"He went to his safe and ceremoniously handed me five hundred dollars as a wedding gift."

DANGEROUS GIFT

By HARRY KLINGSBERG

What was behind this strange act of generosity?

The big mansion and gardens several miles from the city, amidst the engulfing housing developments, seemed a hallmark of decades gone by, and so did the aged owner who occupied its spacious rooms. Past ninety, white-haired and a little bent, he nevertheless retained considerable spirit. On this February day, as often, he was in his study, scrupulously examining through a reading glass reports and accounts on his desk, relishing the warmth of a blazing fireplace in the opposite wall.

Item by item he studied income and outgo, figures and totals, enjoying his task and the sense of accomplishment in a life now more and more isolated and without change.

He began to feel a chill; rising and moving about a bit creakily, he crossed the room and built up the fire again. A rejuvenation, the old man mused as he stood watching, hardly possible with himself. His reflective mood lengthened. Why, he wondered these days, had he lived so long? Was there, perhaps, something else in the world for him to do? Some unfinished business to attend to? Idle speculation, he decided, with an impatient shrug, and returned to the papers on his desk.

"For dessert," Martha Doowinkle said, "we'll have a cherry cobbler."

"Sounds special," John Doowinkle said. An assistant district attorney, he was a slight man, wearing glasses and, from the cut of his jaw, rather stubborn by trait.

"But we'll have it later," Martha said. "Paul and Sue Leland are coming over."

"Paul and Sue —— Oh. The newlyweds you matched up at the shore last summer."

"All I did was to have two nice young people meet," Martha retorted coldly. "Anyway, they're back

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Dangerous Gift (Continued from Page 24)

from their honeymoon, and I phoned Sue today, and Paul was fired from his job—think of it, the day he got back!" Anger shook her voice. "Paul wants to see you, and I thought we'd all have coffee—that must be them now."

She ushered in an attractive pair; the girl slim and graceful, the new husband with dark, direct eyes—a couple you took to on sight, John thought. Anxiety stamped both their faces.

Paul Leland blurted out, "I came here to ask you—you're a district attorney—I want you to put me under arrest!"

John said, "Suppose we sit down. Now then. Could you take it a bit slower?"

Paul managed a grin. "I must sound feverish to you. Well, do you know the David Leland Institute on the Parkway? You've probably been in it?"

John nodded. The handsome edifice, he recalled, was built in the '30's by a wealthy retired inventor, his object the advancement of science and industry.

"I'm David Leland's grandson. Not that I know him—he and my father quarreled long ago." He barely remembered his father, Paul said. "He was killed piloting his own plane when I was four. Something mysterious after his death seemed to harden my grandfather, and he cut himself off from my mother and me." Paul added, "She had to work to support us, and later I helped. We made out—even to college for me."

"I remember your telling me about your mother," Martha Doowinkle said. "And that the city got too much for her and she moved a couple of years ago."

"That's right. She bought a cottage up in Woodhurst. It was her home town."

After getting his B.S., Paul continued, he took a teaching job in a prep school and, quite often, went to the Leland Institute library for classroom material and to keep himself abreast. Last December he met Price Bellamy, the director.

"He runs it generally—an associate director under him is in charge of the research. This Bellamy ——" Paul paused. "He's an effective talker, very sincere-sounding. One day he spoke to me. He said he'd noticed me and heard me give my name to the desk, and wasn't I David Leland's grandson? I told him I was and he said, 'Then you must join in our work. As a Leland, your place is here.' We had a long talk, and I said I'd do it after the midterms. I was delighted. I wasn't wild about teaching, and being on the institute staff had a big appeal for me."

"And were you put on the staff?"

"No; he said that'd come later—meanwhile, he sent me around town to talk up the institute magazine. Well, one evening, Sue and I said, 'Why wait? Let's set the date for Saturday.' On Friday I told Bellamy, and he gave me a week off for a wedding trip. And when I got back today he called me a thief and fired me!"

