I was not there to take him home.

Finally, he whimpered, "How do I know you won't?"

"Will you tell me where you live?" He slowly shook his head. "Well then, how can I take you home if I don't know where you live?" He looked pitiful as he lay on the floor. I stayed next to him while he made his decision as to what he would do.

Finally, David slowly straightened out and stood up. He was shaking with fear.

"David, my name is Mr. Herrmann, and I'm not going to hurt you. I'm here to help you. Will you let me try?"

"Yes, sir." There wasn't much confidence in his voice.

"David, Mrs. Johns tells me that you've run away from home."

"Yes, sir."

"Would you tell me why you ran away?"

"Cause my momma hit me with a chain and things."

"What things?"

"An ironin' cord and a belt and a broomstick."

"Where did she hit you, David?"

"Here and here." The child pointed to a swollen lip and a black eye.

"When did that happen?"

"'Fore I ran away. I was late comin' home from school."

"And your mother punished you?"

"Yes, sir."

"David, don't be frightened. I won't hurt you, but would you take off your shirt for me? I only want to look at your back. OK?"

He pulled his dirty shirt over his head, and Mrs. Johns exclaimed, "Oh, look at that poor child."

David's back was covered with welts, lacerations, bruises, and scars. There wasn't an inch untouched. Further examination found that the ten-year-old was covered with these marks over his entire body from the neck down, including the soles of his feet. It was revealed that when David was to be punished, he first had to remove all of his clothes, and then his mother would beat him unmercifully until she had vented her anger. Finally, she would drag the battered child to a closet and would lock him in until the next morning.

While David dressed, I called the city hospital to tell them that I was returning with another case. David agreed to go with me, but he wouldn't trust me completely. He still withheld his last name and address.

The doctors readily admitted the child as "David Doe." "David, everything's going to be OK now. No one will harm you here. Isn't this better than being on the streets?"

"Yes, thank you, sir." He sobbed as the nurse took him to X-ray.

"Hold the dinner, dear. I need a shower more than food."

It was seven o'clock, and the day had finally ended. Sleep did not come easily tonight. My thoughts were of David, Mary, George and his mother, and the numerous other cases of human tragedy with which I had to deal.

# 3

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## WEDNESDAY

"Ken, Hattie Simmons is in the reception room. She said that she's been on a trip and that her mother took her kids while she was away. She'd like to have them back now, but she claims that she needs your permission." Joan was even smiling. I found it difficult to cope with that. Her moods were chameleonic, and I wondered what storm would follow the calm.

"She needs more than my permission, Joan. I won't return her kids yet, but I will give her a summons. By the way, thanks for the information. Did the receptionist say whether or not the Bronowskis are here?"

"No, just Hattie Simmons."

The Bronowskis were to be in at nine. They hadn't showed up yet.

The morning had been fairly quiet; quiet but not pleasant, for it had been mostly filled with dictation and paperwork. Talking into a little machine with its relentlessly whirling dictabelt for two hours was not exactly stimulating, but it was the recounting of cases that was upsetting. Each dictated paragraph was not just telling a story or listing details, it was reliving the experiences and emotions of a week all over again, but in only two hours. Following this came the



paperwork, the forms. Each case had its plethora of forms. They sometimes seemed necessary, but they were usually redundant. This was the bureaucratic aspect of my position. I was not only a social worker, but also a civil servant. Government demanded accuracy in filling out forms, not necessarily sound social work. We could be called on the carpet, usually Mrs. Tate's worn, blue carpet, for falling behind in paperwork, but not for failing to provide decent services to clients. It was common practice for the director to "ground" caseworkers who failed to keep paperwork up-to-date. This meant that a particular caseworker would devote all of his time to completing his forms and dictation at the expense of his clients. Forms came before clients. This, however, seemed to be typical of the functioning of many governmental departments. The forms and copies of forms and copies of copies of forms and copies of copies of copies of forms were what kept civil servants busy. However, we were supposed to be social workers, and this aspect of our job was professionally alien and emotionally frustrating. There were the K-12's, F-23's, CW-16's, B-212's, DSS-1012's, DSS-412's, etc., etc., etc. These were the pillars of the monolithic structure funded by the taxpayers. These stacks of paper were what an empire was built on, the welfare empire. The criticisms leveled against the welfare department spoke of waste and inefficiency. Completed forms were the weapons government used to combat these criticisms. "We are efficient. Our forms are completed." It would have been more truthful to say to the public, "We have our forms completed, but we haven't given you the service you are paying for. We have not hired enough qualified individuals to do an adequate job. Our caseworkers fill out forms with great expertise, and, oh yes, they also handle more cases than could be humanly expected. But the forms are finished." The system was in a mess

because of the seeming inability of government to foster humane service without wasteful, bureaucratic entanglements. Human grief and suffering too often were the end products of the welfare system. The specialists were not expected to perform well in their specialty, only to play the game of governmental inefficiency.

I remembered Mrs. Quinn reporting on Monday that Mrs. Tate had refused to back our efforts to increase the size of the staff. We had petitioned the commissioner, and, when that failed, the county executive. When several foster parents had met with the county executive in our behalf, he reportedly asked, "Is Child Welfare part of the county government?" We then petitioned the county legislature. They took their time to process our request. Meanwhile, Hattie Simmons was waiting in the reception room. She wasn't concerned with the agency's problems. She had enough of her own.

Mrs. Simmons was a large woman and usually displayed a rather surly attitude. This morning she seemed ready to do battle.

"Good morning, Mrs. Simmons. Would you step in here?" She used the title "Mrs." even though she had never been married. She felt that this would make her situation socially acceptable.

We took our seats in an interviewing room. Mrs. Simmons slammed her purse on the table with a loud bang. "OK, Mr. Herrmann, no nonsense, just give me my kids." Her look was one of absolute hostility.

"Mrs. Simmons, I want to talk with you. I won't give you any nonsense, but don't expect me to just forget everything that's happened. There are a few things that you're going to have to explain."

"Like what, honky? You just tell me the problem, and I'll give you the explanation."

"First, let me explain why your children were placed while you were away." I described her mother's telephone call and all the events which followed. I spent quite a lot of time describing Joey's need for medical attention after the discovery of his having been burned with cigarettes and his having been flogged with a belt.

Mrs. Simmons listened impatiently while drumming her fingers on the table. She looked at the ceiling and occasionally hummed a song. "Look, I said no nonsense. You think I'm stupid? My ex-mother explained what lies she told you, and how you claimed that Joey'd been hurt by someone. That's all the bullshit I want to hear. Just give me my kids, or I'll sue the shit out of you and this place." She stood as though she were about to leave.

"If you want your children, you're going to have to sit down and talk. Do you understand?" There were times when keeping my temper was difficult.

"No way, honky. You just bring my kids back to the house you kidnapped them from, and do it today."

"Mrs. Simmons, I'm sorry that you've chosen to be so unreasonable." At that I handed her the summons. "There will be a hearing tomorrow morning in family court. A judge is going to have to decide whether or not we will return your children to you. Since you won't talk with me, you'll have to explain things to a judge." She grabbed the summons and looked at it with disdain. "Do you have an attorney, Mrs. Simmons?"

"Hell, yes." She turned and stormed out of the interviewing room.

"You know, I could have avoided this hearing if she just would have accepted help. Damn!"

"What's that, Ken?" Marie came into the interviewing room with a client and interrupted me talking to myself.

"Oh nothing. I was just interviewing myself." I stood and walked back to the office.

The rest of the morning was spent returning clients' phone calls and coordinating cases with other agencies. Many of my clients were active not only with Child Welfare, but also with other social agencies, psychologists, or psychiatrists. Psychiatrists were used sparingly, not merely because their fees were inordinately high, but because we had found that social workers and psychologists were just as effective and, in many cases, more effective in helping clients to cope with or to overcome environmental, emotional, and other personal difficulties. Psychiatrists took an extremely long time to tell us that clients had problems when that fact seemed self-evident. Social workers and clinical psychologists took less time in helping the clients to deal with problems. These professionals lacked the status of the psychiatrist's M.D. but their M.S.W. and Ph.D. degrees were professionally adequate, and the clients who were helped were grateful that they had become happier and more self-sufficient in relatively short periods of time. Five years of psychiatric treatment was no better, and often was less worthwhile, than one year of counseling from a social worker. Other agencies frequently were used for such counseling because of the shortage of qualified social workers in our own agency.

"Ken, how about lunch?" Ron looked like he would have welcomed the end of the day more than just lunch.

I went with Ron and found the break relaxing. Our return to the office was put off for a few extra minutes, but there was too much to do to waste much time. I had to call Veronica Maxwell.

"Mrs. Maxwell, I'm Mr. Herrmann from Child Welfare. I'm calling in regard to your letter."

The young woman sounded pleased that I had called. "Yes, Mr. Herrmann, I've been waiting for your call. I spoke with

my sister, Mary, on Monday, after she had been placed in a foster home."

"I've read your letter, and I have a few questions."

Mrs. Maxwell elaborated on Mary's statements. She explained that she had finally decided to write us when Mary had called her to tell her that she was planning to run away because of the situation at home.

"I know that I should have notified the authorities long ago, but when I moved out last year, I just wanted to forget it all. I haven't spoken with my family since I left. Even my husband wasn't aware of what was going on at home until I told him last week about the letter I had sent to Child Welfare. What will happen now?"

"Your parents have a lawyer who apparently wants a hearing in court rather than our services. I've spoken with your sisters, Jean, Karen and Martha, but they say that everything is fine at home."

"Of course they would. They're scared. When I was home, there would have been no way that I would have told anyone what was going on. I'm nineteen now, and my father hasn't bothered me since I was about sixteen. I think that he was afraid that I'd get pregnant or would get him into trouble with the police. At any rate, I told him to stay away from me, and he did; but that didn't keep him away from the other girls. He did terrible things to us. I remember when he forced me to engage in oral sex with him. I was only ten or eleven. He hit me real hard and said that if I didn't do it, he would hit me again. I refused, and he knocked me down. After I'd consented and we were finished, he was very nice to me for a few weeks. Then it started all over again. This happened again and again."

