



2 Tales of the CITY

Composed of Two Amusements:

- I. THE STONERS
AND
II. THE TRIBUNES

BY **JAMES
WALSH**

TWO TALES OF THE CITY
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II.

The TRIBUNES

The TRIBUNES

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The TRIBUNES

Dramatis Personae

Louis Scarfino, Student, Entrepreneur, and later, Mayor of Harrison

Bradley Kusanis, Student, Entrepreneur

Kalliope Beaumont, Student and Bradley's girlfriend

Marcus Bryce, Mayor Scarfino's Chief-of-Staff

Weldon Watson, the Tribune, Construction

Gloria Tedeum, A Secretary to Mayor Scarfino

Redmont Keller, the Tribune, Economics

Fingal O'Flahertie, aka "Oscar", the Tribune Education

Gaspar Fogg, the Tribune, Politics

Carlton Dunn, the Tribune, Law

U.S. Senator Calvin Payne

Giovanni Cardinal Satolli

Joyce Lakin, Deputy Director of Human Resources for Harrison

Roger Souless, Casino Syndicate representative

Reverend Xenophon Uth, Bishop, the Church of the Amphora of Cosmic Secrets

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Cameron Reynolds, an Associate at the law firm of Gray,
Arnold, and Young

Miranda Smythe, Bradley Kusanis' sister

Christopher Austin, Photography Expert

Rowan Madigan, the Tribune, Communications

Tony Joseph, Bryce's driver and bodyguard

Tykhe, Reverend Uth's wife

Stan Adenth Nigelenni, The Bug Man

The TRIBUNES

The TRIBUNES

Prologue

A Nasty Little Secret

The flagship institution for the state's university system is located in the capital, an otherwise undistinguished city in the geographic center of the state. Take away The University and all of its ancillary enterprises and one would be left with a farm town thinly disguised with the trappings of state government.

However, The State University is a formidable enterprise. Despite efforts by some members of the legislature to limit the enrollment, the number of full-time equivalent undergraduate students registered this year exceeded fifty thousand. Projections promised that sixty thousand was likely in the very near future. Experts who had studied the question agreed that the enrollment ceiling for an efficient operation was in the thirty-to-thirty-five thousand range. The University administration vehemently disagreed. Their dogma was that the annual budget was tied directly to the head-count. It always had been thus; it must always be so. More students equated to a higher budget. Agreeing to a ceiling of thirty-five thousand students would be committing economic suicide.

One devious Vice-President suggested a rather transparent end-run around the limit. The University would set up a new college, a branch campus if you will, on University land across the river, a few miles from the main campus. Enrollment on the

main campus would be limited to thirty-five thousand, with the overflow being assigned to the new college. They would all still be taking university courses from university faculty and The University would confer their degrees. Thus, the total university enrollment could safely expand to seventy thousand. The plan might very well have worked except that it foundered when the faculty on the main campus rebelled and refused to travel to the satellite campus to teach.

The Business School, while well-regarded by the accrediting associations, was not nearly as strong as their senior faculty believed. They were wallowing neck-deep in hubris. In Pride's footprints, close behind comes Arrogance, and then, often, Disaster. They actually believed that, if the Business School was suddenly to depart for greener pastures, it would be a mortal blow to The University. What had previously been merely a justified self-confidence had evolved into a repugnant swagger. They made their own rules. They did as they pleased. They answered to no one. They considered themselves to be autonomous in fact, if not in name, even if they could not define autonomous. Inevitably, their attitude filtered down to the students.

Louis Scarfino was a rising junior on the main campus, enrolled in the Business School, majoring in Management, with a minor in Entrepreneurship. He was an indifferent student, with an undistinguished record. However, the combination of an agile mind and a malleable moral compass more than compensated for his intellectual shortcomings. Emerson's Law in action! He took Entrepreneurship seriously and believed in its prime directive – find a need and satisfy it for a price. To begin with, he amassed a

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collection of master keys that gave him access to virtually every faculty office. His targets were course examinations already prepared, but not yet administered. He would copy them on his iPhone and then, later, in the privacy of his off-campus apartment, he would print them. Lou had assembled a stable of independent contractors who, for a fee, would generate the correct answers. A copy of a virgin examination sold for one hundred dollars; a copy with all of the answers provided went for five hundred. Word spread quickly through the campus grapevine and soon Lou had all the business he could handle. The income produced by his fledgling business quickly dwarfed the modest allowance he received from his family in Harrison, a city one-hundred-and-fifty miles to the North, on the southern shore of Lake Katherine. Once he was successful, he celebrated by getting a tattoo on his left forearm. The picture showed a King Midas admiring his wealth. The caption beneath the picture read: "Being rich is the highest virtue."

To help defray the rent on his apartment, he had found a roommate, Bradley Kusanis, a classmate in the Management program. He, too, was a convert to the entrepreneurial mind-set. He was the Doctor Feel Good in the Business School. Whether you preferred pot, pills, or more potent pharmaceuticals, he was the go-to man. If he did not have in stock what you needed, he could get it for you for a modest surcharge.