He explained, "When I told him I was getting married, he went to his safe and ceremoniously handed me five hundred dollars as a wedding gift—an institute custom with its employees, he said. Then he looked at his watch and said would I pardon him, he had to see the custodian; he'd be right back. Now he claims I stole the money while he was out. He said no doubt I squandered it, but he'd let me go because of my name, and his advice to me was to leave the city where I disgraced myself." Paul's voice rose. "I won't let him smear me! How can I look for another job—or face anybody?"

Sue Leland said, "Paul isn't telling his mother about this. It's—it's just too awful!" She bit her lip.

"This Bellamy should be punched in the jaw!" Martha snapped. John shared her feelings; he fully believed this angry young man. The injury here was to both these young people. It was a dismal beginning to their marriage.

He said, "Have you any idea why Bellamy did this to you?"

"That's what I asked him; why? I told him to forget my name—if I was a thief, call the police. He ordered me out of his office." Later this morning, Paul said, he withdrew the five hundred dollars from his savings and sent it to Bellamy by messenger. "I've got to have a showdown, and I thought, if you arrested me —— I guess that was emotion talking. But what do I do?"

"For a start, let's call on Bellamy tomorrow." Seeing them brighten at his offer, John smiled. "Right now—Mrs. Doowinkle makes unrivaled cherry cobbler."

The doorman halted Paul Leland. "Can't admit you. Director's orders."

Flushing, Paul said, "I'll wait here."

"All right, Paul." John walked inside. He had some minutes to his appointment and made a little tour around, admiring the technical exhibits, the splendid library. He proceeded to the director's office. Price Bellamy, in his fifties and carefully groomed, gave John a frigid stare. He introduced the impressive-looking lawyer beside his desk as Edmund Rugart, counsel for the institute.

Bellamy snapped, "You called about this young thief, Leland? Be brief."

"I'll be blunt. I see you have barred this young man from the institute. That was why you hatched the theft charge, as an excuse to issue the order? You also hope to drive him from the city ——"

Rugart cut in, "You dare to impugn this gentleman? What are you after?"

"A retraction of the theft charge. Otherwise, I will advise young Leland to sue this man for slander."

"And if you plague Mr. Bellamy with a lawsuit, we will take it your purpose is money and expose you. Good day!"

"Duly noted," John said. "Good day."

"A short, snappy interview," he told Paul, walking away from the building. "But I see it this way. For some reason, your visits to the institute worried Bellamy. But he couldn't simply exclude you. He had to trump up a pretext."

"But why give me a job? If he wanted to brand me as a thief, he could have tried planting some cash on me any time I was there."

John said, "An employee is easier to accuse. Meanwhile, he kept you away from the institute, ostensibly to boost its magazine. Only, why you? How are you different from other visitors? Well, you're the founder's grandson."

They walked a block silently. Paul said, "I was thinking—my grandfather must go there sometimes—what worried Bellamy becomes sort of plain, doesn't it?"

"It does." But —— The puzzle grew. Why should Bellamy fear a meeting between Paul and his grandfather?

He said, "I recommend a slander suit plus a petition for a prompt trial, citing the need to your livelihood of clearing your name. I'm permitted to practice in the civil courts ——" He saw Paul's grim nod. "I'll start the action today."

"Your honor, this is a damage suit for slander begun by Paul Leland, listed for trial without a jury." John paused. Spectators, reporters eyed his empty table curiously; why no plaintiff? The men at the defense table wore a detached air.

"Early this morning," John went on, "I received a special-delivery letter from the plaintiff to drop the case, that he was leaving the city; that he regretted having troubled me and hoped the check he enclosed would pay for it. I drove to his apartment. He and his wife were both gone."

Judge Greer reached for a pen. "Then the suit is to be discontinued?"

"On the contrary." John spoke deliberately; he had decided on his course with Martha. "Knowing young Leland, I doubt that he truly wanted to end the case. I believe he sent that letter under pressure by the defense."

At the other table, Rugart vaulted up. "Utterly denied! The plaintiff ordered the case dropped, and it must be done. We cannot go to trial without him!"

