

Yakima, Wash.
Apr. 9, '58

Dear Mr. Relander:

After your visit last evening, I looked this story up, I am sending you what I could find of it, it will, I think, show more distinctly than I could explain just why I wasn't cut out to be a writer. I have the rest of it here somewhere, and if you find it interesting enough to build a story from, I will try to find the remainder. I never tried to write it again, but from time to time have thought of ways to improve on the plot. You can see the paper is somewhat yellowed with time.

May I suggest a few of the possibilities.

First of all, the locale, it isn't mentioned, it could be anywhere, I chose the vicinity around San Francisco. Much of interest could be written concerning the farm, the struggle to get the farm going, the disappointment of Mike's father in Mike's dislike for farming. Many interesting details could be built up on the family life, as you can see, these things are passed by completely.

The time of the story could be the Korean affair, rather than the second world war, which would bring it up to date, so to speak, many amusing incidents could be written of his war years, his total lack of interest in girls and etc.

I thought of changing his first job after coming home to working for another trucking concern, and his first meeting with the girl while he was working on this job. then the night of the storm was the first time he had his own truck. It was the big night for him, telling Mary he had his own truck and was in business for himself, then finding things as they were at the Cafe that night. Also the first time he went in the Cafe needs lots of build up. The way the place looked, customers, if any, reactions more accurately described, at greater length. (much greater length)

More about the other truck drivers, so as to bring them into the story in a more intimate form later on. In short, there is much to be written to make a story of interest, and with the right person, the story can sort of come to life and with the big climax, be one that will hold anyone's interest.

If you are at all interested, you may contact me again,

Sincerely,

Mrs. George Severe

[Enclosure. Apr. 9, 1958]

Especially in childhood, dreams are born to be discarded for a different and more exciting one that may happen along any moment. But it didn't happen that way with Michael Shannon. When Mike was about eight, a dream came to life within his heart, a dream that stayed with him through grade school, high school and a number of years in the Army. It almost died with him there, from a lucky shot by a Jap, but Mike was tough and he lived to come home, shot up a bit and having to spend many, many months in the Hospital, but he survived it all, finally coming home, his life and his dream still intact.

Mike's dream might seem commonplace to some, he didn't want to be President, he didn't want riches, or fame of any sort. Mike's dream was to someday own his own Trucking Company. He would start out with one truck, then add another as he could afford it, until he would someday have a fleet of them. Quite a hunk of dream, you say? Yes, it was, but by managing his pay very carefully, while in the Army, plus a few lucrative poker sessions with the boys, he was able to realize a portion of his dream when he came home. At least he bought one truck, it wasn't as new and shiny as the one in his dreams, but it was in good condition. Mike wasn't as new and shiny himself by now, he was thirty-one, with a few gun-shot wounds thrown in for good measure. However, the truck was his..... and life was good. As Mike climbed into the cab of his truck to haul his first load, it would be difficult to describe the contentment in his heart.

The Shannon farm bordered on a busy highway. Mike's dream was born as he sat on the fence watching the big, beautiful trucks go roaring by, bounds for the markets of the world. Red ones, green ones, all the colors of the rainbow. Mike vowed to himself, as he sat there, that one day he would be driving a truck. He'd haul the squeeling pigs, the bawling cattle and all the mysterious boxes and crates he longed to peek into. Mike meditated a while on the color he would get, Red, he finally decided, with his name printed in big letters on the side. And aslso, he would have a trailer behind, so he could hayl a bigger load.

I'll never have accidents, Mike assured himself, as he sat there watching the traffic whiz by. Only careless people have accidents and the truck would be his, so he would have to be extra careful, costs money to fix motors.

Once in a while a truck would stop at the farm to pick up stock Pa Shannon had to sell. While the men were busy loading, Mike would climb up into the Cab, get behind the wheel and pretend he was headed down the highway. Expertly, he weaved in and out of traffic, the best driver on the road, up ahead was the White farm, have to pick up a load of hogs there, ticklish place to back into, but Mike made it easily, nothing to it, for a good driver. But the loading always came to an end, Mike would have to climb down from the truck and watch it disappear down the road without him. Just wait, he told himself, just wait....

"I'm going to buy a truck," Mike informed the family at supper one evening.

"A truck, why lad, sure you have three or four laying out in the yard now," His mother protested.

"Aw," Mike explained, "I don't mean a play truck, I mean a real one, like the one that took the hogs today."

"And where will you be getting the money to buy it with?" Pa asked, very causal like.

Mike looked at Pa impatiently, "I'll earn it, of course," He told him firmly.

Pa smothered a smile as he surveyed Mike's eight year old frame, "Well now, that's a relief," He answered soberly, "Sure I thought for a minute there, you expected me to buy it for you."