Bradley had a steady girlfriend, Kalliope Beaumont, a junior pre-med major in the Psychology Department. The relationship between Lou and Kally was fractious at best. At worst, it became downright hostile. Kally wanted Lou to move out so that she could move in. For Lou's part, that was never

going to happen. He had been there first and the apartment was nearly ideal for him. It was just off the eastern edge of the campus. It occupied the entire second floor of a detached house and it had a private entrance. Lou believed that Kally was a slut who was only using Bradley for either his merchandise or a share of his rapidly accumulating wealth. Once Bradley saw through her, she would be history. All of this made for an uncomfortable and unstable triangle. Such meta-stable conditions rarely have long life times.

It was near the end of the winter quarter at the University and the usual mad scramble was on. Some members of the faculty were furiously trying to deliver everything that they had promised in their syllabi. Others, who had run out of syllabus weeks ago, were desperately trying to find some marginally relevant material to fill the remaining class meetings. The students, on the other hand, were girding for the onslaught of end-of-the-quarter examinations. Tension was palpable. Tempers developed hair-triggers. Tolerance and Collegiality all but disappeared. Sleep became a luxury most could little afford.

At such times both Lou and Bradley found themselves especially busy. Demands for their services spiked. Lou was working in his carrel in the Library and was fighting a losing battle with the urge to sleep. But he had too much work to do if he was going to meet fast approaching deadlines. He recognized that he needed a boost. So he declared a short recess in his work and headed for the apartment to pick up a “black beauty”, a dose of dextro-amphetamine, from a stash that he kept in a hollowed out copy of the 12th edition of “Advanced Accounting” by Hoyle,

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Schaefer, and Doupnik. While the textbook often induced sleep, the black beauty would keep him awake and alert for a good four hours.

Even though this was Bradley's evening to have exclusive use of the apartment, he was rather sure that his roommate would not be there. This was peak earning season and he expected that Bradley would be on the move, dispensing his wares. When he came up the stairs, he was taken aback to find Kally sitting cross-legged on the couch with a copy of her Biochemistry textbook open in her lap.

When the surprise wore off, he asked the obvious question, "How the Hell did you get in here?" It was a serious concern. He had too much of value in the apartment to be comfortable with all sorts of strange people wandering through it.

"Don't get your knickers all in a bunch, Brad gave me a key. After all, I'll be living here after you leave." If the response didn't set him off, the accompanying smirk was calculated to do it. She flaunted the key, worn on a leather thong around her neck, as if it was a powerful talisman.

He disappointed her by giving a hearty laugh. "You're delusional again. What you are wishing for is never going to happen." Then, he cut to the chase, "If you're looking for Brad, I expect that you're in for a long wait. He's out making deliveries. Sex takes a back seat to Business." *Actually, for some of my classmates, Sex is a Business.*

The smirk returned. "Actually, I was waiting for you. I need a copy of the final exam in Biochemistry. Without it, I'm not going to get my A. If that happens, I can kiss Medical School

goodbye. You'll let me have one, won't you?" She rearranged herself on the couch in what she imagined was a seductive pose.

Lou grinned at her. "Sure. Gimme a hundred dollars and it's yours."

"I don't have that much money but I will get it for you next week." In her voice, there was a plaintive tone that was wasted on Lou.

"Sorry, my business plan restricts me to cash transactions. I don't take checks. I don't take credit or debit cards. I don't take promissory notes, nor do I have any interest in acquiring the rights to your first-born child." It was a good business plan and it had spared him the drudgery of bookkeeping and the hassle of hounding people to collect what was owed him. Those who wanted his product soon learned the rules.

Kally was becoming frantic. "I gotta have that test. Why are you being so damn difficult? You know that I'm good for the money."

"I know nothing of the kind. If you don't have the money, go out and earn it. You know how to do that, don't you? When you come back with cash, I'll let you have a copy of the exam. Until then, the answer is no."

"Suppose I let you take it out in trade?" She really didn't want to go this way but she was desperate.

"Barter is unacceptable! Cash only! Besides, you're not my type."

She screamed at him. "What a miserable bastard you are!" She leveraged herself off the couch and charged at him, beating him over the head with the only weapon at hand, the Biochemistry textbook.

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It was not in Lou's nature to beat up women, but if he did not do something to stop her, she might kill him. He gave up trying to protect his head and reached out for her to stop the attack. His hands found her throat and he squeezed. "Stop, you crazy bitch!"

At first, the blows intensified. But, as he continued to squeeze, the blows began to abate. After the blows stopped, he released his hold. Kally collapsed to the floor, with the Biochemistry textbook at her side.

In a few moments, the adrenaline rush subsided and his normal breathing returned. He stared down at Kally. She had not moved since she went to the floor. He checked for a pulse and found none. The enormity of what he had done overwhelmed him. His knees began to buckle and he sat in the nearest chair and buried his head in his hands. Time passed without him being aware of it. He might as well have been in a coma.