"Counsel knows better. Neither party need be present during a civil trial ——"

"I have more to say! I suggest a simple reason why plaintiff ran out on the case; he lost his nerve after being pushed into it by this practitioner who, it seems, still fancies he can profit from it." Rugart's voice soared up. "I charge incitement to litigation amounting to barratry, and I shall demand a full investigation!"

The lawyer's charge drew all eyes toward John. Judge Greer viewed him with distinct doubt. John felt himself tighten up, though not too surprised by the attack. Now, he reflected grimly, his own name was bound up with the case.

He said, "They can save their warnings. I intend to proceed, your honor."

Judge Greer said, "Go ahead then."

"Thank you." John stood another moment, then turned and beckoned to Martha in the courtroom. He said, as she came toward him, "Sit at my table. Any suggestions welcome. . . . I call the defendant under cross-examination."

Scowling, Price Bellamy took himself to the box. He bit out the oath and his residence, an apartment hotel. Yes, he headed the David Leland Institute.

John said, "You seem in a temper, Mr. Bellamy. Because, although young Leland was coerced into abandoning the case, here you are on the stand?"

"Never mind the analysis," Rugart snapped. "Just the relevant questions."

"Some weeks ago, you approached Paul Leland in the institute library, which he used fairly often in his teaching job, and induced him—I quote—to 'join in our work.' Out of sentiment, because he is the grandson of David Leland?"

"That's the truth." Bellamy nodded, poised again. "I thought of these two, divided so long by a family breach—my idea was to reunite them. However, the boy turned out to be a thief."

"Indeed. The particulars, please."

"Well, one afternoon he came to my office—he said he was getting married the next day, and I gave him a week for a wedding trip. During our talk I had to leave briefly; something in a hurry with the custodian. When I returned, he seemed nervous. We keep a fair amount of cash in the safe, and the next morning, when I went to get some, five hundred dollars was gone. I recalled his manner ——" The director gestured. "He slipped over to the safe while he was alone."

John said, "You left him there alone to lend color to a theft charge. The fact is, you made him a phony wedding gift of the money?"

"That's absurd. When he got back, I confronted him. I warned him there were jails for thieves, but if he returned the money, I wouldn't prosecute. He shuffled and denied, but in the end he made restitution. Naturally, I discharged him."

"And banned him from the institute. I submit his coming there alarmed you, whereupon you employed him with the intent of framing, then firing him ——"

"Hired him so he could fire him!" Rugart scoffed. "What nonsense!"

"Allow me to continue. I assume David Leland comes there?"

"On occasion."