"You just think I'm foolin'," Mike declared indignantly, "You just wait and see, some day I'll own a whole bunch of trucks."

"Well, son, if that's what you want, I hope you do," Pa told him, "But I was hopin' you'd be a farmer like your Pa."

The Shannon family consisted of Pa and Ma, Mike, Dave and Jeanie. They were a happy family. Ed and Molly Shannon loved company and were never too tired to take in the dance at the local Hall. Dave and Jeanie, as they grew older followed the pattern set by their parents, but not Mike. He either had his nose in a book on Mechanics or in a motor. When

he was twelve, he knew more about what to do for ailing motors than a lot of grown-ups. He did become a pretty good athlete in school, but cars and trucks were his first and last love, always.

So, while the rest of the family ~~were~~ enjoyed themselves at some social function, Mike stayed at home, very contentedly, his nose in a book. His mother would look at him in amused despair, saying, "Micheal, you don't take after your Pa, he was out all the time when he was your age, or so your Grandma tells me."

"Gosh Ma," Mike told her, "If I'm going to buy a truck, I have to learn all about fixing them, no use buying one, if I can't take care of it."

For a lad in his first year of high school, a truck seemed far in the future to Ma, but she'd pat his shoulder and tell him, "Sure Son, you go ahead and study, books never hurt anyone yet."

Pa didn't like the nose in book attitude very well, he thought high school was alright but a plain farmer didn't need all that bookwork. "I learned to farm by gettin' out and diggin'" He told Mike, "You know how to run the tractor, you don't be needin' that tomfool stuff."

But Mike wanted more than the farm had to offer and Pa finally gave up trying to make a farmer of him, settling for Dave, the younger boy. Dave was short and stocky like Pa, while Mike was growing to be a veritable bean pole, and about as fat. Mike was glad Pa decided Dave should be the farmer, he hated to hurt Pa's feelings, but he just didn't want any part of the farm.

And so it was..... Mike studied motors and crankcases, instead of girls and sweaters in his extra time outside his school work, growing taller and filling out as he grew older, until he was a giant with black eyes and coal black curly hair, a lady killer as far as looks went and that's exactly as far as it went, to the despair of all the girls in school. His sister Jeanie would look at him in unbelieving amazement at times, as, without batting an eye, he'd turn down invitations to go places with the most popular girls in school.

Jeanie asked Ma one day, "Ma, do you think there's something wrong with Mike?"

"Why child, why do you ask such a question?" Ma wanted to know.

"Well, Ma, he just doesn't know girls EXIST! Ma, I'm telling you, the girls are all crazy about him, he don't even look at them!"

Ma remarked dryly, "Sure, he don't be takin' after the Shannons, now does he?" (Ma had caught Pa winking at the widdow Jones, at the damce last night.) "You don't be worrin' about Mike, he'll wake up one of these days."

But Mike went on his way, with one ambition, one ideal and one goal, to one day own his own trucking company. A dream that big left no room in his heart for romance, he was intirely unconscious of the havoc he might have wrought among the girlish hearts in school. Truly one Irishman in a million, in that he had no eye for the fairer sex, a fact no other Irishman would be proud of I'm sure. But Mike was Mike and nothing could change him, "Sure, he'll end up a queer old bachelor," Jeanie moaned to her fólks. But Pa just laughed, he knew the Shannon blood would show up, give it time.

When Mike got out of school he worked for a while, yeah, you guessed, driving truck, but the Army claimed him in a short time and he spent the next several years working for Uncle Sam. A Jap bullét put an end to that

Mike had been his own boss for maybe six months when he met his Waterloo, her name wasn't Waterloo, it was Mary Turner and she ran a Truck-Stop Cafe on the highway south out of Frisco. Mike's load was for San Luis Obispo out of Frisco, he noticed this new sign out, so he stopped to sample the coffee. So few places knew how to make really good coffee he always tried the new places he found, to see if they had discovered the knack. Mike pulled up to the door and went in. The place was small but iraculate, the tables had bright table cloths, the counter covered with shiny formica. He threwed his cap on the stool beside him and looked up into a pair of level grey eyes. As he looked into her eyes.....it happened. Mike's heart started turning cartwheels, his head spinning like a top. It was a vision that was standing before him, a tall, slender vision, with dark hair and grey eyes and seemed to be saying soemthing, but for the life of him Mike couldn't answer. The Mighty Mike had stopped once too many times to sample

coffee, he was now sampling LOVE.....he came back to earth the third time she asked if he wanted coffee.

"C-Coffee?" He repeated after her stupidly.

"Yes, you know," The vision said with a frown, "Java, Mud, Slew Water, that stuff in there," Pointing at the coffee urn. Poor girl, she didn't know she was the object of his sudden, but undying affection, she thought the big lug was a trifle on the balmy side.