After half-an-hour, Bradley came up the stairs. When he saw the scene, he freaked out. He rushed to Kally and checked for vital signs. Finding none, he whirled and came at Lou. "What happened here? What have you done?"

Lou gave him the Executive Summary. "She was waiting for me when I came in from the Library. She wanted a copy of the Biochemistry exam. Since she had no money, I told her no. She tried promising, pleading, begging, and barter. When I would not yield, she lost her temper and attacked me with that damn textbook. It weighs a ton and it hurts." As evidence he displayed the lumps on his head and the bruises that were already starting to develop on his hands and arms. "I didn't mean to

strangle her. It was an accident. I just wanted to get her to stop beating on me. It was self-defense.”

Bradley offered the traditional rational response. “We should call the police.”

Lou shook his head sadly. “Think it through! The last thing that either of us needs right now is for the authorities to begin a close examination of our business activities. Even without the fatality, we would both be expelled from The University and then sent away for long prison terms. Is that what you want?”

“No! But what else can we do. How do we make a dead body disappear?” Bradley was not long on imagination.

“Well, we could put her body in our bathtub to drain the body fluids. Then we could cut her up into roasts, steaks, ribs, and stew meat. There’s room in our freezer.” Lou was being facetious, trying to lighten the mood.

Bradley looked at him aghast. “You really are insane, you know.”

“Chill out, my friend,” Lou answered. “I know that it looks bad, but we can get through this if we stick together and don’t panic.”

“Bullshit,” Bradley screamed. He reached into his backpack and came out with a thirty-eight caliber revolver. Lou remembered that Brad had a concealed carry permit, justified by the fact that he often carried large amounts of cash. He levelled the gun at Lou and told him “Take out your phone and call the police.”

Lou fished out his phone while thinking how ironical it was that Brad had suddenly become a strong believer in law and order. While moving toward his roommate, Lou started to dial but it was not the police he was calling. “What am I going to tell

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them? How I returned home from the Library and found you standing over the dead body of your girlfriend. That won't look good for you and it will be my word against yours. Is that really the way you want to play this?"

At this point, the ring tone on Bradley's cell phone sounded. It was the Simon and Garfunkle version of the 59th Street Bridge song. It took Brad by surprise and, instinctively, compulsively, he reached into his backpack and pulled out the phone. In doing so, he took his eyes off Lou who had closed the distance between the two. Lou reached out and grabbed the wrist of the gun hand with both of his and twisted it back. For a few moments, they struggled for control and then the gun discharged. The bullet entered under Bradley's chin, pierced his tongue and hard palate, and then continued on to lodge in his brain. He died instantaneously, still clutching the gun in one hand and his cell phone in the other. As the corpse crumpled to the floor, the cell phone slid from Bradley's grasp and wound up under his body.

For the second time this evening, Lou was appalled by what had happened. He hadn't meant to kill the poor, dumb bastard. It was another unfortunate accident. He just wanted him to put aside his knee-jerk reaction and listen to reason. *Why did he, suddenly, have to become sanctimonious?*

As Lou surveyed the crime scene, his animal cunning began to assert itself. Someone had strangled Kally. It could have been Bradley. Then, filled with remorse, Brad had eaten his gun. A simple case of a lovers' quarrel resulting in murder and suicide. It was a plausible scenario. The investigators would find gunpowder residue on Bradley's hand. There would be no known witnesses.

He resisted the impulse to rearrange the bodies for dramatic effect. *Better to leave it simple.* The technicians would find his fingerprints throughout the apartment, but that was to be expected since he lived here. He left, locking the outside door behind him. He managed to return to his carrel in the Library without anyone seeing him. There was no one to prove that he had not been in his carrel for the whole evening. He finished his work and, in the small hours of the morning, he went to stay with a girlfriend, something he did often when it was Bradley's turn to have exclusive use of the apartment.

The next afternoon, several of Bradley's customers, who had not received their scheduled deliveries, grew restive. He was not answering his phone so they came looking for him. They prevailed on the landlady to check the apartment. It would be only a small exaggeration to say that her scream could be heard in the next county. The police were summoned. Close behind them came the members of the press followed by an army of the morbidly curious.

Lou was called out of a late afternoon class to be told the news. Willingly, he submitted to police questioning and cooperated fully. While he did not have an alibi *per se*, there was nobody to put him at the scene of the crime in the crucial time window and there was no obvious motive. While his fingerprints were all over the apartment, that was normal. Had they not been there, that would have been noteworthy. Only Bradley's prints were found on the gun. When the Medical Examiner ruled it to be a murder/suicide, the police closed the case and Lou was off the hook. He could not believe his good fortune. But, when one

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wins the lottery, you may double-check the numbers, but you should not question fate. You accept it gracefully as your due and you move on with your life. Only three people knew what actually happened in the apartment that evening. And two of them were dead! It was his own nasty little secret and he buried it deeply in one dark corner of his mind. He discussed it with no one! Not ever!