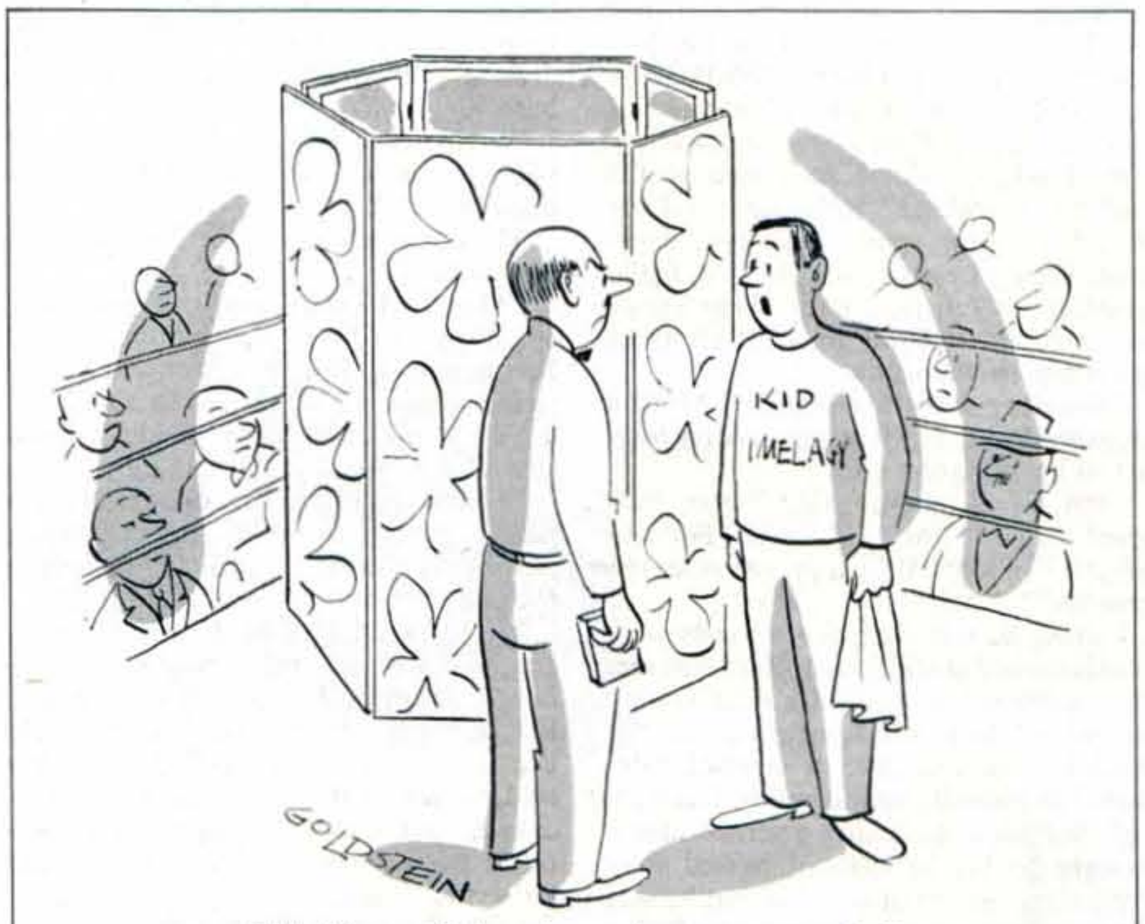
"And thus might meet his grandson. Actually, you feared a reunion between them; and, to reduce the risk further, you pressed Paul to leave the city?"

Judge Greer demanded, "And what might be the witness' motive?"

"The post he holds, sir, suggests that behind his fear lies some hidden swindle upon the institute." The press table alerted sharply; this case was really reaching out. "I confess inquiries about him have not been fruitful, and I now propose to examine into the financial structure and operation of this institution."

"Objection!" Rugart marched toward the dais. "As counsel for the institute I know Mr. Bellamy has served it with honor. Auditors check on him; sureties bond him. They say they made inquiries; then they know he lives modestly. Now they hint some dark, undefined swindle. Outrageous!"

Judge Greer advised John, "I will not allow you to pry into this institution upon mere surmise. Sustained." Rugart stepped away, satisfied. The disappointed reporters settled back.



"He likes a little privacy between rounds."

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

John set his jaw and went at the witness again. When did he last see Paul Leland? Not since he discharged him, Bellamy replied. Nor had he communicated with him. He had no idea where Paul was now, he declared.

"John," Martha Doowinkle called in a low tone. He went to his table. She whispered, "Paul wouldn't just go off without letting his mother know where. He might even be with her." John nodding slowly, Martha added, "Her home's in Woodhurst, Paul said. I could slip out and phone, or—could we go there now?"

"That could be better." John faced the bench. "We have hopes of locating the plaintiff and ask that the case go over until morning. And that, meanwhile, both defendant and counsel be enjoined from communicating with the plaintiff."

"That is insulting!" Rugart shouted. "We oppose a continuance, your honor!"

"Well —— Locating the plaintiff would be desirable. Requests granted, the second one as a matter of form." Both sides hastened from the court.

Paul Leland stood staring glumly out of his mother's cottage window, telling himself over again it had to be this way, but hating the double talk, the pretense.

A cab pulled up in the street; startled, he saw Mr. and Mrs. Doowinkle get out. Ignore the bell—no, he couldn't do that. He answered the ring and greeted them a little lamely. "Hello."

"Hello, Paul. Mrs. Doowinkle imagined you'd be here." John's grin seemed to ease the young man. "I wanted you to know I started the trial on the theory that your letter was not your voluntary act. Was it?"