"Did you actually see him do anything to the other girls while you were still living at home?"

"He always . . . I mean every night . . . walked into the

bathroom when my sisters were bathing. Usually he'd just stand there and look, but sometimes he'd tell them to stand up. There were times when he'd be in the bedroom with one of the kids, but when the door was closed, I never saw what went on in there."

"What did your mother do when these things were taking place?"

"You mean, when he was in the bedroom?"

"Yes."

"She was probably watching T.V."

"But she must have known about the things he was making you and the other girls do."

"She knew, but she just told us that he was our father, and that he could do whatever he wanted to do with us. Mr. Herrmann, my mother is living in the house, but she isn't. Do you know what I mean? She cooks and cleans, but rarely speaks with anyone. During the day, she goes for long walks or just sits in the living room and watches T.V. I don't remember her having a friend or going to a meeting or anything like that."

"Mrs. Maxwell, there will be a court hearing next week regarding this matter. Will you be able to come here to testify?"

She was quite willing to make the trip for the hearing. I explained that due to the type of allegations being made and our inability to adequately investigate, we were planning to ask the court to order evaluations of the parents in the court's psychiatric clinic. The request, also, was going to be made that the three girls at home be placed in temporary foster care pending the results of these evaluations.

"I hope that the girls will tell the truth to the judge."

"So do I, Mrs. Maxwell. So do I." The telephone interview was emotionally draining.

As I placed the receiver down, Joan stood at my desk. "The Bronowskis have come in. They're waiting in the reception room."

Mr. Bronowski was dressed in old work clothes. His hair was graying and looked windblown. He was stocky and sullen looking. His wife was nervous, but she made an attempt to be friendly and cheerful as she furtively glanced at her husband.

Mrs. Bronowski spoke first, after we had been seated in the interviewing room. "Sorry we're late, but we had to hitch rides into the city."

"You mean, you had no way to get here? I'm sorry. I wish you would have called. I could have arranged transportation for you."

"My husband won't take charity. We left at five this morning. We mostly walked, but a few people gave us rides. That's OK, Mr. Herrmann, that's how we usually get around."

Their sincerity and "let's get to the point" attitude with all of its incumbent honesty immediately caught me off-guard. Here was a couple who had subjected themselves and their children to years of living in physical surroundings unsuited for any human being, and they immediately impressed me with almost childlike forthrightness. The pathology expected was not presented.

I began with the intent to confront them with my observations. "Mr. Bronowski, I went to your home yesterday after . . ."

"I know. The sheriff called. We had a fight. In fact, a hell of a fight. Now, what should we do?"

"Clean up!" The words blurted out, but what else could I say? There seemed no reason to waste words.

"We did. Last night my wife and the kids and me, we cleaned up the place. There's more to do, but we made a good start. Want to see it?"

"Yes, yes, of course I would."

"OK, then, you give us a ride home, and we'll show you just what we did, and we'll tell you what we're going to do." Mr. Bronowski sounded quite self-assured.

"I'd be glad to do just that, Mr. Bronowski. However, I think we have to talk about a few things first. I'm glad that you've cleaned part of the house, but I'm concerned over how it got that way in the first place."

"I don't know, Mr. Herrmann. Look, I can see why we're here, and I know that things at home were bad, but they'll be better now. Me and my wife here, we talked a lot after I got home yesterday. I know that we almost lost our kids. We'll work real hard now to keep things decent."

"Mr. Bronowski, the problems that cause situations like yours take years to develop. They can't be changed overnight. Would you accept the idea of seeing a counselor with your wife to see if he can't help the two of you to find out what caused this situation and to help you to find ways of solving your problems?" There were several moments of silence. "You haven't been able to work things out up to now, and it's no reflection on you that you haven't. We all have problems when at some time or other another person can help us. The tough part is accepting the fact that we need help and then to ask for it."

"You too? Do you go to a counselor?"

"I ask for help when I feel that I need it."

He was troubled. Mr. Bronowski was aware of the agency's power in this situation, and he felt the incredible enormity of the complex problems that his family faced. However, he had to deal with the feeling of pride in the rugged individualism



which he had always held dear. Accepting help might mean that he was a failure. Too often we encountered those who seemed to feel that being parents presupposed an adequate knowledge and competence in parenting; that being married presumed an innate ability to succeed in all facets of marriage; and that not to have this knowledge or ability or competence threatened one's self-worth. People frequently forgot the fallibility of being human. The offer of counseling was often more threatening to a client than the serving of a summons.

"How long would this counseling take?"

"I don't know. It might take a few months or a year. You would work that out with your counselor."

"Well, you're not making it sound too easy."

"That's because it isn't going to be easy at all, Mr. Bronowski. As a matter of fact, it's going to be very difficult."

After a period of silence, "It won't be too difficult for the Bronowskis. Right?" He looked at his wife. She nodded in agreement. They accepted the offer of counseling as the challenge it would be.

We made arrangements for counseling at a family service agency in the city. That agency agreed to find time in a volunteer's busy schedule to provide transportation for Mr. and Mrs. Bronowski in order to get them in for their appointments and back home again. The next time they came into the city, they wouldn't have to hitchhike.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was getting late. "Mr. Bronowski, it's past three o'clock. I'm sorry, but I won't be able to take you home. I'll have one of our homemakers give you a ride if that's all right."

"Sure. Fine. Would she like to see what work we did last night?"

Having focused on the necessity of counseling, I had for-

gotten Mr. Bronowski's emphasis on the family's work in cleaning last night.

"Mr. Bronowski, I'd like to see what you've done, but I can't this afternoon. Tomorrow is the day I spend in court, but Friday would be OK. Is Friday morning convenient for you?"

He smiled and shook my hand. "Good, Friday's real good. Maybe we can finish by Friday. We'll see you then."

As I walked into my office, I noticed two little girls standing next to Marie's desk. "Hi girls! How are you?"

Marie answered for them, "We could be better, Mr. Herrmann. Right, girls?" They nodded in agreement. Marie held the younger girl's hand and said, "This is Susan. Suzy is five and very frightened." The little, blond-haired girl hid her face behind Marie's shoulder. "And this is Suzy's big sister, Annie. Annie is six." The two children clung to each other for protection and security. They were quite well-clothed and very clean. The attractive children were frightened and confused.

"Relatives or clients, Marie?"

"Well, it seems that Suzy and Annie live with their mother in Edgebrook." Edgebrook was an affluent, suburban community bordering on the city. "This morning the girls went to school just like they always do, and their mother walked them to the school bus just like she always does. At two o'clock the school bus took them home. However, here is where we come in. No one was home when the kids got there."

"Do you mean that the school called us in because the kids' mother was out when they returned home from school?"

"No, not exactly. You see, the furniture was gone, and the food was gone, and the clothing was gone, and Suzy and Annie's mother was gone. She had moved."

"Everything was gone?"

"Uh huh. Neighbors say that the moving van came at nine and left at eleven-thirty, destination unknown."

"Damn! That's incredible, Marie. What about the girls?"

"No notes or anything. No one seemed to know that the mother was moving. There are no known relatives and no friends. The mother was not very social. I guess we'll have to use foster placement. The police are checking with the moving company."

"Marie, if you need any help, let me know." I looked at the two small children. They were helpless, abandoned, and at the complete mercy of the strangers they saw about them. We knew little about them, but we knew how they felt. Marie and I and all of the caseworkers fought against the gradual hardening process which afflicted persons dealing with the abused, abandoned, and destitute. You repressed your feelings so that you could eat and sleep, and you sometimes had to fight a growing, emotional callousness.

Annie and Suzy were two of the hundreds of abandoned children we had cared for. Children had been left in parks, department stores, churches, and at the door of our agency. We had placed three children in foster homes just two days ago after they had been found in a bus station with a note from their mother. She felt that she could no longer care for them. No other explanation was given. There was the infant only a few hours old who had been left at the door of a city church. There were the two children abandoned at the city zoo. There were the seven-year-old twins who had been deserted in our reception room by a crying and despairing mother. The parents of these children were never found. Others were, but not all of these children who had been abandoned out of a parent's inability to ask for or to accept help returned home. Some parents never again regained the

capacity to care for their offspring. Some children developed neither the ability to understand the weakness of their parents nor the capacity to forgive an irresponsible act on the part of a frightened, discouraged and emotionally crippled parent. Annie and Suzy were only two out of the thousands of children in our nation who had been deserted by parents unable to cope with their own problems, let alone guide and nurture their children.

The little girls had been left for others to love, and others would love them. Foster parents would accept them into their home with an eagerness and affection which would eventually win the love of the children. However, the foster parents would never be able to completely replace their real parents. There would be an emptiness which no surrogate could ever fill.

After taking two antacid tablets, I answered the phone. The voice sounded almost boasting, "Mr. Herrmann, my name is Georges. I live next door to the Johnson family you're supposed to be working with. There's something that you should know."

The caller went on to describe the problems of which I was already aware. His adjectives seemed stronger than necessary, but his description was accurate. He apparently had been keeping a close watch on his neighbors.

"Mr. Georges, thank you very much for your concern, but I'm already aware of the lice, the school problems, and the condition of their apartment. Mrs. Johnson is working very hard to make things better. It hasn't been easy for her with ten children to raise alone."

"Sure, but she ain't alone."

"What do you mean, Mr. Georges?"

"It's her husband. Do you know Mr. Johnson?" The father of the family had been missing long before I had received the

case. His whereabouts were unknown, and a warrant had been issued for his arrest by family court because of his failure to pay support for his wife and children.

"I've never met the man, but do you have information you'd like to give me?"

"Would you like to meet him?"

"Mr. Georges, what are you trying to tell me?" He was becoming exasperating.

"Well, for the last hour or two, there's been screaming and yelling at the Johnson's, and Mr. Johnson has been doing most of it."

"Thank you, Mr. Georges. Thank you very much."

Mr. Johnson fathered ten children. Teddy, the first, had been illegitimate, and the two families arranged a marriage. When he worked it was at odd jobs, and it was purported that he was involved in various illegal activities. Occasionally he would be missing for a few weeks, and, then, he would return home with no explanation. For the last nine months, he had been missing. Mrs. Johnson had decided that he had left for good this time. I had wondered how much of this was wishful thinking on her part. Her husband had a drinking problem and had frequently beaten her when he was drunk. This was all I knew about him.

