

THE SCHEME

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THE SCHEME

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Isabel, my lovely wife.

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THE SCHEME

It was a hot and muggy night in early July as Jimmy Sinclair drove out of town. He had a weekly dinner date with the 2 people he loved the most.

He entered his parents' rural ranch house on 50 acres about 8 miles east of Tupelo, Mississippi.

Pat and Earl Sinclair were in excellent health. They retired 2 years ago and gave full ownership of their grocery store 'Buffalo Bill's' to their only child.

Jimmy, age 45, carried assorted flowers into his mother's kitchen. Pat knew her son's routine and already had an empty glass vase sitting on the dinner table.

Jimmy spoke as he placed the flowers into the vase and added water from the kitchen sink. "Mom, Kathy and I are getting a divorce."

Pat was hard of hearing. Her current ear piece was on the blink and the new hearing aid had not yet arrived by express mail. She kept peeling the potatoes.

Jimmy stepped closer. "Mom, Kathy and I are getting a divorce! She's just a gold digger."

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Pat stopped peeling and looked at her son. "Now that's good news because I never did like her. I suspected she was only after your money!"

Earl walked in carrying the television remote and spoke loudly. "It needs batteries."

Pat turned to her husband of 50 years. "They are in the top left drawer. Our son's getting a divorce. He says she is a gold digger." Pat returned to peeling her 3 potatoes.

Earl searched for the batteries. "I found them. I hope they're not dead. You know, Son, your Mother and I never did like that woman. We strongly suspected that she was a gold digger."

Earl continued to talk loudly as he switched out the batteries. "You and Kathy got hitched mighty too fast. What was it - 2 months? How can you know someone in such a short period of time? I warned you to date longer."

"I wish I had listened to you, Dad. Now it's going to cost me some of my hard earned money to get out of this sham of a marriage."

After dinner the 3 retired to the front porch that over looked the large fish pond that sat below the 2,000 square foot house on the hill.

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Jimmy loved coming to his parents place. He knew he had their support no matter what.

"I guess we can't count on having grandchildren anytime soon," said Pat while sipping on a tall glass of iced tea.

Jimmy looked at his loving parents and asked himself, *'Why couldn't I have found true love'?*

"More tea, Son?" asked his father holding the pitcher in his hand. He held out his empty glass and watched half the contents hit the deck as his father shakily filled the glass.

"I'm meeting with Kathy and her lawyer tomorrow morning and we'll try to work out a settlement."

Pat cupped her hand to her ear.

Jimmy spoke again much louder. "I'm meeting with Kathy and her lawyer tomorrow morning and we'll try to work out a settlement."

Jimmy slowly drank his iced tea and thought of John Farran, the hitman, he just hired to kill his gold digging wife.

Later that evening Jimmy drove to his own home on Rutland Road. He parked his old white Honda in the circular driveway next to his greedy wife's new, green, BMW convertible.

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He climbed the stairs to the master bedroom. Kathy now slept in the guest room at the end of the hall. Jimmy saw lights coming from under her bedroom door. 'Good night gold digger', he said to himself.

He left the house at 6:45 A.M. and had to be at the grocery store by 7. When Jimmy pulled into the parking lot he spotted Billy Sutton, age 20, exiting his mother's red Chrysler Caravan. He liked his hard working clerk of 9 months.

Jimmy heard from others that Billy was well liked at college. He was a good looking young man. He was tall with close cropped blonde hair and had bright blue eyes.

"Morning, Boss."

"Morning, Billy. While it's on my mind when will you start college again?"

"I took a year off so my pitching arm could heal. I start back in January."

"Any luck in finding that dream car yet?"

"No, Sir. It's hard to save money."

Jimmy chuckled. "Well Billy you could save more if you dated only one girl at a time."

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Billy grinned as he picked up some trash in front of the store. "True, Sir, but how do you know which woman is the right one for you?"

"Well you have me there. I sure am no expert," said Jimmy as he unlocked the front door. He turned off the alarm and switched on the lights.

Billy grabbed a white apron and headed in the direction of the storage room.

"Billy, I have to leave at 9:30. I have an important meeting with Kathy and her lawyer at 10."

"Yes, Sir, I know. Mrs. Sinclair called me before I left for work."

"What did she say to you?"

"I like you, Sir, and I don't want to come between you both so I'd rather not tell each of you what the other tells me."

"Okay, Billy, that's understandable but it's my store and I hired you, remember?"

"I know, Sir, but I want to be loyal to both of you."

"Billy, your loyalty is one of your best qualities. I won't put you on the spot."

"Thank you, Sir," said a relieved Billy. "What do you want me to do first?"

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Kathy was undecided on what to put on. Should she wear a suit, a dress, or a blouse and skirt? She called her mother for advice.