"Well—you see ——" Paul halted abruptly. "Please come in."

Inside, he made introductions, then spoke to the quiet graying woman next to Sue Leland. "I guess I wasn't frank with you, mother."

Anna Leland met his eyes. "I know that, Paul."

To her, he rapidly sketched his experience with Bellamy. He turned to John.

"Around seven last night Bellamy phoned me. He told me he was calling from a booth on a delicate family matter, in order to save my mother a great heartache. I was about to hang up on him, but that stopped me. Then he said in these exact words, 'It was hushed up after your father's death, but he was a forger and a crook. Now, I want you to instruct your lawyer—by special-delivery letter only—to drop the slander suit, and I want you to leave town.'"

John said, "And the alternative?"

"He'd have my father's history circulated in the town where my mother lived. He said, 'Think of the talk, the anguish to your mother. The choice is yours.' He gave me a minute for my answer. Well, my head spun. I knew there was some mystery about my father. I talked fast with Sue and told him I'd do what he asked. We—Sue and I—felt we couldn't see my mother's life spoiled."

Early this morning, he and Sue threw some clothes together and came here. "We'd fixed up a story that I quit my job and planned to go West—I had a feeling it wasn't going over. Well, when you told me you went to trial anyway ——" Paul expressed himself with his hands. "The sham got too much for me. It came over me that you and my mother deserved the truth."

Sue Leland said, "I'd better tell you now, Paul. Bellamy phoned an hour ago." She turned to John. "You see, the phone's in the dining room and I answered it—I came back and pretended it was a wrong number. He wanted me to put Paul on. I felt Paul had been upset enough and I said, 'You let him alone! Don't call again!' and banged down the receiver."

"Good for you!" Anna Leland said. Reproof in her tone, she spoke to her son. "I suppose, for my sake, you intend to tell Mr. Doowinkle to let the case die?"

"How important is a case?"

"And how important is it not to give in to a threat? And should you have taken for granted your father was what Bellamy said?" Smiling now, Anna said, "It was tender of you to worry for me. But don't you think I can take care of myself?"

"I do. But——" He smiled with her. "You win, Mrs. Independence."

John said to Anna, "Perhaps you should tell me about Paul's father."

"Yes." Her eyes were far-off a moment. "When Walter and I married, he was in the company with his father—they manufactured Mr. Leland's electrical inventions. I'm sure Mr. Leland thought I corrupted his son. You see, Walt was fascinated by distant lands and eager to write about them, and we decided he'd break away from the company. His father made a fierce scene over that. He said he'd raised a disloyal son. Walt bought a plane and learned to fly, and we traveled together, and his work began to appear in the magazines. But after Paul was born, I couldn't always go with him.

"Flying over Central America in the spring of 1937, Walt's plane failed and he crashed into a lake. Only wreckage was found. His body was never recovered.

"Then Bellamy came to see me. He worked for Mr. Leland and—yes, I remember, he was in the family; a distant cousin." Here was a new detail, John thought, not that its meaning was clear. "He said facts had come to light about Walt that he was forbidden to reveal, that he had money for me from Walt's father, who preferred never to hear from me. I said Mr. Leland could keep his money, but I meant to find out from him about these supposed facts. He wouldn't see me or talk to me. He never answered my letters. I had to give up."

The year after Walt's death, she read that his father had founded the institute and put Bellamy in charge. "So Bellamy says Walt was a forger. He's lying, just as he's lying about Paul's being a thief!"

Paul asked, "What happened at the trial this morning?" John described the curtailed session, and Paul's eyes darkened. Young Leland said, "They're really gunning for you personally. That shows you're right—Bellamy must be guilty of some gyp on the institute."

"Together with that lawyer," Martha Doowinkle put in. "Rugart was desperate not to have it gone into."

"But why," John said, "were they never caught? And it's true Bellamy doesn't live high. Why a gyp without the rewards?"