"Yeah, I'll have coffee," Mike told her with a lingering sigh, sure he'd be drinking water and calling it wine, if she gave him the cup. Mike stole another look at her, she had her back turned, drawing coffee from the urn, she looked good from the back too. He had a strange desire to break out singing, or dance a jig, this happy feeling could this be love? He shook his head to clear out the cobwebs, if this was love, he'd been missing a lot. While his buddies in the Army sparked with the girls, he sparked up the Captian's Jeep, contented to have his nose in a motor. At first the guys looked askance at him for doing unnecessary work, but when they discovered he would really rather fool around with a motor than fool around with the girls, well, they shook their heads in amazement, deciding it took all kinds of people to make a world. Now, Mike wished he had listened to their talk, he could use a little knowledge of girls.

She was setting his coffee before him, Mike glanced up at her almost shyly, could she be knowing the powerful emotion that flooded his being, could she be feeling it too?"

But she was saying with a quizzical look in her eyes, "Can I get you any thing else sir?"

"You might be telling me your name, and where you've been all my life."

"My name is Mary Turner," She answered shortly, "You'll find my name on the Menu folder, Mary Turner, Proprietor, and as to where I've been all your life, I hardly think it's any of your affairs." She turned to go to the kitchen.

"Ma-Miss Turner," Mike called frantically, "If I said any thing wrong, believe me I didn't mean to." Gee, he thought miserably, I wish I knew how to handle girls, I

wish I'd listened to the guys.

Mary came and stood in front of him, "Listen Mister--"

"Mike, Mike Shannon is the name,"

"Listen Mr. Shannon, I like to be nice to my customers, I plan on building up a business here, but I'll stand for no one getting fresh, do you understand?"

"Fresh?" Mike wore a puzzled frown, he had never been "fresh" or otherwise with a girl before, he was confused, "Sure and I wasn't trying to be fresh, Miss Turner, I just want to know all about you, I lo-like you." He was looking at her with such a deadly serious expression that Mary had to smile.

"I believe you mean that," She told him, "But from now on we'll talk about the weather."

However, Mike managed to learn quite a little about Mary as he tarried, drinking coffee(good coffee too) untill it was fairly coming out his ears. He learned that she had started the Cafe, on a shoe string, so to speak, about a month ago, was getting along with only a cook to help her at present, untill the business got a little better.

"Aunt Ella is staying with me and taking care of Suzy, we live in rooms in the back," Mary seemed to enjoy talking now that she was started.

Mike frowned suddenly, something was wrong, Mary had been talking and he had been listening in a sort of rosy haze, but something was wrong, what was it she said, now he remembered, AUNT ELLA IS HERE TAKING CARE OF SUZY. A slow freeze started in the vicinity of his heart. Suzy.....could that mean that his dream girl wasmarried? Had she materialized only to fade away....into some one else's arms?

Mike turned to her with sick eyes, "Suzy, you mentioned, who is she?" He asked, praying it would prove to be a sister or a stray relative.

"Suzy is my daughter, she's almost four," Mary answered complacently, never knowing the castles she was machine gunning down with those fateful words.

"Are you ma-er-where is your husband?" Mike was stumbling over shattered dreams.

"I'm not married, the marriage was annulled," Mary answered shortly, and that is all she would ever say about the missing husband. But that was enough for Mike. The sun was shining again, the castle walls in place once more, the world a wonderful

place to live in. Mike stayed a while longer, for the first time letting his schedule go hang. After all, it wasn't every day a man found the girl he wanted to marry, and Mike, with his remarkable ability of single mindedness, decided Mary would someday be his wife, the sooner the better. It was with remarkable restraint too, that he refrained from telling her his decision. Finally he sat his coffee cup down and bid her a reluctant adieu, went out to the truck and swung lightly up into the Cab.

Mary watched him out of sight, with an almost tender smile, crazy Irishman, she thought, he probably has a girl at every truck stop.....just goes to show you how wrong a person can be.

Mike drove down the highway, his head in the clouds, he didn't even mind the thought of Mary's child, cute little tike, he thought, if she looks like Mary. He felt a strong desire to see Ma and tell her about Mary, he wondered what Jeanie would say, she had tried hard enough to get him interested in girls. He grinned to himself, she'd no doubt make some wisecrack, but no amount of wisecracks could mar the wonder of this day, this first love, for Mike.

As soon as he returned to Frisco, Mike went out to the farm, to sample Ma's apple pie and tell her about Mary. They sat in her cozy kitchen, Ma and Mike, while he raved on and on about Mary, to Ma's secret amuzement.