"Wear the dress," said Carol Cummings, age 56. "Now remember to fight for what is legally yours."

"I will, Mom. I hired a bulldog of an attorney."

She checked her appearance in the full-length mirror located in the hallway. The floral print dress was definitely the right choice.

Kathy brushed her long dark hair and put on red lipstick. She grabbed her purse and headed out the front door. She drove slowly away in her BMW while listening to country music.

John Farran, age 35, with short dark hair and a mustache checked his 'Wheel of Fortune' wrist watch again.

Jimmy Sinclair, his partner in crime was late. The hitman sat in a corner booth, in the dark, away from the other customers in the Hide-Away Bar and waited.

Jimmy sat outside in his old car in front of the dimly lit and smoky bar knowing he was keeping his hitman waiting. He was having mixed feelings. He wanted to kill his wife but then again he didn't.

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The hard working grocery store owner just didn't want to give his gold digging, money grubbing wife a huge sum of money for only 11 months of marriage.

Jimmy really hated her for setting him up. He felt she pretended to like him for himself and not for his money. He wanted the same long lasting and loving relationship that his parents have.

Jimmy stepped into the relatively empty bar and walked over to John who was sipping on a Coors Light beer. "Sorry I'm late. I had another argument with Kathy," he lied.

Jimmy ordered a coffee and said, "I know the police will be checking my bank accounts for any transactions once Kathy is killed. I can't have any out of the ordinary withdrawals. So I thought of a good way to give you your required down payment."

"What good way is that?"

"After I visit with Kathy's divorce lawyer I want you to meet me at Summit Bank. I'll give you half of the \$30,000 we agreed on and the other half once she is dead."

Sitting across from the unhappily married man was a professional truck driver posing as a hitman.

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"Now did you visit my store and check my wife out?"

"Yep. A very attractive woman. She's maybe 15 years younger than you?"

"Kathy's 26 and I'm 45. Can you make it look like a store robbery?" Jimmy asked showing his hitman the headlines of the *Tupelo Business Journal*: '*Rash of Store Robberies - One Owner Shot*'.

"That's my work," lied John acting serious as he tried to look convincing as a professional killer. "You want her shot in the head or torso?"

Jimmy looked at his watch, gulped down the last of his coffee and said, "The torso will do. I have to go to our meeting. It starts at 10. I have to pretend I want to settle."

Jimmy and Kathy sat at opposite ends of Attorney Paul Salman's conference table. He read the newspaper about the robberies while she looked out the window.

The city's premiere divorce attorney entered and placed a small file folder on the table. He then sat down next to his new client.

"Morning, Jimmy. I know you want to get this over with so here are our demands."

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The meeting was short. It lasted only 10 minutes. Jimmy walked to the elevator, entered one and was gone. She stayed behind talking with her attorney. "I think we will not come to any agreement on who gets what. I think you will have to serve him with the divorce papers, Paul."

"Your husband has no legal grounds to deny you what is legally yours."

"Where's Kathy? Where's Jimmy?" That's all Billy heard from his loyal customers. "They will be back in a few hours," Billy would respond while bagging groceries or ringing their purchases.

He knew that Kathy and Jimmy had loyal and dedicated customers who really cared what was going on in their lives. He ignored the twinge in his arm as he repeatedly performed his duties.

Billy had injured his pitching arm while at a friend's birthday party several months ago. In a strange twist of fate a drunk man fell off a trampoline breaking Billy's right elbow. It resulted in him having surgery. Three large pins were inserted to hold things in place.

Following the orthopedic doctor's instructions to give his arm time to heal he was throwing a baseball lightly every day to his younger brother, Ray.

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Billy had some money put away in a savings account at Summit Bank destined for a used car. His ultimate dream car was a new Chevy Camaro with the sport package with the top of the line stereo system.

The store clerk would gently refuse his mother's offers to pick him up in front of his place of employment each day. Instead, Billy liked to walk the 20 or so blocks to Tupelo Chevrolet and search the lot.

If he arrived during business hours the salesmen would not approach. They knew that the star pitcher of the University of Mississippi baseball team was broke.

'Someday', Billy would say to himself, 'Someday, I'll drive out of here instead of walking'.

Billy's younger brother, Ray, who was 14 walked into Buffalo Bill's with their mother. He was happy to see them.

For some reason this day was extra busy and Billy needed help. "Thanks for coming, Brother. Can you please bag the groceries and help carry them out to the cars?"

"Okay," smiled the younger boy excited at the chance to work with his older brother. "Are you staying too, Mom?" asked Billy.

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"No. Your father wants me to help him lay new sod in our back yard. Just call when you need a ride."

Both boys gave their mom a big hug and went back to work. "How much will I earn today?" asked Ray.

