Spring 1956

The Sadist

John R. Provancher
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol3/iss2/23

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Calliope by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maila.bundza@wmich.edu.
"What makes you think I'd do It?"

"Well, any guy who would murder his wife would...."

"It was called an accident...remember?"

"And Goldstein's death. That was an accident too?"

"Of course. Poor George stood entirely too close to the edge of the canyon. But he always was a little neurotic. Used to visit his psychiatrist every Thursday. You know, I bet George thought he was a California Condor."

He smiled unappreciatively and said, "She'll be easy."

"$25,000 is what I call easy. Got her picture?"

He pulled a snapshot from his wallet. "This is a picture of Selma before she became ill."

"Ill?"

"Yes, she has infantile paralysis. Paralyzed from the waist down. Been that way for 12 years now."

"Not bad looking, is she?"

"Not bad."

Selma was a brunette. Nice figure. Chesty. Angelic face. Bright, saucer eyes--blue probably. "How old is she?"

"33."

"Why'd you marry her?"

"Usual reasons."

"Someone else now?"

"Yes."
THE SADIST

"And she won't give you a divorce?"

"No."

"Well, it'll take me a week, give or take a few days, to complete the job. Any objections?"

"No."

"Good. Your address?"

"147 North Haven Road."

"Oh, about the money. Six months after your wife's er--passing, you will pay me the 25 grand at the rate of $500 per month."

"Playing it safe, eh?"

"Always do. And, incidentally, on Wednesday night of this week you will meet me at the corner of Wallington and Fairview."

"What time?"

"11:45 p.m."

"I'll be there," he said, rising slowly. He advanced to the door, opened it, turned, and said, "Doesn't make sense, does it?"

"What?"

"Love and hate and fear. Where one ends the other begins."

"Most people," I said, "love and hate because they fear."

"And the sadist?"

"The sadist enjoys witnessing the suffering of others because he has an excessive hatred of civilization."

He stared at me, bowed low, and said, "Perhaps you're right. Goodnight."
THE SADIST

On Tuesday morning I made a routine check-up on the life histories of my client and his wife. Then, on Tuesday afternoon, I visited Selma. A corpulent colored maid answered my knock.

"Yes?"

"Census taker, ma'm."

"I'm sorry, but...."

"Who is it, Mary?"

"The census taker, ma'm."

"Well, have him come in."

As I entered she wheeled toward me and said, "Won't you sit down please?"

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you ma'm, but....."

"Oh, that's all right," she said, smiling warmly. "I was just going to have my afternoon tea. Won't you join me?"

"Why thank you, ma'm."

"Now what would you like to know?"

"Well, first, how many are there in the immediate family?"

"Just my husband and I."

"No children, then?"

"No--my paralysis....."

"Yes, of course, I'm terribly sorry. I should have realized...."

"Oh, that's all right."

"It must get awfully lonesome sometimes."

"Yes....... sometimes."
Mary came in carrying two cups of tea. She placed them before us, took three steps backward, and asked, "Will that be all ma'm?"

"Yes, Mary, that's all." Then she gazed at me and inquired, "Tell me, just how does one become a census taker?"

"Well, it's more or less of a political appointment. You do someone a favor. And, at a propitious moment, they return the favor."

"Oh, I see."

I sipped the tea, smiled, and said, "Ummm--this is good. Allow me to compliment you on your choice of servants."

"Why, thank you. Now is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

Then, taking advantage of the situation, I said, "Yes. I--well, I know this may sound odd, but I was wondering if you'd mind if I dropped in every now and then to visit with you?"

"Why on earth should you want to?"

"Well," I said, morosely, "I lost my wife two years ago, and, well, you remind me so much of her. She was a very beautiful woman too."

Her ego being sufficiently inflated, she replied, "My husband sometimes--" she offered an embittered expression to tell me that she thought her husband was a despicable beast--"well, I suppose it would be all right--" then emphatically--"in the afternoons."

"Thank you," I said humbly, "you have no idea of just how much I appreciate this."

"You know," she said, "this may sound silly, but I don't even know your name."

"Or I yours. Mine's Frank, Frank Ziegler."

"And mine's Selma Thurston."

"It's a pleasure Ma'm," I said, pressing her hand, "but now I must go. Is it all right if I come Thursday afternoon at two?"
THE SADIST

"Oh, yes, that will be fine."

"Until then, goodbye Selma."

"Goodbye."

I opened and closed the door and stood listening as Selma said, "Isn't he nice, Mary?"

"He certainly is ma'am. A perfect gentleman."

On a black Wednesday evening, I donned a short, grey beard, darkened the lines on my face, padded my suit to lend a stooped appearance, and, picking up my cane and wrinkled old hat, departed for my rendezvous with Mr. Thurston.

"But who are you?" he queried, after I tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'm a friend of Mr. Ziegler's. He's going to meet us at Pat's."

"Pat's?"

"Yes, it's a tavern down near the Erie terminal."

We started to walk toward Pat's when out of the darkness a casual voice said, "Hello, Vern," in that indifferent sort of a way everyday friends greet each other.

"Oh, hello Jim," Thurston replied calmly.

"Nice night, isn't it?" he said, staring at me.

"Yes, very nice."

And then his friend was gone and we were alone once again. We reached the tracks. They were lonely and endless, and I could see the dim outline of a tunnel a little way off. It was then I put the gun in his back and marched him toward the tunnel. Naturally, he was stricken with incredulity, at first, but in awhile he knew I wasn't fooling and it was then he asked in an awed tone, "But why?"

"$100,000," I replied, using my natural voice.
THE SADIST

"Ziegler!" he gasped.

"Did a little investigating yesterday. Seems you'll receive a hundred grand upon the death of your wife. I had a nice little conversation with Selma yesterday. In time, guess who's going to be her next husband?"

"You'll never get away with it. Jim--J-Jim saw you."

"Jim saw an old man. Turn around."

And as he did so, I brought the gun smashing down upon his head. He toppled just inside the tunnel, not too far from the tracks. It was really a very simple matter to drag his body across the rails.

As I departed I heard the moaning whine of the Midnight Special. And I thought about Mrs. Thurston and how she would eventually become Mrs. Frank Ziegler. And then I thought about the $100,000 and the inevitability of my future wife's er--accident. After all, no matter how careful you are, accidents will happen. Do you suppose it has something to do with the law of averages?

###

FOR G. / John Murphy

Breath and mystery and the child in you
Beneath this fit of moonlight and babbling starshine
Left unsaid all quiet and innocence
To mock the world and my vulture heart.

Let all the words I have sung for you
Enter silently into your private night,
To dissolve among tokens of love and praise
Others have paid you with their eyes.

And being free and quaintly mad,
You command the universe to sing and giggle,
Turning my song into a penance,
To be drowned within its curving mirth.

Until everything is laughter and be silly,
An idiot's game for the rule I broke;
Love is the derelection in farewell,
Farewell is the moment I cannot know.