As I drove up to the Johnson home, I wondered if I would finally have the opportunity to meet the infamous Mr. Johnson. I also wondered what effect his return would have on the recent and long overdue progress his wife had made. Perhaps his return would motivate the family to make more improvements, an added incentive as it were. However, his return might cause the family to revert back to its previously disastrous, lethargic routine. At any rate, I was eager to meet Mr. Johnson.

I heard crying and screaming as I walked up the stairs.

"Mrs. Johnson, it's Mr. Herrmann. May I come in?"

- Teddy, the ten-year-old, opened the door. He was sobbing.

"Please help us. Please!"

I entered the apartment and found it in shambles. The furniture was overturned. Clothing, broken lamps, smashed dishes, and litter everywhere. The children were screaming.

"Teddy, where is your mother?" He pointed to the bedroom off of the kitchen.

I made my way through the debris in the living room and in the kitchen. Mrs. Johnson was bending over the bed. "Mrs. Johnson, what happened?"

She turned toward me with tears in her eyes. She was disheveled and had a black eye. A trickle of blood ran from the corner of her mouth. "Please, Mr. Herrmann, please help my children." She began to cry.

I looked past her and saw six-year-old Jimmy, the child who on Monday had been so proud as he guided me through their clean apartment. He had a bloody face, and he quietly wept and moaned. "Jimmy, Jimmy, what happened to you?"

The boy turned his face toward me, "My daddy was real mad at me."

Mrs. Johnson grabbed my arm, "Please help us. He'll kill us."

"Mrs. Johnson, sit down on the bed next to Jimmy. I'll get help." I called the police and then my office. Mrs. Quinn agreed to send another caseworker to help me.

While I waited for the police, I looked after the other children. The seven-year-old girl had a bruise on her arm, but the other children were in good physical condition. Their father had returned today. He was drunk when he stumbled into his home this afternoon, and he demanded that his wife give him the money she had left from her welfare check. When she told him that she had paid the rent and had purchased food with the rest of the check, he became furious and

began to search for the money he accused her of hiding. As he tore apart the apartment, Mrs. Johnson followed him about. She pleaded with him to stop. Mr. Johnson punched her in the mouth when she refused to leave him alone. At that, Jimmy ran at him. His father threw the boy to the floor and kicked him in the face. He then grabbed the next closest child, the seven-year-old, by her arm, picked her up and threw her into a chair. Mr. Johnson left, not having found what he came for. I arrived only a few minutes after he had driven away.

I took Jimmy to the hospital. He was admitted with broken teeth, a broken nose, and facial bruises. Another caseworker drove the family to a shelter provided by the Salvation Army for mothers and children who found themselves homeless. When the caseworker left Mrs. Johnson and the children, they were still badly shaken, but, at least, they were assured that they were safe. The police issued a bulletin for Mr. Johnson. He had disappeared again.

On my way back to the office, I felt anything but empathy for Mr. Johnson's behavior. I felt anger and fury, but no empathy. The man was an alcoholic with severe emotional problems. My professional response probably should have been to hope that he could be found so that he could be helped. My gut reaction was to want to see him punished, punished as severely as possible. I hated him for what he had done to Jimmy, his wife, and the other children, and, I suppose, for what he had done to himself. The two antacid tablets I had taken after leaving the hospital didn't seem to help. I felt sick to my stomach when I thought of Jimmy in the emergency room. As the nurse carefully cleaned his face, she asked him how he had been injured.

Looking at her from the examining table, Jimmy told her, "My daddy kicked me."

The nurse looked at me, shaking her head. When she

brushed the hair off of the boy's forehead, he smiled at her. She quickly kissed him and left the room.

Jimmy looked at me. "I hope my daddy dies, mister." He began to cry.

Children are not the only victims of beating and physical abuse. Thousands of women every day are brutalized by hostile and sick husbands. The courts listen daily to tales of beatings of wives who are unable to prepare a meal on time or who have failed to clean the house as expected or who have failed to fulfill the expectations of an over-demanding husband.

This, however, is not considered criminal assault. Beaten wives have only one recourse. That is to petition family court for a separation and an order keeping their husbands away from them. Unfortunately, this is rarely enough to protect them. If a man would beat someone outside of his family, he would go to jail. Wives, it seems, are fair game.

The other workers were leaving as I walked into the office. Mrs. Quinn was on her way out the door. She stopped me on my way in. "Did you leave the Johnson family with the Salvation Army?"

"The family is at the shelter. Jimmy's in the hospital, but he'll be OK. He had a broken nose, lost a few teeth, and was badly shaken; but they're all badly shaken. The police are looking for Mr. Johnson. They said that they'll arrest him on the outstanding support warrant."

"Say, you look like you've had it. Why did you come back here?"

"I have court tomorrow, and I'd better make sure that I have everything ready."

"OK, but don't stay long. I'll see you tomorrow. Good night, Ken."

Looking over my schedule, I saw that I had four cases in



court on Thursday. Hattie Simmons' case would be heard. The other three cases had been in court for some time. If Mr. Johnson would be arrested, he, too, might appear before a judge tomorrow. After organizing my material for court, I turned off the lights and locked the office.

While making my way through traffic, I thought of Jimmy and his mother at the hospital. My stomach was still upset.

## 4

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# THURSDAY

I remember when I had just begun to work in child protection. Going to family court was novel, exciting, and rather interesting. It was still rather interesting.

In the beginning we acted as our own attorneys in court except in the case of lengthy trials. It was rare that we would lose a case because the judges had granted us a margin of freedom in legal rules and courtroom procedure. We carried far fewer cases then, and those we brought to court were well-documented and well-prepared. However, the number of abuse and neglect cases eventually began to increase, and all of our time was required for casework, and no time was available for playing lawyer.

The county finally assigned an attorney to handle our cases for us. He wasn't working full time on Child Welfare matters, but he spent as much time as possible. Norm Lewis was a young, politically appointed, assistant county attorney. He was upset over our lack of legal prowess, and he was astounded over the success we had had in court without legal assistance. The court was less patient with us now that we had an attorney. We no longer escaped bills of particular and motions and objections and the fine points of the law.

The informality of family court proceedings became a

thing of the past. This court was once a forum for decisions involving social and family difficulties. The family court had allowed discussion and mutual input from all sides on a rather informal basis, but this was no longer true.

Family court was to be concerned with family problems, and it was to help, not to punish. The court became more punitive and more demanding. This was not the fault of the judges. They tried to maintain a difficult balance between judicial decorum and fatherly intervention into family problems. Their caseloads also had grown out of control with an increased jurisdiction and with the accelerated deterioration of family life. There were days when each of the five judges in this court heard over fifty cases.

Societal changes and added pressures on families caused more separation, more abuse of wives and children, more neglect of parental duties, and a general breakdown of family life. With all of this, some social scientists had come along to tell us that this social reaction was healthy. They called the traditional family a thing of the past; something we should be happy to see go. The people who sat in the waiting rooms of family court didn't understand the good times the so-called experts spoke of so glowingly in their magazine articles. Here there were tears when families were broken apart, no hopeful smiles of good times to come. When delinquent children were taken off to a detention cell or a state training school, no one felt that a new age was approaching. No one in family court could accept the deterioration of the nuclear family as anything other than a sign of possible societal desolation.

Child abuse and neglect cases were heard in family court. These were civil cases. If you beat someone on the street, you were taken to criminal court and tried for assault. You might go to jail. If you beat your child, you were taken to family court and tried for the civil offense of child abuse. There was

neither a fine nor a jail sentence attached to a conviction. The most serious verdict would be the temporary removal of a child's custody from his parents. The reasoning behind this was understandable. If the parents beat their child and were convicted and sent to jail, what had been accomplished, other than retribution? When the parents would be released from jail, they would not have been helped with whatever it was that originally caused them to abuse their child. They would be likely to repeat their offense. Their actions were not premeditated and viciously planned for any sense of self-gratification. They were usually perpetrated out of frustration and psychosocial pain. These acts were self-degrading and committed out of anger and desperation. Most abusing parents were not sick but, rather, ill-suited to a role and, quite often, they were the victims of emotional problems that they had found to be both baffling and terrifying. Perhaps they had been abused as children, and they were acting instinctively. Perhaps they were acting out of rage. In any event, there were few who had planned their actions, and there were few who delighted in a child's torment. Sadists existed, but they were the minority of abusing parents.

There was a provision in the law to refer cases of child abuse to the criminal court. This had been done, but rarely. Our cases did not often call for such action. The goal was to rehabilitate problem families and to reunite family units as soon as possible after children had been removed to protect their welfare. Helping parents to resolve their conflicts created healthy homes. Jailing disturbed parents would ensure broken homes and would guarantee that children would be raised in foster care or in institutions.

The court was crowded today with child neglect, child abuse, support, and juvenile delinquency cases. Family court was divided into five courtrooms, each with its own waiting

room. The hearings were confidential; therefore, the courtrooms were closed to the public. Each case waited its turn. They were called when the judge who was hearing the petition was ready. With today's volume of cases, we would probably have to wait quite awhile.

"Hey, Ken!" Norm Lewis looked tired this morning. He wasn't only the attorney for my cases but, also, for the four or five other caseworkers in court today. "What cases do you have today?"

I listed them for him. "Simmons, O'Hara, Jacobs, and Gorman. Simmons is here for the first time. I want a temporary custody order. The others are trials."

"OK. I think I have the paperwork on those." He quickly searched through a large stack of records and papers which he carried with him. "Is there anything that I should know that you haven't sent me?"

"If you have my petitions and court summaries on each of those cases, you have everything you need. If you get a chance, I'd like to talk with you about each case before we go before the judge."

"If I have time, we'll talk." He rushed down the hall to another part of the court. I smiled, thinking of how Norm had seemed to think that his job would be easy. That was when he had first started to work for the county. Actually there were times when he seemed to have little to do, but, in general, his was a harried lot.

