

21 June, '26. Job by wire. Mary Y. Doubts the company her husband keeps. Wants me to track down a man going through Taycheedah on the Chicago Line, one M. Erwin Fritzel. Cagey, but easy to track. Follow him to Hotel Retford on the 22nd; meets with well-dressed man (dandy?). Payment received, \$25 + \$10 for expenses.

Thumb-worried pages are flipped over and back and over.

29 June - another wire from Mary Y. Wants me to look into and speak with suspected Bolsheviks. Two men, traveling through Fond du Lac en route to Milwaukee. Ernest Harker and Phillip Palmer. Per instructions, direct them to a studio called "Linden Street Arts". Contrary to instructions, hang around to watch them. Nothing. Payment received, \$25 + \$20 more for "a job well done".

Several pages are turned in chunks, comparing and contrasting.

6 Nov - Mary Y. again. Her second time by the office, and the fifth gig. M. Sedgwick. Harassed her husband? Stays at the Retford. Nothing. Payment received - \$50, and another fifty in an envelope signed Bonus. The Dandy was there.

The flutter of paper. An absence of case notes. Lines are worn in from frantic scribbles and furtive reminders.

20 Dec - Blinds closed. Sun down. Mary again. No ring. Never wears a ring. Must think I'm slow in the head. But I've got her number. Some lie about her "husband". Probably the Dandy. Eliot Idel and Moe Brown. Travelers, like the rest. They're here at the El Dorado. Leaving soon. I watch the Dandy knock on their door. Not so sneaky, huh?

They leave at 8 in the evening! I know his car now. Green Dodge All-Steel, dented front bumper.

The creased spine creaks as it is turned back to the current page.

Dec 22 - Six jobs, six busts. No clues, no evidence. Just marks and mascara that never runs. She tells me to expect another job,

but I don't know if I can keep this up. The money spends, sure enough, bu

A noise in the entryway. The pen leaves the page with a distracted thunk. A moment passes as the writer hurries away after the sound.

Another hand begins to write on the following line:

I could never have known.

Footsteps hurriedly rush back to the journal. The pen is grasped in a hurried attempt at normalcy. A notion quickly abandoned. The journal slams closed and droplets of hot sweat bead its cover.

A cry of attempted authority and the aching silence that follows.

The clammy, shaking clutch of a .38 Special and the slow, deliberate steps of a man practiced in violence. Sixteen minutes and forty-two seconds pass.

The creak of disused bedsprings in another room. The journal opens again, and the page turns without care for sound.

I will never come back to this place.

That same penmanship. It could be mistaken for distress.

I must find a way out of here.

A pregnant pause in the lines. Palpable to an audience not yet arrived.

Any way out.

Another moment passes, and the creaks of the bed sound through the slightly ajar door.

The pen is placed a measured distance from the journal. Dropped, or thrown, in a highly emotional state.

Sleep comes quickly to him. He murmurs in dream as he does in his waking hours. An annoying habit. The lines etched in his face from stress, age, and vice deepen in the soft moonlight filtered through the threadbare curtains. A poor face to steal. One that can be made better.

A delicate knee presses into the hard spring of the mattress. The pressure and sound stir him awake.

Then... that familiar moment. Recognition... confusion.... Fear. His epiglottis is fused before he can make a sound.

The veins in his tired eyes widen and burst as he struggles. The knee moves to his chest and keeps him pinned. Smoke-yellowed nails claw at the unyielding flesh as tears begin to well. A manicured nail digs pointedly into the soft flesh beneath his Adam's apple. His clawing increases in intensity. He can feel every bit of the nail as it twists and forces the skin and fascia of his throat away.

"This is the laryngeal prominence." The boy watches keenly, as the thin skin is peeled back, "and this is the cricothyroid ligament."

The private eye can feel a dull tearing sensation as the cartilage is split. Air, blood, and mucus spray from the new hole and skin stretches out and in as he desperately attempts to breathe. "This would be called a tracheotomy." The boy takes careful notes. As he does, he shuffles impatiently. He's done well to be so quiet. "Have a taste, but clean up after yourself." He drinks greedily, but makes sure to wipe the blood and saliva from the wound clean. "Count with me," he straightens to attention; "One, two, three, four;" a nail is pressed between each rib for emphasis, knitting closed the flesh slowly every time, and he dutifully follows suit. "Five... six..." The finger stops at the seventh.

"This is the last true rib. Every one beyond this is false. For me." A demure smile. "Theologians say it was the third rib, but the Hebrews did not specify a number. I like to believe it was this one." The bone is plucked from its place, leaving raw cartilage and throbbing muscle in its absence. The private eye squirms impotently. The boy stares in rapt attention at the pink, dripping thing and reaches thoughtlessly to touch it. His hand is crushed as he does, twisted and wrenched from his arm. It thumps dully against the bare wooden floor. He noiselessly retrieves it after a fitting pause.

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof." The hole in his chest and his larynx close without a sound and the private eye suffocates unceremoniously after a few moments.

"Genesis 2:21." A gentle reminder as the rib is placed into the shapely side now rising from the warm body. The boy is slow to tie the noose, hampered as he is, but loops it around the ceiling beam all the same. "Handle the rest, would you?"

The sound of rope cinching. The friction of fiber and skin. A rope tightening against weight. The room is silent.

A moment of realization. The journal page is turned back quickly - a prudent addition.

The money spends, sure enough, but I could never have known.