"So you fell in love at last, son, I'm glad," Ma pushed a lock of hair back from her face, hair that had known it's first silver when word came that Mike had been wounded and growing almost white as he lay for so many months in the hospital. What is there about the first born that is so dear to one, Ma thought, she loved them all, but Mike held a special place in her heart. Strange child he had been, taking so long to find out that there were girls in the world, but at last he had found one, how she hoped it was the right one for him.

Jeanie came barging into the kitchen, throwing her cap at a peg by the stove as she went by. She had on an old sweat shirt, long ago discarded by one of the boys, jeans that had seen better days. Her face was flushed by the sharp fall weather and even in the old clothes she was a tempting sight.

"Hi, Mike, how's every thing in the trucking business?" Jeanie sat down at the table and helped herself to a piece of pie. "Gee, Ma, you make the best pie in the country, and Boy! Am I hungry!"

Mike took in Jeanie's disreputable appearance with a frown, "Ma, for gosh sake why don't you make her put a dress on, she looks awful"

"Jeanie has been helping Pa with the farm work, Michael," Ma said hastily, seeing Jeanie's indignant glare, "You know, it's hard on Pa trying to do the work alone, now that Davy is in the Army." Mike searched Ma's eyes quickly, but there was no reproach there for his lack of interest in the farm, each to his own, was Ma's code, bless her heart. "Maybe I can come out next week and give you a hand Ma," He told her.

"And take your nose out of a truck for a week," Jeanie said with scorn, "That I'D like to see."

"I'd see to it that you wore a dress once in a while, you look like last years rag mop," Mike informed her.

"You never noticed my clothes before, why now?" Jeanie's eyes were throwing off sparks.

"Now, now, children, It's sounds odd, dear, for you to talk to Michael that way, every thing he does is always so right with you."

"Well, he don't have to tell me I look awful, I know how I look."

"You look nice to me child, you always do, oh, Mike has met a nice girl, he's going to bring her out to visit us soon, I hope."

It was Jeanie's turn to really look amazed now. "Mike! Not you! A girl?"

"Well what's wrong with me having a girl?" Mike wanted to know.

"That's what I've been wondering for the last umteen years," Jeanie told him sweetly.

Mike gave her a glare and turned to Ma, "I don't dare ask her to come out for a while, Ma, she sort of balled me out, so I have to take it easy, 'til she gets to know me better."

"What did you do, ask if her spark plugs were all clicking, or whatever spark plugs do," Jeanie was going to get even, if she could.

Mike ignored her, "Well," He said rising, "Have to get back to work," He dropped a kiss on top of Ma's head as he went by her, "I'll try to bring Mary and her little girl out to see you Ma, soon as I can make the grade."

Ma got up from her chair slowly, "Michael, did you say, her little girl?"

Mike turned from the door, "Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you, Mary has a child, about four, Suzy."

"Michael, is-is she married?" Ma was trying to hide her concern.

"The marriage was annulled, that's all she told me," Seeing the troubled look on Ma's face he came over and put an arm around her shoulders, "She's a nice girl, Ma, you'll say so too, when you meet her." He went whistling out to his truck. Ma and Jeanie looked at each other with mixed emotions. "Don't worry Ma, Mike's too nice a guy to get himself in trouble, I get a bang out of knowing he's human after all, I had fully decided he was nine-tenths truck."

"I told you, dear, he would find a girl someday, but a married woman," Ma was still doubtful.

"What does she do Ma?"

"She runs a truck-stop Cafe, on the highway, somewhere, Michael only met her once."

"Well then forget it Ma, she was probably being nice to a customer, I'll bet she has forgotten his name by now."

Pa came in for supper and Jeanie told him the news, "Mike has bit the dust at last Pa,"

Pa never could keep up with Jeanie, "Whatever are you sayin' girl, I'd like to see the day Michael would be eatin' anyone's dust."

"Jeanie is tryin' to tell you Mike is in love." Ma was busy putting the meal on the table, Pa glanced at her quickly, noting the odd note in her voice.

"He's got it bad, Pa, he doesn't know if he's coming or going, but he's definitely gone."

Pa shook his head, Jeanie was way over his head again, "What's so wrong with Mike bein' in love," He asked, "I knew the Shannon blood would show up in time."

"Oh and it's showin'," Ma informed him, a bit grimly, "The woman your son is showin' an interest in, is married."

"Mike, in love with a married woman?" It was Pa's turn to be concerned.

"Now Ma," Jeanie protested, "She's not married, the marriage was annulled," Jeanie took her place at the table, "And besides I think we are making mountains out of mole hills, Mike only met her once."

Pa roared with laughter, "He's only seen the girl once and you've got him married already, Molly, relax, the boy is just havin' a bit of fun."