My cases were all in the same courtroom today. Usually it was necessary to rush from courtroom to courtroom. My clients for the morning session had already arrived. Mrs. Simmons and Mr. and Mrs. O'Hara sat angrily in the waiting room. They glared at me as I walked over to the clerk to sign in.

The O'Hara family was one case which I had hoped I

would not have to bring to court. For three months, I attempted to involve them in family counseling and to get the parents to let their daughter return home.

Joann O'Hara was fourteen and an only child. She was bright, but she had found her freshman year in high school troublesome. Her parents argued constantly. They both had a drinking problem, and Joann had been finding it increasingly difficult to tolerate the situation at home. She had tried, but school counselors and neighborhood friends could not help her to cope with her parents' late night drinking bouts and their constant screaming at each other. The teenager finally took matters into her own hands and ran away. After receiving the case, I made repeated efforts to improve the situation, but it was all fruitless. Court action seemed the only recourse. The parents were being charged with child neglect. They refused to accept help for their drinking problem, and they would not readmit a daughter who had fled emotional anguish but who had now decided to return home.

My first interview with Mr. O'Hara was over the phone on a Friday afternoon three months ago. The police in a small town south of the city had picked up Joann. She had been found sleeping in the back of an abandoned truck in a field. The girl refused to give them her name, age, or home address, and they called Child Welfare. I drove out to speak with Joann. After an hour, she told me her story. However, she was frightened that she would be sent home. After speaking with her father, I was able to dispel her fear.

"You want me to come and get that bitch? Listen to me, Mr. Social Worker. My wife and me, we got too many things to worry about without that bitch around. She thinks that she has all the answers. You know what? She even went to some place called "Alateen" to learn how to live with us. She thinks we're alcoholics. How does that hit you? Imagine that!

She thinks that we got problems. You just tell those police to lock her up. We ain't takin' her into our home, and that's it."

Reasoning was useless, but I tried. I tried for three months. Joann, at the age of fourteen, knew enough to seek help from the proper community resource. "Alateen" was a group of children of alcoholic parents. They were learning to understand their parents' problems and how they could help them. Joann's parents were too involved in their drinking problem to see what it had done to themselves and what it was doing to their daughter.

Joann stayed in foster care during this time. She was doing well. School marks improved, and her attitude brightened. However, the girl missed her parents, even with their drunken fighting. She cried at night.

Today we were seeking custody of Joann. I hoped that the judge would order her parents to receive help. They might not follow through, but, then again, they might.

The clerk waved at me from his desk. The waiting room was quite noisy. Occasionally a deputy would come out of the courtroom to tell everyone to quiet down.

Mort had been a clerk for Judge Marsh for the last nine years. He was both efficient and understanding. The people who waited to be called for a hearing told him their problems. They spoke for hours. He listened sympathetically and played the role of confessor rather well. He was used to the noise and confusion of crowded waiting rooms, and I often wondered if he wore earplugs. Mort's desk was piled high with court records and petitions. "Say, you have four cases today. Two this morning and two this afternoon. They're all before Judge Marsh. Are you ready to go on the, hmm, let's see, the Simmons and O'Hara cases?"

"Everyone's here, Mort. Whenever the judge is ready."

"He's got a couple of cases he wants to hear first, but they

won't take long. You should be in there in just a few minutes. I'd find Lewis and get him down here if I were you."

"Thanks, Mort."

I found Norm Lewis as he was leaving a trial before Judge McCarthy. He was shaking his head in disgust, and he obviously was angry.

"Norm, we're just about ready to go in before Marsh. What happened in McCarthy's court."

"Ken, they don't need lawyers in that man's court. They need sick comedians."

"What did he do now?" Judge McCarthy was known for his, to say the least, questionable behavior on the bench. His final decisions were usually considered just, but the way he handled himself smacked of theatrics. However, his courtroom was closed, and the public was unaware of what went on during his hearings.

"Listen to this." Norm was still upset. "I just had a juvenile delinquency hearing. The fifteen-year-old stole a car. Second offense. No doubt he did it. McCarthy gets this kid to approach the bench. He tells him to stand up straight and to look at him. The kid's got long hair, so McCarthy tells him to get a haircut. Then he tells the kid that he doesn't like hippies in his court. The kid's scared and shaking all over. McCarthy says, 'Are you flexible?' Well, the kid doesn't say anything. 'I asked if you are flexible?' McCarthy is screaming at this kid. The kid says, 'Yes, judge.' What's he going to say? He's not about to disagree with the judge at this point. So McCarthy grins at him and says, 'Well, that's good because you might as well bend over and kiss your ass goodbye. Deputy, take him away.'"

"Are you kidding me?"

"Is the pope Catholic?" I followed Norm to the waiting



room where my clients awaited justice.

Mort finished speaking with a deputy and called, "Simmons! All those for the Simmons case, the judge is ready for you." Norm and I followed Hattie Simmons and her mother into the courtroom.

The judge sat looking at us as we took our seats. Judge Marsh was a stern looking figure in his black, judicial robe. He handled cases with expediency and a literal, legal point of view.

"I have a petition before me filed by Child Welfare. It alleges that a Hattie Simmons' children are neglected under the law. The allegations note that on May 14 of this year, the Simmons children were left without supervision and that their mother was unlocatable at the time. Is Hattie Simmons here?"

"I'm here, your honor." Hattie was well-clothed, and she was well-mannered today. She was presenting herself as a responsible mother who had been wronged by the evil welfare department. "My mother is here with me, your honor. She'll back me up."

"Fine, Mrs. Simmons, but first, listen to the rest of this petition. It goes on to allege that Joseph Simmons, age four years, has suffered from emotional rejection by his mother which has resulted in an inability to speak, an inability to be toilet trained, and an inability to interact with others in a normal manner. It is further alleged that Joseph was hospitalized on May 14 of this year with multiple scars and marks about his face, neck, arms, legs, stomach, and buttocks. These scars and marks were resultant from cigarette burns. The aforementioned child also exhibited lateral scars and wounds of the lower back, buttocks, and both legs from apparent beatings with a belt. The petition charges that these

wounds were inflicted on the child while he was in the legal care and custody of his mother, Hattie Simmons. Mr. Herrmann, where is the child now?"

"He's still in the hospital, but he'll be ready for discharge on Monday, your honor."

"Mrs. Simmons, you have the right to an attorney to represent you here, but I see that you have no attorney with you."

"Judge, I don't want a lawyer. Those things that Child Welfare says are all lies."

"Just the same, I would advise that you get an attorney. The county is charging you with child maltreatment. If you can't afford an attorney, this court will appoint one for you."

"Can I ask questions myself?"

"Yes, of course, but an attorney would be best."

"I'd like to go on with this right now if that's OK. I really don't want a lawyer."

"That's up to you, Mrs. Simmons. Let the record show that Mrs. Simmons has waived the right to an attorney in this matter in spite of the court's urging that she be adequately represented." Judge Marsh looked at Norm. "Mr. Lewis, is the county ready to proceed?"

"Yes, your honor. I call Mr. Herrmann."

I was sworn in, and I proceeded under Norm's questions to unfold the Simmons' story. During my testimony, Mrs. Simmons stared at her mother. The grandmother of the children sat looking at the floor. When Norm was finished, Mrs. Simmons chose not to reexamine.

"I call Mrs. Ruth Simmons to the stand." Norm seemed confident, but I couldn't share that confidence after having observed the nonverbal communication between the mother and the grandmother while I testified.

"My name is Ruth Simmons. I'm Hattie Simmons' mother." She was quite nervous.

"Mrs. Simmons, you are the grandmother of the children named in the petition?"

"Yes, I am."

"Did you call Child Welfare and speak with Mr. Herrmann on May 14?"

"Yes."

"Would you tell the court what prompted you to make that call?"

"Well, well, I thought there was a problem with Hattie's kids." She seemed upset, and she stared at the floor as she moved restlessly in her chair.

Hattie spoke out. "You tell them where it's at now, woman."

The judge looked angrily at Hattie. "Mrs. Simmons, please be quiet. You will have an opportunity to ask your mother questions."

Norm walked to his chair and sat down. "Mrs. Simmons, what did you feel was the problem with your grandchildren?"

"Mister, it was all a misunderstanding. Hattie, she went to visit a relative in another state, and I'd agreed to watch her kids for her. But I'd forgot that."

"You were babysitting for your grandchildren?"

"Yes, that's it. But, you see, I forgot that when I called the welfare."

"Mrs. Simmons, you are under oath."

"That's the truth, mister."

I shook my head in resignation for what was to come. It was obvious that Hattie had intimidated her mother, but the grandmother was our only witness.

She went on under examination to tell about how it was her fault that the children had been alone and that her daughter had rushed home after the children had been placed.

We had no case. The grandmother's story was obviously

fabricated, but it was on the record, and she swore to it.

After Norm's summation and Hattie's refusal to say anything other than to claim her innocence, the judge spoke. "I find it difficult to believe the conflict in child care arrangements described by Ruth Simmons. However, no factual evidence to the contrary has been presented. Doubt has been cast over Hattie Simmons' ability to provide adequate care for her children, but not enough doubt has been generated to warrant the removal of custody from the mother. However, in the case of Joseph, I don't feel that he should return home at this time. Therefore, the petition on behalf of all of the Simmons children is dismissed with the exception of Joseph Simmons. I remand him to the temporary custody of the county until a date next month. At that time a trial will be held in this court to determine the custody of said child."

Leaving the courtroom, I approached Ruth Simmons. "Why, Mrs. Simmons?"

"I don't want to die, mister. That girl would kill me. She really would."

Hattie walked up and looked at me with a triumphant grin. "He's as dumb a honky as you are, social worker." She laughed and left the waiting room. Her mother meekly followed her down the hall.

Mort called me to his desk. "Say, do you want me to tell the judge what that woman said after she left the courtroom?"

"Mort, the judge knows what game she's playing. It's just that my testimony wasn't enough without the grandmother's. We'll just have to wait for next month's trial and see what happens."

The deputy came out of the courtroom. "O'Hara!"