Unless, he reflected, the rewards were to materialize in the future. But what was their method? He needed a witness able and willing to give full details about the institute—the founder, of course! John chafed at himself; he was rather late with that. Somehow he hadn't given complete thought to David Leland, passed over him as a name out of the past, but he was a reality and knew how the institution was born and shaped. And he certainly would not stand for having it fleeced.

The easiest place to drive yourself mad is in traffic.

FRANK G. MCINNIS

He said, "I should have subpoenaed David Leland. Maybe I can phone him."

Anna Leland remarked, "He's very old now. Maybe he's mellowed. You'll find his phone under 'Meadowview.' He never listed himself in his own name."

John made the call. A thin voice said, "David Leland speaking." John gave his name, and the voice became sharp. "You want me to be a witness?"

"That's right. I'd like to see you and tell you about the case ——"

"Know all about it—and you too. I'll be in court in the morning." Evidently the defending pair had rushed out to his home, in the event Paul's lawyer called him. From the old man's tone, the prospect wasn't too good for tomorrow.

A reporter said, "Why, there's David Leland!"

David Leland made a unique old-fashioned figure on a front row. Seated a little stiffly, his white hair shining, he gave close heed to the proceedings.

John advised the bench, "The plaintiff is in court. I now call him."

Paul Leland testified self-possessedly. He explained the slander suit; how Bellamy's phone call impelled him to drop the action. Now, he would see the case through. The old man in the front row watched him with frowning interest.

Rugart intoned, "No questions to the boy. The individual who should be interrogated is the one who concocted his improbable tale. But that will come." He said, eying John, "I suppose Mr. Bellamy is now to be heckled further by you?"

"I will recall him when I am ready." John turned. "I call David Leland."

The old man rose; whispers followed his slow gait to the stand. He took the oath and bent a barbed look on John, his thin face fixed in asperity.

John began, "I have done some reading about you in a newspaper library, and Anna Leland has added some details. You have reached ninety?"

"Passed it. And just fire your questions. Forget my age."

"I intend to. You made your fortune as an inventor in the electrical field and retired in 1938, when you founded the institute bearing your name. Correct?"

David Leland said, "Correct."

"On the personal side, you have long been a widower, and your only son, Walter, died in 1937. He has been called a forger ——" As Rugart interjected a protest, John said, "I did not revive this painful subject. Mr. Bellamy put it into the case." John continued, "How did the forgery charge against your son arise?"

Judge Greer said, "Is that relevant here?"

"I will not insist on it. Mr. Leland, did you consider that the charge might have been faked?"

The old eyes narrowed. "I do not care to discuss it."

"May we then discuss your grandson, a stranger to you since his childhood? Seeing and hearing him here, did he not strike you as a truthful young man?"

"He could have been taught a good story." He leaned forward. "By you."

"I hope to change that opinion." John paused. "Is it not odd that Mr. Bellamy never told you he met your grandson in the institute, nor that he hired him?"

That was all explained to him yesterday, the witness said. "Price—Mr. Bellamy—admitted hiring him on impulse, but, as the boy proved to be a thief, he'd kept still to spare my feelings. He then told me about this case, and that a rascally lawyer was professing that the institute's been swindled. He felt I should know the situation."

"Please proceed. There was more?"

"Mr. Rugart said I might be pestered to be a witness, but I could refuse because of insufficient notice. I said I wouldn't dodge—I'd go to court and teach this lawyer not to scandalize the institute."

"These men wanted you to dodge, but had to settle for next best?"

"You're just twisting it." He was a touch exasperated. "This swindle nonsense—why, every dollar in and out of there has always been watched by a trust company and auditors. I go over the accounts myself and visit there regularly to see what's going on. Well, then. With all the controls, where's the chance for a swindle?"

John said, "There you can help. From the newspapers at the time, we learn the bulk of your fortune went for the institute, and that Mr. Rugart was your counsel. And you named Price Bellamy the director. You thought him fitted?"

"Fitted and loyal. He'd been my company cashier, and we were related besides. I want you to know I trusted both him and Mr. Rugart—then and since."

"Your honor, I propose again to probe into the financial setup of the institute. Since yesterday's adverse ruling, the plaintiff has been heard ——"

"Argument, argument!" Rugart broke in. "For all we care, he can probe away."