"I tell you Pa, the lad is in love with her," Ma said indignantly, "And she's married and has a small child."

"Sure she's not married if the marriage was annulled," Pa sounded a bit uncertain, though.

"That's what she told him, that's all we know about it. She might be a greedy creature tryin' to get her hooks into the boy."

"Let's eat," Suggested Jeanie, "Ma, Mike is old enough be now to know his own mind, so let's forget it."

"What does the girl do?" Pa asked.

"Oh she runs a Cafe of some sort, on the highway, Pa, she was no doubt being pleasant to a customer, Mike is so green about girls, he wouldn't know the difference." Jeanie looked up from her food, with a smile, "But I will say this, more power to any woman that can take Mike Shannon's mind off a truck for a few moments."

The next time Mike stopped at the cafe he met Suzy, she was a cute little trick allright, she resembled her mother, all but her eyes, they were black instead of grey. she took to Mike right away, calling him Uncle Mike. As to Mary-- well, she was pleasant as usual, but with a reserve about her that prevented Mike from asking for a date, much as he longed to do so. There was a shadow in her eyes even when she smiled, a shadow Mike wished he knew the source of. It wasn't long until the other drivers knew how Mike felt about her, they ribbed him unendingly. But he was at the stage where he didn't care much what they said, his love for Mary was the only thing in his life that mattered.

Mike was puzzled and unhappy over Mary's attitude, he sensed that she liked him, but she would never be relaxed and informal with him and when he finally got up enough courage to ask for a date, she turned him down, pleading work to do. She would let him take Suzy with him for a drive when he drove his car out to the Cafe on his day off from work. Mike took Suzy out to the farm with him several times. Ma fell in love with her as he knew she would. When she asked if he was bringing Mary out, he could only shake his head and tell her, maybe.....sometime.

"You know, Ma," Mike said on one of his visits to the farm, "I think Mary is unhappy about something, I wish I knew what it was, maybe I could help her."

"You really love the girl, don't you son," Molly Shannon looked at her son with tender eyes.

"You know I love her, Ma," Mike answered, unhappily, "But what good does it do me, she treats me just like all the truckers, no better, no worse, but Ma, I know she likes me, what could be the matter, do you suppose?" Mike was like a child, looking to his mother for an answer, but Ma didn't have the answer to this one.

"Could it be business that's worrin' her," Ma replied, "Maybe things arn't going right at the Cafe."

"The Cafe is doing fine, she has hired two girls and another cook, no it can't be the Cafe, it's something else, something personal, I can sort of feel it."

"Maybe it's the Man son, the one she was married to." Ma was plainly worried, "Does she ever speak of him?"

"She has never mentioned him, since that first day I saw her, he must be a character though, to let Mary and Suzy get away from him."

Ma filled the coffe cups fresh and sat down by Mike, she loved his visits to the farm, but now her heart was burdened with his unhappiness, she murmured a silent prayer that things would work out for this beloved son of hers, saying gently, "You just don' be worryin' son, I think things will be allright, maybe it's some little thing that will mend its self in time."

After Mike had gone Ma washed the cups and put them away, then sat be the window star-

ing into space. She wished she might meet the girl that was causing all the turmoil. Maybe some day she would have Jeanie drive her out there and meet her, then she would know more about what the score was, you could always tell more about a person by meeting them face to face. She got up slowly and started the evening meal, Jeanie and Pa would be in soon. She'd talk it over with Jeanie this evening, see what she thought of the plan.

One wet miserable day in late fall Mike started out on his run to San Luis Obispo, it was mid-afternoon by the time he had the load ready, so he decided to have his supper at Mary's Cafe. It was raining by this time hard and steady, wind bad too, a foul day to be out. The windshield kept steaming over making it difficult to drive. The rain beat a tattoo on top of the Cab, making a glittering sheet of the road ahead. I'm glad I've got a roof over my head and not in a foxhole somewhere in Korea, he told himself.

Mike's mind and heart wandered far ahead, how will I ever break down Mary's resistance he asked himself, for the hundredth time? How can I make her understand I'm ready and willing to take on all her problems, how he wished he knew, it was a disheartened Irishman that was winging southward, through the downpour that didn't help his mood. The rain and the cold seemed to intensify his discomfort. Maybe, he thought disconsolately, she won't ever be saying yes, but, he told himself grimly, I'll be camping on her doorstep until she comes right out and tells me NO. All in all, it was dreary trip, he was glad when the lights of Mary's Cafe glistened through the rain. He pulled over as close to the door as he could, jumped out and made a dash for the door. The windows were so steamed up from the cold that he couldn't see through them, he went in quickly closing the door against the storm. The place seemed to be empty, but for one man sitting at the end of the counter next to the kitchen. Mike thought that was funny, Mary usually had a girl working the counter this time of day. He sat at the counter, waiting for someone to wait on him. The man down the way from him hadn't glanced up from the paper when he came in, seemed to be engrossed in his reading. Still nobody, Mike looked toward the kitchen, where the heck was everybody anyhow? "Hey," He finally yelled, "How about a little service in here?"