Taking my seat in the courtroom, I looked at Judge Marsh. He looked almost apologetic.

The procedure was the same followed in the Simmons

hearing. Mr. O'Hara spoke in reply to the judge's question about the validity of the petition's allegations. "Lies, judge, all lies, except the part about us not allowin' Joann to come back home. That's damn true. She didn't want us, so we don't want her. Let her stay in the foster home."

Judge Marsh acted expediently. "Do you wish to consent to the court entering an order of child neglect, Mr. O'Hara?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Mrs. O'Hara?"

"I agree with my husband."

"Mr. and Mrs. O'Hara, I find your daughter, Joann O'Hara, to be a neglected child, and I place her in the custody of Child Welfare." Both parents stood and began to leave. "Just one moment." The judge was angry. "This hearing isn't over yet. Sit down." The parents sat in the nearest chairs. "Mr. O'Hara, do you and your wife have a drinking problem?"

"No, judge." He cowered at the judge's show of emotion.

"Do you, Mrs. O'Hara?"

"No, I don't, judge."

"Frankly, I don't believe you. Do you realize that you have just given away the custody of a daughter who would like to help you? You say that she doesn't want you, but you're dead wrong. According to her caseworker, she loves you both very much, but neither of you seem capable of returning that love. You had better cooperate with Child Welfare in order to expedite the return of Joann to your home. In fact, I order the two of you to cooperate with any counseling plans established and arranged for you by Child Welfare. In six months I want you back here in this courtroom. I want a progress report from Child Welfare, and I want your daughter here for that hearing. That's all."

Outside the courtroom, Mrs. O'Hara wept. I approached

the parents. "I'll send you a letter setting up an appointment for next week. We'll arrange for visiting with Joann and for counseling for the two of you."

They nodded in agreement and walked off down the hall. Somehow I felt an incongruous confidence as I watched them leave. I had a feeling that the O'Hara family might be reunited before the next court hearing in six months.

I noticed Mort waving at me. "Ken, the judge has postponed the Jacobs and Gorman hearings until next month."

"He did what? Why?"

"The Jacobs' attorney is ill, and the Gormans' attorney is out of town. Sorry."

Delayed hearings were a hazard of the judicial system, a common aggravation. It was not uncommon for a case to last six months to a year or more in court due to postponements gained by attorneys. However, family court was more expedient than criminal court. Defendants in criminal cases might await trial while they sat in jail for a year or more. Civil suits took years before they were heard in court. The entire system was overburdened.

As I walked down the hall on my way to the elevator, I saw Marie sitting in the waiting room of Judge McCarthy's court.

"Marie, are you waiting for McCarthy's fairness, justice, and display of forensic skill?"

She glowered. "I have a real winner of a case, but I think that I know what will happen when we go in there. These parents put an ad in the newspaper's classified section giving their eight-year-old daughter away."

"They did what?" I hadn't heard of that case, and I was surprised, to say the least.

"They advertised for someone to take their kid. A couple in their town answered the ad, and the parents delivered the

girl without question. They dropped off all her clothes and toys and other belongings. They didn't even say goodbye. Here, do you want to see the ad?"

Marie handed me a page of newspaper classified advertisement. Circled in red was an ad which read, "Wanted, couple to provide loving home for eight-year-old girl. Not troublesome, is healthy, and intelligent. Write immediately Box 40A, Gazette Express."

"This sounds like an ad for someone with kittens or puppies to give away." I shook my head in amazement.

"No, they kept their dog. The girl's school principal brought the matter to our attention. I went to the home, and the parents wouldn't even talk with me. They just said that they had adopted her five years ago and that they never really loved her. They gave me an envelope with all of the documents which pertained to her, and then they asked me to leave."

"That's it?" I was shocked at the cold cruelty of the entire episode.

"Just about, but I went to the school. The teachers told me that the girl came to school with cuts and bruises occasionally. She told them that her parents beat her, and they told the school principal.

"The bus driver told me that the child threw up on the school bus last winter. The girl hadn't put away her toys, and her mother made her swallow some small plastic letters. The bus driver told the principal."

"What did the principal do?"

"Not a damn thing. He didn't want to get involved. Finally, however, he did give us a call. I guess that the physical abuse was all right, but when the girl was given away, he decided that he'd better do something."

"How is the girl?"

- "How do you think? She was abandoned and, then, adopted. Following that she was beaten for a few years and then given away to a pair of strangers. The girl is angry, confused, and generally miserable."

"Marie, good luck."

"The child needs it more than I do, but it shouldn't be too much of a problem today. The parents have agreed to consent to our being granted custody. They don't care what happens as long as they don't have to take the child home."

At that, Marie was called into the courtroom.

I took a few minutes for a lunch break before returning to the office. It was a sunny day, and a stroll through the shopping center on my way back to the office would be a welcome break in routine. I found Ron in the book store. "Looking for a dirty book?"

"Sure, but this looked better." He was holding the *Travel Guide to Western Europe*. There was enthusiasm in Ron's voice. "Look at that architecture! The wife and I might just see that someday."

We perused the travel literature and fantasied an escape from the everyday problems everyone faced and the unique problems with which child protection workers tried to cope. We wandered among the books.

I paged through a collection of Stephen Crane's works. "Ron, did I ever tell you that my undergraduate degree was in English?"

"No, but that makes you as suited for this work as most of the rest of us. Why didn't you teach?"

"I did for almost four years, but I found it too confining."

"At least, this work isn't dull."

"No, not at all. I can't call it dull." I found what I was looking for. "Did you ever read Crane's *War Is Kind*? It's Crane's book of free verse."



"No, the *Red Badge of Courage* and a few of his poems, but not that one."

"Listen to this: 'A man said to the universe: Sir I exist! However, replied the universe, The fact has not created in me a sense of obligation.' The thing that really eats me up inside is that there are people who take that literally and don't give a damn about other people."

"Isn't that what Crane meant?"

"No, I don't think so, but maybe he did. I'd like to think that he was telling us that man has an obligation to the universe, to all others, and that the universe doesn't have an obligation to mankind."

Ron smiled. "Say, you're getting pretty profound. Maybe you should take a civil service exam for senior philosopher. It might be better than being a senior caseworker."

"Yeah, sure. Let's go." The entire week was building emotionally. I felt like breaking down. Ron joked on our way back to the office, and his humor made things easier to take. However, inside I was churning.

Mrs. Quinn was busy talking on the phone. The other social workers were out of the office working on cases. Joan was out to lunch. Ron had been stopped on his way back to the office by a client in the reception room.

"Hello, Ken." I was surprised to see Mrs. Tate sitting in Marie's chair. "I was waiting for your supervisor to get off the phone, but I'll give this case to you since you happened to be here. Go out on this right away." She handed me a small sheet of white paper with notes scribbled on both sides.

I was rather baffled by the names and addresses with no other explanation excepting an odd word or two. "Mrs. Tate, what is this all about?"

"It's all there for you to read." She actually seemed offended by my question. "A Mr. Netzer called. He told me

that there is a Fuller family at 4872 Post Road in Edgebrook. He says that he saw Mr. Fuller in the front yard kicking his four-year-old son. Mrs. Fuller took the boy into the house, and Mr. Netzer hasn't seen any of them since. Go check it out." She stormed out of the office.

I called Mr. Netzer to verify the complaint. The only thing which he could add was that Mr. Fuller had just left the house in his car. Mrs. Quinn was still on the phone. I left her a note telling her where I was going.

The Fuller home was in a new development in the northern section of Edgebrook. Its lavish exterior and elaborate landscaping fit in well with the other large homes in the development.

As I rang the doorbell, I quickly swallowed two antacid tablets. A well-dressed woman in her middle twenties opened the door. She had been crying.

"Mrs. Fuller?"

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Fuller, I'm from Child Welfare."

"What do you want?" She seemed to be struggling to maintain her composure.

"Mrs. Fuller, we had a call that your son had been injured. I would like to talk with you and your husband if I may."

"My husband has gone out. He won't be back for a while. Could you come back later?"

"No, I would like to talk with you now, and I have to see your son."

"Billy is taking a nap, and I don't want you disturbing him."

"Mrs. Fuller, may I come in?"

"Show me your identification." I showed her my identification card. She seemed even more nervous now. She choked back some tears.

Mrs. Fuller showed me into her home. We sat in the living room.

"Mr. Herrmann, I don't know who called you, but this whole thing borders on the ridiculous."

"If there is no problem, please let me see Billy. I'll be on my way if he's all right."

I could feel the tension in the room. Mrs. Fuller looked at me with an attempt to show her strength of will, but after a brief moment, a tear showed in the corner of her eye. She began to cry.

"Mrs. Fuller, I might be able to help."

"It, it's my husband. He has these spells. The doctor gives him tranquilizers, but lately they don't seem to have helped at all."

"What did he do to Billy?"

"This afternoon, Jack lost his temper when Billy refused to come into the house. Jack beat him." She wiped away some tears and cleared her throat. "Billy is upstairs. I'll take you to him."

I followed the mother to a bedroom on the second floor. The child was lying on the bed. He was small for four years, but an attractive youngster. His blond hair was cut in a modish manner and it seemed to frame his small facial features.

"Billy, this man is a friend. He came to visit you."

"Hi, Billy, how are you?" He had a black eye and bruises on both arms. "Mrs. Fuller, Billy is going to have to see a doctor. I'm going to have to take him to the hospital. You can go with us."

"Jack will be furious."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know." Her composure was gone now. She looked emotionally and physically depleted. "When he has these

spells, he goes out and drives around for a few hours, but he always comes back."

"We'll leave the phone number for him where we can be reached." I wrote the number of the emergency room at the city hospital. "Billy, can you stand up?"

He looked at his mother. She reassured her son. "It's OK, Billy." He got off the bed, but he seemed to be in pain.

"Where does it hurt, Billy?" He pointed to his stomach. "Mrs. Fuller, was he kicked in the stomach?"

She nodded and left the room.

"Mommy!" Billy began to cry.

"Come on, Billy, let's go with your mommy."

Mrs. Fuller wrote a quick note for her husband, and we left for the hospital after I had called the emergency room to let them know that we were on our way.