"I'll talk to Mrs. Sinclair when she gets back from her settlement meeting but I think \$8 an hour plus tips."

"Wow! \$8 an hour. I can buy something really good with that," said Ray as he carried out 2 bags of groceries for an elderly woman.

Kathy sat in her car and called Buffalo Bill's Grocery Store. Billy Sutton, her trusted clerk of 6 months answered.

"Billy, I'll be there in about 20 minutes to take the deposit to the bank."

"Mrs. Sinclair, your husband just left with this week's deposit. He kept looking at his watch."

'How odd' thought Kathy while waiting at the traffic light in her newly purchased car. 'That's my Friday chore'.

Jimmy pulled into the far corner of the parking lot at Summit Bank and waited. Suddenly, a white Cadillac

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pulled up alongside and a gun was thrust into his face.

The hooded man smiled, "Give me my down payment please!" Jimmy did as instructed and just like that John had his \$15,000.

An elderly woman ran over after the Cadillac departed the parking lot. "I saw what happened. I got his license plate number."

John placed his \$15,000 under his dresser. He looked at his 'Wheel of Fortune' watch and walked over to the television set in the corner of his one bedroom apartment and turned it on.

He walked over to his microwave oven and made himself some popcorn. 'Show time', John said to no one as he sat down to watch his favorite game show, 'Wheel of Fortune'.

This was a game John was good at. He was quick to solve the puzzles on the display board before most of the show contestants could do so.

He had found his unique watch among many others at a novelty store for \$20 while out on one of his truck runs before he got hurt on the job.

At the first commercial John went outside to check his mailbox. Unfortunately there was no mail waiting for him. He was expecting his monthly worker's compensation check as he had

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been running low on funds - that is
until he met his sugar daddy, Jimmy
Sinclair.

John returned to his residence
failing to notice a young man with a
video camera recording his every move.
This activity caught the eye of the
nosey landlord who spotted the stranger
and approached. "I own this property.
Can I help you?" quizzed Mr. Martin.

The young man rolled down his
window, flashed a gold badge with photo
identification and said, "I'm a private
investigator. I was hired by an
insurance company to document the
activities and alleged injuries of your
tenant in unit 33. I'm telling you this
because my claimant might set you up
with a fake slip and fall."

"How long do you plan to be out
here?" asked Mr. Martin.

"The insurance company hired me
for today only so I'll be gone in a few
hours."

The private investigator handed
the man his agency card. "In case you
ever need a PI."

Mr. Martin took his card and went
back inside his office. John's
telephone rang. It was the landlord on
the other end of the line. "I want to
thank you again, John, for helping me

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around the complex with all the painting and repairs."

"I am glad to do it Mr. Martin. I appreciate the fact that you give me free rent in exchange."

"I called to inform you about a man sitting out front of the building in a gray Volvo filming you checking your mailbox."

"What?"

"Yes. I have his business card. He is from 'I See You Investigations', his name is Roderick Naughton and he mentioned something about an accident."

"Yes. I am out on worker's compensation from a heavy box that fell on me a few months ago. I'll hang up now and pay him a visit."

John placed some newspapers into a trash bag and went outside to the dumpster that was located at the rear of the parking lot. On his return he knocked on the investigator's tinted windows. "I know you are in there, Roderick. Roll down your window now!"

Realizing his cover has been blown Roderick rolled down his window about 4 inches.

"Hand me your video camera before I break this window and yank you out!" demanded an angry John.

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The nervous rookie PI did as instructed.

"How long have you been watching me?"

"I started a few hours ago."

"What's on the video camera?"

"Just you riding your bicycle, getting your mail and dumping your trash just now."

"I want you to write in your report that I was home all day and according to the landlord I have back pain."

"This is my first case. I'm just trying to earn enough money to move to Hollywood. I want to be an actor."

"If I were you I would quit now before your next claimant beats you up. Now get out of here!"

The rookie private investigator rolled up his window and quickly departed.

John knocked on Mr. Martin's door. "Thanks for warning me about him."

"Just glad I spotted him when I did."

John walked back to his own unit and threw the small video camera in the trash. He returned to watching reruns of his favorite TV show.

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Detective Mike Anderson of the Robbery Division walked into Summit's bank lobby wearing a beige suit and was directed to the robbery victim.

"Are you Jimmy Sinclair?"

"Yes."

"I'm Detective Mike Anderson of Robbery Division. Let's sit down in the manager's office."

The detective wrote everything down on a yellow notepad. "Can you describe what the person looked like?"

"All I saw was a gun in my face."

"What type of gun?"

"A big gun. I was scared!"

"How much money did you have in the two deposit bags?"

"\$15,300 in cash and another \$2,000 in checks."

"Is that a normal deposit for your grocery store?"