John said, "An act to make Mr. Leland think they have nothing to hide. We do not need his permission. For the purpose of this request, plaintiff's testimony must be assumed to be true. We may therefore inquire into defendant's motive."

"You may in theory," Judge Greer said. "Very well. Proceed."

John turned. "Mr. Leland, how many millions did you give for the institute?"

The witness said, "I consider that none of your business."

How much, John asked, was used for building and contents? How much was set aside for later support? The reply came back: "I will not discuss it."

"You understand the court has allowed this line of questions?"

Rugart said, "Is he about to ask that Mr. Leland be held for contempt?"

John ignored the lawyer; compulsion of this witness was never in his mind. "You spoke of a trust company, Mr. Leland. I assume you established a trust fund, the company to administer it with the institute as beneficiary?"

"You can assume whatever you like."

"And I judge there was an assignment covering the fund. Upon what terms?"

"Also none of your business."

Baffled, John walked back and said in an undertone to Paul, "Maybe, if I had a look at the assignment—but I can just see him agreeing to it."

"H'm. . . . If you knew the trust company, would they let you examine it?"

"No, but they'd produce it in court. But which trust company? Wait a minute. He'd have picked one of the four or five big ones. It wouldn't take long to make the rounds. . . . Your honor, at this time I request a recess."

As Rugart bounded up, Judge Greer demanded, "A recess? Why?"

John was about to say, "To seek information," but in the judge's mood that would not work. Stratagem was called for—a reason not easily turned down.

He said, "I fear the court session has fatigued Mr. Leland. He told us to forget his age, but before continuing with him I feel he should rest for an hour at least."

"I—ah—object!" Rugart was disconcerted. "A ruse to drag out the case!"

David Leland spoke from the stand. "May I have a word?" His cold glance surveyed John. Turning, he said, "I believe I would like a rest, your honor."

"Well —— All right then. We will recess for lunch too. Until one-thirty."

David Leland watched John leave the court, then joined the men at the defense table. "I wanted (*Continued on Page 76*)

(*Continued from Page 74*) him to get the recess—curious to see what he thinks he can do with it." They forced smiles.

As court reconvened in an expectant stir, John called, "The officer of the Colony Trust Company." John took a legal paper from him. "Your honor, this is the assignment creating the trust fund. May I familiarize myself with it?"

While the defense pair glared, he gave the paper study with Paul, his own suspense caught by court and press table. John reread a paragraph, his lips tightening. He said, "This may be it," and faced the aged man back on the stand.

"I am sure you recall this paper. By it, you turned over some ten million dollars in assets to the Colony Trust Company, to be invested for the institute." John paused and said dryly, "I see Mr. Rugart has lost his 'probe-away' attitude."

"I object! By no contortion can the trust fund be relevant to this case!"

Judge Greer remarked, "I have permitted this line. Let him proceed."

"Mr. Leland, did you intend the fund to exist permanently or at your pleasure?"

Openly astonished, the old man was about to blurt out a reply. Then he snapped, "I will not discuss that with you."

"Let me quote from paragraph ten of this paper. After a stipulation that you were to receive periodic reports of income, we read, 'And the said David Leland may at his option, by a suitable writing, alter or rescind any of these provisions.' Did Mr. Rugart explain this language to you?"

"That's between him and me." His acid tone spelled the futility of further questions. The court was intent.

John stood there. For all he could see, the case was finished, with its aftermath for Paul Leland and himself. He began turning away; stubbornly faced the stand again. Questions wouldn't work with the witness—maybe shock treatment would.

John flashed at him, "You made it plain the fund was to be permanent—do not interrupt, Mr. Rugart—but you are allowing two conspirators to thwart your purpose. You stare; do you think you are beyond being duped? Here is the assignment. Take a long, thoughtful look at the paragraph I quoted!" He whipped down the paper on the stand.

"Mr. Leland!" Rugart shot up. "There's nothing wrong there—believe me!"