Mrs. Fuller held her son in her arms during the ride. "What will happen now?"

"Billy will be examined at the hospital. He'll probably be admitted. Then, I'd like to have a talk with you and your husband."

"Will Jack be arrested?"

"No, don't worry about that. The police won't be involved."

"He's really a good father, but he needs help. He didn't mean to do this, but he can't always control himself."

"I believe you, Mrs. Fuller, and I'll try to get him the help he needs."

"God, I hope it will be all right."

I tried to alleviate her concern, but I sensed that she wasn't really listening to me.

"Jack really loves Billy, but he needs help. He really needs help."

I waited with the mother in an empty examining room

while Billy was in X-ray. She sat quietly and ignored my attempts at conversation.

A nurse entered the room. "There's a Mr. Jack Fuller in the waiting room. He's asking about his son, and he wants to know where his wife is. I told him that I would find her." Mrs. Fuller looked frightened.

"Mrs. Fuller, don't worry. It'll be fine. I'll talk with him. Nurse, thank you. I'll take care of it."

Mr. Fuller was a man of average height. He was in his middle thirties, well-groomed, and sharply dressed. He was pacing about the waiting room.

I identified myself to the nervous father and asked him to come with me. Another examining room seemed best for the interview.

"What is going on here? Where is my wife? How is Billy?"

"Mr. Fuller, I know what happened this afternoon. Billy is in X-ray, and we will go to your wife in just a few minutes."

"What do you mean, you know what happened? Maybe I should call my attorney."

"You may if you wish, but nobody is talking about court at this time. Mr. Fuller, I want to help you."

"Good. You can help by leaving us alone."

"So that you can lose control again and beat up your son?"

The words stunned him. He sat down in the nearest chair and stared at the floor. He held his head in his hands. There was a long silence, and then, "What can I do? I didn't want to hurt him, but . . . oh, I don't know. It's almost like someone else takes over. I might have killed him."

"Has this happened before?"

"Yes."

"Have you told your doctor?"

"Yes. He gives me tranquilizers. When they don't help, he gives stronger ones. That helps for a while."

"Mr. Fuller, Billy will probably be admitted, but we will have to wait until the doctor sees his X-rays. Let's join your wife."

Mrs. Fuller was apprehensive as we entered the room where she had been waiting. Mr. Fuller looked just as frightened. They sat next to each other.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fuller, if Billy isn't admitted, he will have to stay with a relative or in a foster home for a while, at least until we can be sure that he'll be safe at home. That means that you are going to have to get some immediate help, Mr. Fuller."

"Jack, please, I don't want Billy taken away." She was frantic.

I tried to calm her. "The last thing I want to do is to take away Billy. We are only talking about temporary placement."

Mr. Fuller spoke quickly. "I'll do anything. For a long time, I've been thinking about going into the hospital again. Maybe now's the time."

"You've been in the hospital before?"

"Maybe three or four times in the last seven years. A few nervous breakdowns. When the pressure gets too much at work or at home, this happens and I just go to pieces. I own a clothing store, and things are pretty competitive. Lately, things have been hectic."

"They have a psychiatric section here. I would recommend that you be admitted right now."

"Let me talk with my wife for a little while." I left them alone.

While they were trying to sort out their problems, I spoke with the doctor who had examined Billy. He told me that the little boy had suffered no serious physical injury, but that he would be admitted for a few days for observation. We also discussed Mr. Fuller's possible admission to the psychiatric ward. The doctor agreed to do all he could.

"Mr. Herrmann, I'm staying here. I just hope that they'll be able to help me. If not, I don't know what will happen."

"Worry about that after talking with the people here. They'll be able to help you."

"What about Billy?"

"He'll be admitted for observation. The doctor says that Billy will be all right." They looked relieved.

Mr. Fuller was admitted to the psychiatric ward, and I drove Mrs. Fuller back home. "Do you have a relative or a friend with whom you could stay for a few days?"

"Yes, but I need some time alone. I have a lot to think through. Thanks for everything."

"I'll stop by on Monday, and we'll talk. The hospital should be able to say something about your husband's condition by then, and Billy might be ready to come home."

Mrs. Fuller shrugged her shoulders and stepped out of the car. She was anything but hopeful as she left me. Her frustration and sadness were readily apparent as she walked up the sidewalk which led to her front door.

I wondered on the way home if the universe did owe anything to people like the Fullers. Even with all of their apparent affluence, they somehow were poor. They seemed to have been shortchanged in life.

## 5

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### FRIDAY

As I walked up the path which led to the Bronowski home, I noticed wild flowers which I hadn't noticed earlier in the week. Their bright colors formed a strange contrast with the drab tar paper and lumber patchwork on the exterior of the shacklike home.

Mr. Bronowski walked toward me. "Hey, welcome. It's a beautiful day out, isn't it?"

"It sure is, Mr. Bronowski."

"Come up to the house." We walked slowly. "I called the family service people and talked to Mr. LePage. He's gonna counsel the wife and me. Sounds like an all right guy. My wife and me have been really doin' a lot of work around here. We been doin' a lot of talkin', too. Don't get me wrong. Everything isn't perfect, but for the first time since I can remember, we can smile once in awhile. I wanted to tell you that before you go in, and I want to tell you somethin' else. My wife is really anxious about you bein' happy with what we've done. I know we still have more to do, but . . ."

"I understand. Don't worry. I'm already happy with what I've seen. Your attitude toward this whole situation is enough for me."

In fact, what I saw inside the house reinforced my optimism. The family must have worked night and day. The



trash had been removed. Floors had been swept. The horde of flies had disappeared, and the broken furniture had been repaired or thrown out.

Mrs. Bronowski was obviously anxious to please. She was so excited about the work they had done that I thought she would burst with pride. "You don't know how much we've done. Some men from town fixed the septic system just yesterday. They said that it was in need of cleaning. We got a good price, too. We've been working all the time. Even the kids helped out. Their laughing and carrying on helped make the work easier."

The home was still in need of improvements. There still was no bath or shower. They needed hot water, and the stairs were quite dangerous. A good coat of paint would help, but the Bronowskis had obviously been making a herculean effort. Their goal was to avoid losing their children, and, in working toward that goal, they were growing together. They had begun to discover hope, but they had only begun. I could only encourage and motivate for a number of months. Once the situation was fairly stable, I'd have to close the case. That would be the real test of success. Without the child protection worker, I wondered if they could continue to grow. I hoped that they would remain in counseling after our involvement ended.

"We're really glad you could make it. Can you come back next week?"

"How about next Wednesday at the same time?" Actually, I had already scheduled a visit for that time.

"OK. Wednesday it is. I got some paint, and it should be done by then. Thanks for comin' out. Have a safe ride back."

"Thanks, Mr. Bronowski. I'll see you next week. Remember, if you need help out here, just give me a call. I'll send out all the volunteers you need."

"Naw. We can do it, but thanks anyway."

I had driven to the Bronowskis directly from home this morning. It was better than going straight to the office. Before leaving, I called the office to arrange for a homemaker to transport the Simmons children from their foster home to their mother's home. I doubt that I could have taken Hattie Simmons' acid tongue today.

"Good morning, Ken. I'd like to see you as soon as possible." Mrs. Quinn was with Ron.

"Just a minute. I'll be with you as soon as I can."

I had several messages on my desk. Mr. Gould, the Howards' attorney, had called. He wanted to know when we were taking his clients to court. He must have been eager to earn his fee. I wondered if the Howards had received their summonses for next week's hearing. The city hospital had called about David Doe and George Hartley. They were ready for discharge, but they would have to wait until Monday. Mrs. Johnson called from the Salvation Army. She wanted to know if her husband had been arrested. I wondered if the police would ever find him. There were several calls from clients who wanted to arrange visits with their children, to come to the office to talk about innumerable problems, or to ask for help in cutting welfare red tape which had created one crisis or another. Betty Morton had called, wanting to visit her children.

"Joan, would you please check with our record room and find out who Betty Morton's caseworker is? I had her case Monday morning on emergency service. She, apparently, hasn't been contacted by anyone from the agency since then."

Joan grumbled, but she did give me the name of the social worker who had received the Morton case. Her cheerfulness rarely lasted more than one or two days.

The caseworker was Jerry Dow. I called him. "Jerry, I had a call from Betty Morton."

"Oh, yes. You handled her case over the weekend. Look, I just got her case today. What did she want?"

"The name of her caseworker. She also would like to visit her children."

"OK. Give me her phone number, and I'll call her right away."

It was not unusual for cases to take several days to be assigned to a protection caseworker. A complaint which was accepted by the agency went through bureaucratic entanglements before reaching a caseworker. It went through the intake worker, the intake supervisor, a series of at least three clerks, the district supervisor, the caseworker's supervisor, the unit secretary, and, finally, it was received by the caseworker who would handle the case. We had sixteen caseworkers to service all of the child abuse and neglect cases in a county of one and one-half million people. This included a city of four hundred thousand. Betty Morton's case was one of over one thousand dealt with at any one time by our small staff.

I went to see Mrs. Quinn. Ron had left her while I was talking on the phone. "Your humble servant is here."

"Sit down, Ken. Did you see Ron?"

"Yes, when he was with you earlier. We haven't had a chance to talk at all."

"Last night, one of the children on his caseload was killed."

"Oh, brother!"

"To make it worse, Ron was going to place the boy in foster care today."

"What happened?"

"Mr. Williams threw his six-month-old son, Seymour, down the stairs at about one this morning. He was arrested for manslaughter. The baby was crying, wouldn't stop, and I guess the father went into a rage."

"Damn! And Ron was going to get the kid out of there today. How is Ron?"

"I saw him first thing, and I've spoken with the other case-workers. I'd like everyone to be supportive. It's the first time this has happened to a child from one of Ron's cases."

"Sure. Of course." I knew how Ron must feel. When a child with whom we had been working died, the social worker felt somewhat responsible. While we couldn't be held responsible for all of the children in our community, our job was to protect as many as possible. Seymour Williams was one of several children who had been killed by a parent in our county this year. The public would read the newspapers this morning and would shake their heads. A few might be angry. Very few would be aware of the thousands of children killed each year in our nation who are never reported by the news media.