Mary came slowly in from the kitchen, her face as white as chalk, she walked up to the

coffee urn, drew a cup and brought it over setting it in front of him, spilling a great portion as she did so.

"Mary," Mike asked with concern, "Are you sick, you're so white, is something wrong?"

"Hello Mike," Mary was speaking so low, Mike could hardly hear her, "I have a headache, I'll be alright."

"Where is the girl that helps you, you shouldn't be here alone."

The man down the counter pushed his coffee cup to the edge of the counter and Mary went to get it, she walked like a person in a dream, sort of. Mike was thoroughly puzzled. "Where is all the help, Mary?" He asked again. Mary came back and stood in front of him, looking at him with a strange intentness that he wasn't to realize the meaning of until much later, many heart-breaking hours later.

"I let the help go Mike," She told him, still in that low tone, "It-it was such a bad night, we didn't think there would be much business." She turned without another word and disappeared into the kitchen. Mike was more mystified than ever, she hadn't asked if he wanted food, he looked at the puddle of coffee where she had spilled it, Mary the neat person she was, she hadn't made a move to wipe the coffee up, there was something wrong, but what?

As he sat there trying to figure it out, the door opened and several of the drivers came in, Ed Maddin, Mike's special friend among them. He came over and sat beside Mike, throwing the evening paper down in front of Mike as he did so.

"Did you see the headlines?" Ed inquired, "Big bank holdup in Fresno, quite a haul fifty thousand, killed a man, getting away."

Mike glanced through the paper, his mind filled with his own problems. The paper stated there were several men in the bank job. the papers were full of robberys nowadays, but he hoped they caught the Cop killer. Mary hadn't come in from the kitchen to take the orders, the man at the end of the counter didn't take his nose out of the paper.

Finally one of the men yelled as Mike had done, "Some service in here," laughing, as he said, "If I have to do the waiting tables, we'll really have a feed."

Mary came in then and silently took the orders, no pleasant smile for the men, as

she always had.

The men noticed her seeming preoccupation, looked at Mike with a knowing smile, one saying, "Lovers quarrell, maybe?" Mike ignored him, looking down at his cup, as if therein he might find an answer to what was wrong. Presently Mary brought the orders in and as she set Ed's food down Mike noticed her hand was trembling, "Mary, you better take it easy, can I help you, in any way?"

"No, no," She said hastily, "I'm really ok Mike, just a headache." She still hadn't asked him if he wanted dinner. Ed had noticed her hands too and said, "Do you know what's the matter, Mike?" Mike shook his head, glancing toward the kitchen, it was then he saw a man's face framed for an instant in the service window. What was he doing, he wondered, did he have any thing to do with Mary's strange actions? Had he brought bad news, or, a paralyzing thought struck him, was this the missing husband? Had all Mike's dreaming been in vain, had the man come back, from some mysterious nowhere, to claim his family? Mike's heart touched a new low and when Mary came back to give the men a refill on coffee, he searched her face with stricken eyes.

"Mary, is every thing alright," He asked, once more, "That man--"

"That man," Mary said quickly, "He-he's an insurance agent, I'm taking out some more insurance." The man down the counter pushed his cup out again and Mary went to fill it, damned strange character, Mike thought, sure likes to read.

Mike got up in despair, threw down a dime for the coffee, went out into the storm. it was raining even harder than ever. Mike eased the truck out onto the highway carefully this was a night when accidents happen. He drove into the gathering darkness, his heart clear down in his boots. It was all the windshield wipers could do to keep a small place clear to see through, so he took it extra slow. Mike had driven perhaps a mile when he noticed a car beside the road, it seemed to be empty. As he went on he saw what seemed to be a figure standing beside the road with a bundle in his arms. The headlights picked up the figure and it proved to be a woman, with, yes it looked like a child in her arms.

Mike knew the law says no riders, but a man, if he's human, couldn't very well leave a woman stand along the road on a night like this. Not if he had a nice, warm cab on his truck. Mike pulled up and opened the cab door, the woman hastened over to the truck, and Mike took the child from her arms as she climbed into the cab. She grabbed the child away from him before she even sat down.

The child was wrapped from head to toe in a wet, sodden blanket, it seemed, from the size, to be around three or four and never moved or woke up as it was tossed from arm to arm.