From staring at John, the old man frowned toward the lawyer. "Are you telling me not to look at it?" He studied the paragraph with his reading glass. Then he eyed Rugart sharply. He turned to John. "I was told that language was there only to keep the trust company in line, and advisable. But 'rescind any of these provisions'—that adds up to—why, I could revoke the fund altogether." He gestured. "By a suitable writing—but I'd never sign one!"

"Not knowingly." In the hush, John's thoughts raced. He felt certain these men already had such a writing. What had they got him to sign? Plainly, nothing they could use while Mr. Leland still lived. He probed, "Did you have a will drawn by Mr. Rugart?"

"Yes, I did. When I planned the institute, I told Price Bellamy I'd leave him my home, money too; I felt he deserved it. But for two or three years I didn't get around to a will, until Mr. Rugart prodded me and I had him prepare one and bring it over. It said what it should, so I signed it; it was witnessed, and I gave it to him for safekeeping."

Said what it should, John fretted, and signed and witnessed. Just the same, he'd learn more about it. "Do you recall the will? I assume it began with a clause to pay just debts, and so on?"

"That's right." Next came the bequest to Bellamy; then minor legacies to servants. And his residuary estate? Such as it was by then, the witness said, also went to Bellamy, whom he named executor. "I remember that came at the end."

Well, that was the will —— But wait now. Didn't he see an oddity there?

He addressed the court with a trace of excitement. "That will should be looked at. Usually, all bequests to a residuary legatee are combined at the end. Yet this will begins with a separate bequest to Mr. Bellamy, on page one. Was it so written because the first page contained no signature and no witnesses, hence could be switched?"

"Denied!" Rugart was suddenly ashen. "I assure you, Mr. Leland ——"

The old man cut him off. "I want to see that will!"

John said, "I will allege the first page of that will was—carefully, I am sure—replaced by another, the contents of which we can judge. And now we see why these men had to prevent a reunion between grandson and grandfather. Suppose the two became close? And Mr. Leland decided to make a new will to include the young man? The old will would become worthless, its fraud impossible. . . . I recall Mr. Bellamy."

Bellamy rose weakly. He stood frozen, dread of the witness stand in his face.

"Perhaps, with his honor's consent, you prefer to speak in his chambers?"

"I might as well." He was barely audible. "I might as well."

To the waiting reporters, Doowinkle said, "Verdict for plaintiff in the slander suit, with further action to follow against Bellamy and Rugart. Yes, I know you want the story on the will—suppose we make it my house. My wife and I asked Paul and his family over; Mr. Leland too." John gave them his address.

Later, they were all in his living room. On impulse, Anna Leland left her chair and joined the pensive old man alone on the sofa. He was visibly pleased.

He said soberly to the reporters, "I did my son a great wrong. After his death Bellamy showed me some forged company checks and cleverly—oh, he was so distressed—made me believe it was Walter's work. I'd quarreled with Walt—to me it seemed he deserted me ——" A deep sigh escaped him. "Bellamy admits now the forgeries were his. Why did he poison my memory of my son? Being my kin, he thought I'd then make him my full heir. When he saw me founding the institute instead, he schemed with Rugart to grab the trust fund after my death. You explain it, Mr. Doowinkle."

"First," John said, "they had Mr. Leland reserve control over the fund. Then they had him say in his last will and testament that, having established and kept up the institute, the public should carry on; wherefore he bequeathed the trust fund to Bellamy, 'who is like a son to me.' It was Bellamy who typed the will—both versions. His deal with Rugart was an equal split."

"A ten-million-dollar steal!" A newsman whistled. "Could they have collected?"

"Well, who'd prove the will was a trick, after Mr. Leland was gone?"

"Which they counted on long before this," David Leland said. "But they won't collect now—my grandson's lawyer scotched that at risk to himself. I can apologize to him—but what can I say to you, Anna? And to my grandson?"

Paul smiled. "Why not just, 'Hello'?"

"Hello." His eyes twinkled. "You know, I've wondered lately if there still wasn't something for me to do. Ninety's not too old to start catching up, is it?"

THE END