Child protection agencies jealously guard the confidentiality of their files. Only when the police are called in is a case made public. Even then, it might not be considered newsworthy. Most of the child abuse murders are not considered newsworthy. Most of the child abuse murders are not reported as homicides. Our records reflect the true story.

Yesterday, Ron had helped to partially alleviate my occupational depression. Today, he would need help.

"Also, Ken, I have another case for you. We had a call from Maureen Driscoll, the school social worker at West River Elementary School. She has a fifth grade boy, Martin Blaine. He was beaten by his mother this morning. She'll keep the boy in her office until you get there. His sister is already in a foster home. She was placed as an abused child last year."

"How old is she?"

"Three years. The mother beat her with her fists, and the child now is permanently brain-damaged."

I spoke with the caseworker for the Blaine girl. She told me that Mrs. Blaine had been seeing a psychiatrist and that the doctor had just sent a letter to the agency informing us that Mrs. Blaine had been making good progress. The worker also noted that Mrs. Blaine was a very uncooperative client. Visiting with her daughter was sporadic and contact with the woman had been difficult.

At the school, Mrs. Driscoll took me to see Martin. He was a cute, freckle-faced, ten-year-old.

"Martin, this man is a social worker, too. I'd like you to tell him what caused those marks on your face."

The boy had lacerations of the face and neck. Welts covered his cheeks and forehead. He had two black eyes. These wounds were fresh. There were old bruises on his arms. His clean white T-shirt seemed incongruous with these signs of maltreatment. The school bus driver noticed his condition when Marty boarded the bus this morning.

"Marty, what happened to you?" I swallowed two antacid tablets.

The child seemed puzzled over our concern. "My mother hit me with a belt 'cause I was bad this morning."

"Did you get hit with the buckle end of the belt?" The lacerations were typical of a beating with a buckle. After a time, we were able to identify the weapons used to beat children by the types of wounds inflicted.

"Yes. My dad's belt."

"What did you do that was so bad, Marty?"

"I left the water runnin' in the bathroom. My mother told me to turn it off, but I forgot 'cause I was late for the school bus."

"Marty, I'm going to take you to see a doctor so that he can fix up those cuts. OK?"

"Sure, mister, but the last time I didn't have to see no doctor."

"When was the last time?"

"A couple a weeks ago, I guess."

Mrs. Driscoll interrupted the conversation. "The week before last, Marty came in with those bruises on his arms. I had a talk with his mother about it."

"She must have really beaten him if those bruises are two weeks old. What did she say?"

"Well, you see, Martin is a rather difficult child to control, and his mother had punished him. She agreed never to do it again."

"I guess she broke the agreement. Did you report the incident?"

"No, I felt that I could handle it, but when he came in today looking like this, I felt that I should call it in."

"Mrs. Driscoll, the law mandates that even suspected cases of abuse should be reported."

"I know that, but I could never call in all of the cases. Besides, I'm a social worker, too, you know." She seemed insulted.

"I realize that, but if you had followed the law, Marty might not look like this today. That's why there are agencies to deal with this type of problem. That's why the law was enacted."

"Mr. Herrmann, are you questioning my competence?"

"I'm questioning your judgement." I turned to Marty. "Let's go, Marty. We'll go see my friend, the doctor."

"Just one minute." Mrs. Driscoll was angry.

"Not now. Let's worry about bruised egos another time. Right now I have a victim of physical abuse to worry about. I'm not going to stand here and argue with you. Maybe this incident will convince you that you should do what you're paid to do, not what I'm supposed to do. If you want to complain about my attitude, call my supervisor. Good-bye, Mrs.

Driscoll." She reddened with rage and stormed out of her own office.

Marty and I drove to the hospital. The child was given a thorough physical examination and a complete set of X-rays.

The doctor was concerned. "This child has been abused regularly." He pointed to an X-ray. "These white spots indicate old fractures. His arm was probably broken on two different occasions. That was quite awhile ago, but the fractures were healed without medical attention. The boy has old scars on his back and observable bruises on his arms. All of that plus his facial welts, bruises, lacerations, and neck lacerations. This is topped off by two shiners. The kid has had quite a going over for a long time. Any idea who did it?"

"It looks like his mother. Marty's younger sister was placed as an abused child, too. Mrs. Blaine beat her with her fists."

"This boy wasn't beaten that way. It looks like the old wounds, from that peculiar shape and intensity, were inflicted with a belt. The fresh marks are from the buckle end of a belt."

"That's what Marty said."

"We're going to admit him for observation. Those black eyes he has concern me, but he should be all right."

The Blaine home was the only house on the block which needed paint. The lawn hadn't been mowed in months.

Mrs. Blaine admitted me after I had told her why I was there.

"I don't understand. Martin was just fine when he left home this morning." She was a very heavy woman in her middle thirties. Her print housedress hung on her body like a tent. Beads of perspiration ran from her brow, trickled down her neck, and disappeared beneath her dress.

"Mrs. Blaine, Marty took the bus to school. He was picked

up in front of your house and was dropped off at West River Elementary. The driver took him to the school office because he was concerned over the marks on your son's face."

"So?" She looked puzzled.

"So, he must have been beaten before he left home this morning. Marty claims that you beat him with your husband's belt."

"He's lying."

"Is the bus driver lying, too?"

"He must be. Maybe, he's mistaken." She lit a cigarette. "You people took away my other kid for no reason. Now you're trying to finish the job."

"Mrs. Blaine, your daughter was placed in foster care because she had been beaten to the point where she was brain-damaged. Now your son has been beaten. The hospital reports that he has been beaten regularly over a period of time. The school social worker told me that you admitted beating Marty the week before last."

She finally showed emotion. Her reply was angry. "She did what? See, you can't trust anybody. Driscoll told me that she wouldn't tell." She threw her cigarette into the kitchen sink and lit another. "OK. You take Martin. Do whatever you want. Just leave me alone."

"Mrs. Blaine, I . . ."

She held her hands up to silence me. "No, no more. Get out of my house. I don't want to hear any baloney about me needing help. My psychiatrist tells me that I'm just fine. You think that I'm nuts. I don't want to hear anymore."

"Mrs. Blaine, I don't think you're nuts."

"Don't you hear me? Get out, damnit!"

I left the house. As I walked to my car, I could hear Mrs. Blaine cursing and shouting something about meddlers and do-gooders.



I returned to the office and called her psychiatrist. He thanked me for describing the day's events. The doctor termed Mrs. Blaine's behavior a possible setback in therapy. His tone was highly clinical. "She has made sufficient progress to care for her children properly, but we have to expect a reoccurrence of symptoms now and then."

"We can't chance a reoccurrence of abuse now and then."

"No, of course not." He was tolerant. I was irritated.

Making a few notes of the interview, I noticed Ron. He was filling out forms.

"I see that you're wading through some paperwork."

"Right, I have to put the Williams case together. Tate wants to see Mrs. Quinn and me. I already feel rotten and she's just what I don't need."

"There wasn't anything you could have done."

"I know that, but just the same. I guess she has to have answers for the commissioner and the press."

"Don't let her get to you, Ron. When Marie lost that little girl she was working with last month, she told off Tate after the woman blamed her for the child's death."

"Say, I know it wasn't my fault. This morning I wasn't so sure, but I've given it a lot of thought since I heard the news. Now all I have to do is to convince the director."

Joan called me from her room. "There is a client for you in the reception room, a Mrs. Alvarez.

I had forgotten that Mrs. Alvarez was coming in. The appointment was made last week, and I had neglected to write it on my calendar.

The Alvarez family had been referred to Child Welfare by the school authorities. The two children, Natzul, age six, and Alejandro, age seven, were rarely in school. When they did go, they were never prepared, and they usually were quite

hungry. The teachers made it a practice to give the boys breakfast when they came to school. Mrs. Alvarez was a widow. Her husband had been killed in an industrial accident one year ago.

My first visit to the Alvarez home was fraught with communication problems. Mrs. Alvarez spoke little English, and I knew only a few words of Spanish. I had found the family pet interesting. They called him Pedro. Pedro had a collar around his neck, and the boys would take him for walks about their apartment. Visitors would be given peanuts to feed the pet. I remembered my surprise at being offered a few peanuts by Alejandro just after I had introduced myself to his mother for the first time. She explained, "It's for to feed Pedro." I had wondered who Pedro was. Alejandro had taken me by the hand and had led me to the attic.

Natzul was singing a song and holding onto Pedro's leash as we entered. Both boys were quite proud of their bird. Their mother had smiled at their excitement as I fed the pigeon Alejandro's peanuts. "Is just a pigeon, mister; but is cheaper than a dog or cat. The kids think is wonderful." The boys beamed.

Mrs. Alvarez was an easily excited woman. Today, she was explosive. After we had been seated in the interviewing room, she broke into a stream of Spanish.

I stopped her. "Please, Mrs. Alvarez, I don't understand."

"OK, Mr. Herrmann. My money is stopped. I no have food."

"You mean that public assistance stopped your check?"

"Si. I no understand why. I call them. They say I no come in for to do something."

Welfare recipients were required to report to the department every six months in order to have their financial status verified. This was intended to decrease fraud and to readjust

public assistance grants according to need. Some welfare clients neglected to report or they missed their appointments for various reasons. When this happened, their public assistance grants were stopped.

"Mrs. Alvarez, you should have gone to the welfare office to have them review your grant for you." I wished that my Spanish was adequate enough to explain the problem to her. We had no Spanish-speaking caseworkers in our division, but we had many Spanish-speaking clients. "You wait here, and I'll try to straighten this out for you."

"I no have food for my kids."

"You will have. Wait here."

I returned to my office and called the public assistance division. After making five calls, I finally located the person handling the Alvarez case. I explained the family's plight. The response was that she would have to reapply for aid. She would have to start all over again. This seemed ridiculous, since the department already had all of the information they needed. The application process was tedious, long, and involved. I asked to talk with the worker's supervisor. The supervisor told me that his worker was mistaken. All Mrs. Alvarez had to do was to come to the public assistance office today and her grant would be started again. They would allow her to fill out the necessary forms immediately. If it was so difficult for me to find the person who was handling the Alvarez case and, then, to get the proper information as to what she should do, I could understand why clients found the welfare system puzzling, frustrating, and degrading.