Mike reached over and shut the cab door and started down the highway once more, "You had better take the blanket off the kid, so she can dry out," He advised the woman.

"You tend to your driving, I'll take care of the kid." Her voice was low and husky, like she smoked too many cigarettes. Mike looked at her in surprise, she had her head covered with a scarf, her hair seemed to be blond, what he could see from the dim light in the cab. What kind of a character had he picked up, he wondered.

"That might be your car back up the road awaya"

"It could be, if it's any of your affairs," The sullen voice replied, Mike shrugged his shoulders, about the answer one could expect from a dame that didn't care whether her kid caught pneumonia or not.

"Bad night to be out, going far?" Mike was curious, also he was disturbed about the child, that lay so strangely quiet. Most kids of that age would wake up, being jostled around like that one had been.

"I will tell you when I want to get put, now will you drive your damned truck and keep quiet, I've got enough troubles without some dumb truck driver asking questions."

Mike pulled over to the side of the road in blind rage. But he didn't stop, you couldn't put a child out in the driving rain, he went on, he never thought he'd see the day he felt like slapping a woman, but he had. He wanted to reach over and drag the wet blanket off the child, himself. "You listen to me," He told her, his words coming through gritting teeth, "Just because you're mad at the world, you don't have to be taking it out on the child, she's soaking wet, take the blanket off and let her dry out."

"It's not a girl, it's a boy, and I will take care of my kid without any help from you, now either shut your trap, or stop and let me out."

Mike slowed up the truck once more, but he couldn't stop and put her out, "Ok, sister," He said, "If that's the way you want it, I picked you up out of kindness, I can't understand why you're so all fired nasty about it."

"Oh thank you so much for your kindness," He could see the smirk on her face in the darkness, "Now, drive your damn truck and let me alone."

Mike drove on through the rain, his temper at the boiling point. At least she had taken his mind off Mary for a few minutes. As his temper cooled down, he noticed something that was sort of nagging at his memory. A smell, that was it, a sort of medicine odor, what was it? It seemed to jog a memory that was somehow connected with his childhood. He racked his brain for an answer, where had he noticed that particular smell before? Then he remembered, his mother had used a medicine that smelled like that, to rub his little sister's gums with, when she was teething and very fretful. Sometimes when Jeanie had been very cross and cried a lot, mother would give her a drop or two, it would put her to sleep and give her rest for a while. Mother kept the medicine on a high shelf in the pantry, she warned him and Davy to never, never touch it. Well, Mike got to thinking about it one day, and he did touch it, much to his sorrow. He grinned to himself, he still remembered the licking he got that day. He wondered what the medicine would do to animals, the pigs now, they liked to sleep, he'd try it on them, they were so big, he poured the whole bottle in the trough with a little water, they drank it, as Mike watched with interest. Soon they were huddled in a pile, fast asleep. The trouble was, when feeding time came, Pa couldn't wake them up, he prodded and poked at them, but they snoozed on. Pa got alarmed finally and called the Vet. By the time the Vet got there, some of them had woke up and were staggering around like they were drunk. The Vet was as mystified as Pa, until he discovered the bottle. They soon found out who the culprit was and Mike got a whaling. Pa refused to let Ma buy any more of the stuff, he said anything that would put animals to sleep, wasn't fit for humans. And besides the Vet had cost Pa twenty dollars

he wasn't about to pay any more bills like that for nothing. But, he came back from his reminiscencing with a jerk. What was the odor of that medicine doing in the truck? He took a quick look at the child laying so oddly silent. Was the child drugged, was that why it hadn't moved when he took it from the woman, then handed it back? He felt a chill around his heart. What kind of a character had he picked up anyhow. He was in a quandary, should he accuse the woman of drugging the child, demand to see it, or should he go on and mind his own business, on the chance that he was wrong. He had passed two small towns was approaching the third one, the woman was peering intently out the window, looking for a sign of some kind, he surmised. They started through the town and she said suddenly, "Stop the truck, I want out here." He pulled up, idly noting the name of the street, Rose Street, hell of a name for a character like that to pick, he told himself.

"Lady," He choked on the title, "I'll take you where ever you might be wanting to go, the lad has been out in the rain enough for one night."

"You stop and let me out, I don't need your help, just go on and mind your business!" She jumped out of the cab, the child in her arms, without waiting for help, and started up the side street, Mike sat there drumming his fingers on the wheel in helpless anger, should he follow her, or go to the Police and tell them about her. Maybe that medicine odor was toothache drug, or something, he'd feel kind of silly if she proved to be on the level. On the other hand, the kid had been like a dead person, he shivered, well, he decided, it's none of my business, as the dame said. He started on his way again, more troubled than ever, he had the kid on his mind now, along with Mary.