"Yes it is. I make the deposit every Friday morning. We have some long time loyal customers who like to pay in cash. My grandparents opened the store in 1951 and I took over from them just about 2 years ago."

A police officer walks over and hands the detective a slip of paper. Mike reads the note. "Sir, we ran the

! license plate on the Cadillac. It was stolen a few days ago from the airport."

The bank manager knocks on the door. "Do you know when I can have my office back?"

"Now," Detective Anderson replied. He turned to Jimmy Sinclair and asked, "You provided the arriving officers with all of your information?"

"Yes, Sir, I did."

"Then you're free to go." Mike watched the robbery victim enter his old white Honda and depart the area. The detective turned to the branch manager. "I will need a copy of your exterior video surveillance tapes as soon as possible."

The manager took the lawman's business card and said, "This is our 1st robbery since we opened 8 years ago. I'll work on getting the tapes to you within 24 hours."

Mike said thanks and walked out to his unmarked police cruiser. "Dispatch to Unit 31."

Mike picked up the microphone. "Unit 31 come in."

"Pick up your partner at the Seven-Eleven Store on 5th and Main."

"Unit 31 I copy."

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Mike watched a young couple pull up to the bank in a faded green station wagon and enter. They left their German Shepard waiting with the windows rolled halfway down.

Mike thought about his own dog as he backed out of his parking space and drove south to the Seven-Eleven Store.

He picked up his dog at the pound about a year ago. His real name was Lucky but Mike named him Dillinger after the famous gangster from the thirties.

The likeable animal was always quick to greet his master when he arrived at his apartment, which was located above a barn on a farmer's ranch on the outskirts of Tupelo.

It was a great situation - free rent just because the old farmer liked cops. *'Not a bad life'*, thought Mike as he pulled up to a traffic light.

He realized the young couple in the car in front of him was too busy kissing to notice the traffic light had changed to green.

Mike blew his horn. They looked back and switched lanes to let the officer go by. Mike passed the lovebirds and thought of Amber, his ex-fiancé, living somewhere in New Mexico.

They met while Mike was finishing his 2 year degree in Police Science.

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She broke off their relationship because she didn't want to be married to a gun and a badge.

Amber tried desperately to talk Mike out of a career in law enforcement. No dice, Mike ate and slept police work 24/7.

He was half of a team dubbed Laurel and Hardy by his Captain about 8 months ago when the new partner assignments were made.

The 2 men made an odd pair.

Mike, at 32, had short dark hair, blue eyes, stood 6 foot 3 and weighed in at a physically fit 210 pounds.

As he pulled into the parking lot of the Seven-Eleven store out walked his partner, known as Detective Harry Fusco.

Detective Fusco was 53 year old, stood 5 foot 8 and weighed 260 pounds. Not surprisingly, Harry held a large bag of pretzels in front of his huge pot belly as his partner pulled up.

"Hi, Stan," joked Hardy as he climbed in. The 2 detectives then headed toward a witness's house.

Jimmy entered his old Honda and drove straight to the Hide-Away Bar. He

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slid into a booth already occupied by his hitman.

"That was a clever way to give me my down payment - just fake a robbery."

"I don't want the police to find any paper trail at my bank," said Jimmy looking around the bar.

"How do you plan to come up with my balance once your wife is dead?"

"I'll worry about that when it's time. What did you do with that stolen car you took from the airport?"

"I parked the car one floor below where I took it. How did you know I stole it from the airport?"

"A witness gave the police the license plate number. Now that you have your down payment where and when will you kill Kathy?"

The waitress walked up and took Jimmy's drink order. When she left their table John answered, "It is best you don't know. I want you to act naturally if questioned by the police."

Jimmy walked into his crowded store. He was greeted by a few customers and his angry wife.

"Why did you take the deposit to the bank? You know I do that myself. I've been taking the deposit for over

50 weeks without a problem. You take it
just once and we get robbed!"

"I could have been killed."

"Yes, and if you were, I wouldn't
have to spend any more of my money on
lawyers."

"You mean *my* money!" said Jimmy as
he and his wife continued to argue.

Mike and Harry arrived at the
witness's house and rang the doorbell.
A sign reading 'The Friedman's' hung
above the door. Over a cup of coffee
and homemade apple pie the 3 discussed
the events that occurred earlier in the
day.

Mrs. Friedman put her coffee cup
down and said, "I was trying to dial a
phone number on my cell phone when a
white Cadillac zoomed by me and
screeched to a halt. I saw a gun being
pointed out the window so I wrote the
license plate number on my arm.

"Were you alone? Mrs. Friedman?"

"Yes I was."

"What happened next?"

"I saw 2 hands reach out of the
Cadillac's window and take 2 deposit
bags from the victim who was handing
them out his driver's window. The
Cadillac then drove off and I ran over
to help."