Mrs. Alvarez seemed relieved. I told her that I was concerned about her children not going to school regularly and their seeming lack of food. She told me that they were bored at school because of the language barrier. The more she spoke, the clearer it became that she had been keeping them

home because of her fear they would be injured or harmed by a hostile environment. The boys were all she had left. Two months after arriving from Puerto Rico, her husband had been killed at work by a fall from a high walkway over molten steel. Since that time, she had been isolated. I told her that I could arrange for someone to work with her who could help her cope with what she felt to be a threatening situation. The food problem seemed to result from her poor budgeting. I offered the aid of a Spanish-speaking homemaker to help her with her budgeting problems. She was delighted.

I called the Neighborhood House in her section of the city. They agreed to send a Spanish-speaking social worker and a homemaker to help the Alvarez family. Mrs. Alvarez left me and hurried off to the public assistance office to rectify her financial dilemma.

Mrs. Quinn was sitting at my desk. She was sullen.

"Where did everybody go?" The office was empty.

"It's four-thirty on a Friday. What would you expect?" Most of the caseworkers made it a point to make home visits on Friday afternoon. They were able to go directly home after their calls. "Joan is in the record room, and I told Ron to go home early. I'm upset about the latest referral we've received."

"How come? It's become so damn routine getting new cases that I don't think any of us even care how many we get anymore. It's like drowning in fifteen feet of water or fifty feet of water. What's the difference? You still drown."

"Well, this case is weird. It came from the Internal Revenue Service. The agent came in today with the complaint. It seems that a father sold his kid for \$300 and listed the money on his tax return as 'income from sale of child.' The boy is three years old."

I looked at Mrs. Quinn in disbelief. "He sold his son and noted it on his tax return?"

"He sure did. We know the name of the couple who bought the child, but nobody knows where they live. Maybe Marie will never find the boy and the people who bought him."

"Marie?"

"She's getting the case. The case she had in court yesterday of the eight-year-old girl who had been given away has been transferred to the foster care division. Judge McCarthy granted us custody. She closes one case, and she gets the next one that's referred to us. This is the case, but she'll do a good job with it."

I sat in Marie's chair. "How did the Williams conference go today?"

"We detailed the case for the director. She listened, took notes, and glared at Ron and me. Finally, she told Ron that the baby would still be alive if he had been more efficient."

"She blamed him for the baby's death?"

"Oh, yes. She not only blamed him, but she also accused me of poor supervision and dubbed the entire protection staff irresponsible."

"We're understaffed, overworked, deluged with paperwork, given no useful training by the agency, sent out to cope with an uninformed public, and our own director calls us irresponsible? This is one hell of a way to make a living."

"That's what I told her. She told me that if I didn't like it, I should quit."

After several minutes of silence, Mrs. Quinn said, "I'm ready to retire. Maybe now is the time. I think that I've just about had it."

I probably should have been more reassuring and supportive, but I wasn't able to be. "That's not a bad idea. I can retire soon, too. Only thirty more years."

My supervisor laughed. "Good luck, Ken. Right now, I'm going home. Have a good weekend." She stood and slowly began to walk to her office to get her brief case. "By the way,

Maureen Driscoll called me. She said that you were mean and nasty to her this afternoon."

"I was. What did you say?"

"I was mean and nasty to her, too."

I smiled. "Thanks, Mrs. Quinn. You have a good weekend, too."

She walked out the door. The phone rang. It was five minutes to five o'clock. I hesitated, but I answered it.

"This is Children's Aid, Mr. Herrmann. The social worker who was to have been on emergency service this weekend is ill. He won't be able to work. You're the last one I called because I know that you worked last weekend, but no one else is available. We're really in a predicament. Could you possibly be on call this weekend?"

"I've really had a bad week, and last weekend was hectic. I need a weekend off and. . . . You've called everyone else?"

"Yes, everyone. No one is available."

My reply was reluctant. "All right. Let the answering service know that I'll be on call." The secretary from Children's Aid thanked me.

I was exhausted, and I wondered how effective I would be this weekend. Hopefully, it would not be too busy, but I realized that my optimism was more fantasy than reality. It was always busy lately.

I passed Joan on the way out. "Have a good weekend, Joan."

She grumbled. "Can't wait for Monday." She was always there to cheer up a depressing situation.

The traffic was light on Friday afternoon. My theory was that most of those who worked downtown left early on the last day of the week. It made for a longer weekend. The toll collector on the expressway smiled as I gave him the fifteen cents. The radio announcer was cheerful enough.

"I'm home, dear." It was a relief just to be home. Even if I would have to take emergencies, at least, it was the weekend and I was away from the office for awhile.

My wife was in the kitchen. "Hi! Before you sit down, are you on call this weekend?"

"Yes, the worker who was scheduled is sick. I took over for him."

"I wondered because the answering service called. I told them that you would call back as soon as you came home."

I called the answering service. "We have a complaint for you from the city police. They have a six-year-old boy at Precinct #20. His mother was arrested for. . . ."

I missed hearing the rest of her message. My thoughts were of Pedro the pigeon. I laughed.

"Mr. Herrmann?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. I was thinking of a pigeon. What was the message?"

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## EPILOGUE

The reader may be interested in what happened to the people he encountered during this week of child protection work.

Betty Morton eventually entered a mental health hospital. After a brief stay, she began a series of outpatient visits for drug detoxification and psychotherapy. Her children were eventually returned to her custody. Mrs. Morton secured work, and her parents became involved with her and her children and helped them through a number of minor crises.

Mrs. Johnson left the Salvation Army shelter and returned home. Her husband was never found. The home situation deteriorated over a period of months, and the children were eventually placed in foster care. Little hope was held that they would ever return home.

The Howard case went to court. After two hearings, the petition charging the parents with abuse and neglect of their daughters was dismissed for lack of evidence. Mary never returned home. She finished high school and began a life of her own. Her sisters remained with their parents. They moved from our county shortly after the court hearings.

Hattie Simmons left her children with her mother after a brief period of living up to her responsibility as a parent.



Several years later, she was arrested for murder. She may still be in jail. At any rate, her children remained with the grandmother. However, Joey did not return home. After his hospital stay, he went to a foster home after the court had adjudged him an abused child.

George Hartley survived and was placed in an institution for the mentally retarded. He remains there. Mrs. Hartley was committed to a mental health hospital. Her present status is unknown.

The Bronowski family temporarily made great strides toward improvement. However, Mrs. Bronowski abandoned her family after she and her husband stopped going for counseling. The children were placed in foster care. To the best of my knowledge, Mrs. Bronowski has never been located.

David Doe soon received a last name. His mother was found, but she refused to accept the idea of her son returning home. David remained in foster care.

Suzu and Annie, the abandoned sisters, were returned to their mother after she was located in another state. The mother made great efforts to overcome multiple emotional and environmental problems. She was successful, and the family was reunited.

Joann O'Hara never returned home, but her parents conquered their drinking problem. They, then, began to reestablish a relationship with their daughter. The girl is now living on her own.

Mr. and Mrs. Fuller eventually divorced. Billy went to live with his mother. The present whereabouts of Mr. Fuller is unknown.

Marty Blaine was found to be an abused child by the court. He was placed in foster care, and, later, he was placed in the custody of relatives. Continued efforts to involve Mrs. Blaine

with her children while they were in care were fruitless.

The Alvarez family's situation improved considerably. Mrs. Alvarez and her sons remained together.

Mrs. Tate and Mrs. Quinn retired from the agency. Ron left the department and took employment elsewhere, not in the child protection field. Marie left social work and became a happy housewife.

The agency remains. The staff eventually increased in numbers, but the volume of cases grew faster than new case-workers could be assigned to their positions. The situation is becoming more desperate.

Judge Marsh and Judge McCarthy still preside over cases in family court. Norm Lewis continues to serve the needs of the agency.

The names used in this book are fictitious, and efforts have been made to protect the identities of the individual characters. However, these efforts in no way have detracted from the validity of the situations presented and the factual quality of the cases described.

How widespread is the problem of child maltreatment? The American Humane Association's estimates for 1973 run from 250,000 to 2,500,000 children each year in our country who are abused. The number of neglected children (i.e. abandoned; inadequately fed, clothed, or sheltered; given inadequate or no supervision; or exposed to habitual parental abuse of alcohol and drugs) runs well above these figures. Each year the statistics are growing at an alarming rate.

Our future is determined by these figures. Studies and experience have shown that children who are abused and neglected often become parents who abuse and neglect their children.

The problems we have encountered in this book are not unique. They exist throughout our country. Your responbil-

ity is to improve the services given to the Georges and the Davids and the Joeys. The social workers who live with these problems are hired by you to correct inadequate child care, but this does not free you from the responsibility to become involved. Merely shaking your head and saying, "Isn't it a shame," does nothing. Becoming involved when you are made aware of a child maltreatment situation could save a child's life. Agencies need volunteers to assist in the development and operation of adequate child protection programs. If nothing else, you can write a brief letter to your legislator urging him to fully support the development of social agencies and comprehensive legislation which will be geared to combat child abuse and neglect. You can visit your local child protection agency and make an assessment of the quality of services the families in your community are receiving. How many of you are aware of or even know the name of your local child protection agency and how to contact it? The police and the local school should be able to give you that information.

The belief that child maltreatment is just another social problem which can be ignored may condemn millions of American children to the horrors of parental brutality. Admittedly, this is not a pleasant subject, but it is a reality which demands the involvement of everyone, not just professionals. The lack of personal involvement in the effort to meet this problem with all of the skills, compassion, and tools available is a condemnation of the very humanity of those who are elected in our country to positions of authority and those who cast the ballots which determine who will hold these positions. Children cannot help themselves—they need you.

Increased public awareness, genuine public concern, and the public's demand for action will result in a substantial

reduction in the incidence of child abuse in our country. It is the public's responsibility to combat this problem. You are the public.

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