Mike reached his destination, unloaded and without stopping headed back to Frisco, empty. He usually picked up a load for his return trip, but he was too troubled this time, the sky was getting light in the east as he headed for home. He came to the little town where the woman had stopped, he turned up the street where she had got out of the truck. Why, he wondered why does it bother me so? There was a neon Motel sign up ahead, quite a good sized place, he noted, she might have stopped there, should he inquire, but what would he say? Who would he ask for, nuts, he grumbled, disgusted, I'll go home and let her settle her own problems. He went back to the highway and was on his way for home.

The sun was climbing higher and higher, a beautiful day after the storm, even tired as he was, with no sleep, Mike began to feel better. He always got a lift of spirits when he knew he'd soon see Mary. It was close to noon when the Cafe hove in sight. Mike stopped and went in, ready for a mountain of food, he had eaten nothing since, gosh, he thought, since noon yesterday. Mary was standing near the register, otherwise the place seemed to be empty. Mike flopped wearily down on a stool and put his cap down beside him. "Hi, Mary, how about a whopping big bearkfast for a starving man?" He looked at her closely. She still had the white, wan look of the night before. "Mary, for Pete's sake, why don't you get one of those girls in here to help you?" He demanded.

She came over to where he was sitting, "I let them all have a few days off Mike," she told him, looking like she might drop to the floor at any moment. "It's been quiet the last few days, I'll do allright." She was getting him a cup of coffee, he noticed the edge of a piece of paper showing beneath the cup as she handed it to him, he looked up, there was a warning look in her eyes, did she mean he wasn't to read the note inside. He palmed the paper as he took the cup, got up saying, "I guess I'll push on after all Mary, have a lot to do." Mike went outside and got in the cab. He opened the note and read unbelievably.....Who ever gets this (It read) The bank robbers are hiding here, in rooms in the back, they've taken my little girl away, so I won't tell on them, they said they'd kill her----- please do something, but be careful, they'll kill Suzy if they know I've told..... A woman took Suzy somewhere, please look for her.

Mike stared at the paper in horror, he remembered the headlines in the paper, bank robbers get away with fifty grand, Policeman killed. But why would they come to the Cafe? he remembered the man at the end of the counter last night, he must have been one of them, he had never raised his head all the time Mike was in there, so any one could get a look at him. He had been keeping an eye on Mary, so she wouldn't give them away. That was what caused her white face, strange actions. He looked at the note again, they had Suzy, the muscles in his arms corded into knots, if he could get his hands on the swine.

Mike started to get out of the truck, in blind unthinking anger, he'd go in and tear them apart with his bare hands. But reason overtook him, what had Mary wrote, be careful they'd kill Suzy, be careful, yes, he must think what to do, they must be keeping the

Cafe open, so no one would suspect they were there. He thought back again to the article in the paper. It said there were several of them.

As Mike sat there, horror stricken and confused, a truck roared past him, headed toward Frisco. He saw it was Ed's truck. Mike started the motor and took out after him, as he overtook Ed, he motioned for him to stop. Ed found a place to pull out, stopped, and came back to Mike's rig.

"I didn't stop at Mary's," Ed explained, "Was in a hurry to get home."

Mike silently handed him the note, Ed read it, frowning, then read it again, as if he couldn't believe his eyes. "So that was what was wrong," He said finally, "Too bad we didn't know it last night, when all the boys were there, we'd of tore the place apart!"

Mike was staring at Ed with a growing horror in his eyes, "Ed, do you know what I did?"

Ed shook his head, "No, what do you mean?"

"Mary said in the note, a woman took Suzy away, Ed, I PICKED UP A WOMAN, WITH A CHILD IN HER ARMS, ALONG THE HIGHWAY LAST NIGHT! My, God, what have I done? The woman was standing there in the rain, her car had stalled on something, so I picked her up, she said the child was a boy," Mike was wringing his hands in helpless grief, "Ed, how was I to know it was Suzy, I had her body in my arms, I gave her back to that hellion," He stared at Ed, wildly, "How in heaven's name can I ever tell Mary that I helped to take Suzy away?"

"Mike, it wasn't your fault," Ed tried to calm him down, "Didn't the child speak or make a sound?"

Mike shook his head, now he understood only too well the odor of medicine, the child had been drugged. "They had given her something to make her sleep, I smelled the medicine it bothered me, but the woman was such a hell-cat, I didn't do anything about it. How stupid can a man get! I knew in my heart there was something wrong, but I was so worried about Mary, I just let it slide."

Luckily they had driven around a bend in the road, for Mike was out pacing up and down the highway. "We've got to think Ed, what are we going to do?"

"The first thing to do is get ahold of yourself," Ed told him sharply, "The shape you're in, you couldn't do anything constructive."