

**DILEMMAS OF CRIME: TWO TRANSACTIONS**

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**SCENE ONE: THE MALL**

I was on the mall at Madison recently, taking in the sun and the scene between chapters of Minton's *Inside*. While I was walking around reflecting on the wealth of information in Minton's review of "Prison American Style," I lingered to browse at one of the many informal student "shops" set up on the grass near the busy walkway. A number of late editions, monumental works, classics in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sexuals were displayed for sale, along with sundry incidental items, from sandalwood coasters to paired pewter cellars. Most of the psychology and sociology books were oriented toward deviant behavior and crime. All in all, a rather substantial deviance library was offered for sale.

I asked the long-haired, very sincere young man if he was leaving the country or changing areas or just dropping out.

"I'm dropping out after six or seven years around here. I've decided to become a criminal."

"Don't put me on! I just noticed that you had lots of stuff here, and some great volumes and records."

"Really, no put-on. I'm finished with this scene. None of it is relevant any more, at least not for me."

He proceeded to spin it out amid occasional pauses for quoting prices or closing a deal.

"You know, I've been taking these deviance and abnormal classes for years here. I don't know how many times I've been out to one of the juvenile homes or talked with parole officers, guys on parole, police, assistant district attorneys, convicts, hustlers, and thieves. You know the literature if you've been in it. All the things that John Erwin talks about in *The Felon*, such as different categories of criminals. Well, I've hung around a lot of those guys and talked to them before and after a caper, sometimes almost during a caper. I don't know how many boxes of field notes I've collected."

"Don't want to get rid of them, do you? Got them here for sale?"

"No chance. Can't tell when I might want to go back to them for some reason. Anyway, this class I had with Halleck a few terms back, a small seminar with only

seven or eight of us involved in it, really began to turn me on. We went up to the prison at Wapaun. Got to see the whole scene up there. We even sat in on parole-board hearings, and got to see some of the decision-making. But what really got me to thinking was the first-hand stuff laid down by some of the cons we talked with. Even up at the joint, where they are locked into a pretty sorry system, even there you get a certain feeling of excitement. I don't know. It's like static electricity coming out of those guys. Understand?

"I know what you mean."

I didn't tell him that I'd been down that road, behind those walls, locked in the womb of that concrete mother a few times myself. I didn't tell him that I'd walked the mornings and the evenings, the noontimes and midnights of a thousand days .. all of them, and a thousand more. Pantherizing my cage, while ever dismal rains pounding on the cellhouse windows, washed my years away in rivulets of rust. And the occasional sun spread its waffled patterns along the tier in front of my cell.

It wouldn't have been any use for me to spin that out for him, because he was caught up in that glorious adventure thing that goes beyond Halliburton or Kerouac. He was easing into that hang-loose world that scholars like Erwin and Roebuck talk about.

While I was rapping to this easy-going young criminal-to-be, trying to decide whether I wanted to spend six dollars on Halleck's *Psychiatry and the Dilemma of Crime*, my mind sucked back to its jelly-ning days as a criminal, whatever that may mean. Days spent sitting in the card rooms or coffee houses of static land, cutting up the one good caper I was ever involved in with the "heads," "punks," "gleaners," and "hustlers" on short-term leave from "Big Mama."

I could still feel that certain grab of excitement, of promise, of anticipation that is always part of the criminal consciousness, at least as I experienced it. There is something about having no obligations to anyone, like about work every day, or the family needs this or that, or having a deadline to meet at school. The guy that's on the grift makes his own connections with society, when it's his pleasure.

Soon there was a kind of lull in the kid's going-out-of-business sale. I asked him, "You've been around campus for years. Just where are you in terms of a degree?"

"Yes. Well, I screwed around in college majoring in this and that for awhile. They finally kicked me out with a sociology degree. I had 256 credits. I've been in this PhD program here for a couple of years. Suppose I could get my dissertation proposal accepted anytime, if I wanted to."

"What about grades?"

"Grades are not the issue. I get the four-point brownie button anytime I want to. But that's part of it. That's what the system runs on. Perform, conform, do good, give them the old Socratic bull. Keep it in at the classroom and out at the Agency. Don't make it fit the streets. Screw it and pound it and hammer it until it fits the stability model—until it Parsonizes reality for you so you can live in that narrow little dead-end corridor ..."

"No polemic! If it's your bag, have it! But as for me, I feel like I am about to be let out of this big cage. Like the zoo-keeper has left the door open a crack and I'm splitting to where it's no restraints at all. I've walked up and down this stinking crappy cage long enough. Understand? It's not me and the public any longer. It's just me! And free! And the public better button down their pocketbook and keep their door locked!"

"What if you get caught?"

"Look! Tell me the cage they got for 'bad' animals is any worse than the one they got for ducks and peacocks. They got you locked in either way. March you right and left, up and down, inside and outside. Tell you when to play and when to pay. It's just degrees. Who can judge the difference in degrees? Life fluctuates. You live with it .. Say, you going to buy that Hallack, or not? I've got races to run and mountains to climb."

"Six bucks is too much. I've got my head shrunk on the dilemmas of crime for free anyway. Later."

## SCENE TWO: CITY HALL

Another time, and other actors:

"Good morning, Judge. How's the coffee?"

"Same old java, George. Nothing changes."

"I see you sent that Roberts kid up to the joint yesterday, Judge. I didn't know that he was that involved in law violations."

"Well, really, he isn't a *bad* kid. Not like we call some kids bad. Roberts just hasn't had a chance to learn the right ideas and behaviors. Sending him up to Corrections for a year or two may make a new man of him."

(Guy et al, from p 142)

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