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Author: R. C. FitzPatrick
Illustrator: John Schoenherr

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CIRCUIT RIDERS ***



THE CIRCUIT RIDERS

On the Board,
they were just little
lights that glowed.
But out there
in the night of the
city-jungle,
they represented
human passions—
virulent emotions—
and deadly crimes-to-be ...

by **R. C.
FitzPatrick**

Illustrated by Schoenherr

■ He was an old man and very drunk. Very drunk or very sick. It was the middle of the day and the day was hot, but the old man had on a suit, and a sweater under the suit. He stopped walking and stood still, swaying gently on widespread legs, and tried to focus his eyes. He lived here ... around here ... somewhere around here. He continued on, stumbling up the street.

He finally made it home. He lived on the second floor and he dragged himself up the narrow staircase with both hands clutching the railing. But he was still very careful of the paper bag under his arm. The bag was full of beer.

Once in the room, he managed to take off his coat before he sank down on the bed. He just sat there, vacant and lost and empty, and drank his beer.

It was a hot, muggy, August afternoon—Wednesday in Pittsburgh. The broad rivers put moisture in the air, and the high hills kept it there. Light breezes were broken-up and diverted by the hills before they could bring more than a breath of relief.

In the East Liberty precinct station the doors and windows were opened wide to snare the vagrant breezes. There were eight men in the room; the desk sergeant, two beat cops waiting to go on duty, the audio controller, the deAngelis operator, two reporters, and a local book ... businessman. From the back of the building, the jail proper, the voice of a prisoner asking for a match floated out to the men in the room, and a few minutes later they heard the slow,

exasperated steps of the turnkey as he walked over to give his prisoner a light.

At 3:32 pm, the deAngelis board came alive as half-a-dozen lights flashed red, and the needles on the dials below them trembled in the seventies and eighties. Every other light on the board showed varying shades of pink, registering in the sixties. The operator glanced at the board, started to note the times and intensities of two of the dials in his log, scratched them out, then went on with his conversation with the audio controller. The younger reporter got up and came over to the board. The controller and the operator looked up at him.

"Nothing," said the operator shaking his head in a negative. "Bad call at the ball game, probably." He nodded his head towards the lights on the deAngelis, "They'll be gone in five, ten minutes."

The controller reached over and turned up the volume on his radio. The radio should not have been there, but as long as everyone did his job and kept the volume low, the Captain looked the other way. The set belonged to the precinct.

The announcer's voice came on, "... ning up, he's fuming. Doak is holding Sterrett back. What a beef! Brutaugh's got his nose not two inches from Frascoli's face, and Brother! is he letting him have it. Oh! Oh! Here comes Gilbert off the mound; he's stalking over. When Gil puts up a holler, you know he thinks it's a good one. Brutaugh keeps pointing at the foul line—you can see from here the chalk's been wiped away—he's insisting the runner slid out of the base path. Frascoli's walking away, but Danny's going right aft ..." The controller turned the volume down again.

The lights on the deAngelis board kept flickering, but by 3:37 all but two had gone out, one by one. These two showed readings in the high sixties; one flared briefly to 78.2 then went out. Brutaugh was no longer in the ball game. By 3:41 only one light still glowed, and it was steadily fading.

Throughout the long, hot, humid afternoon the board held its reddish, irritated overtones, and occasional readings flashed in and out of the seventies. At four o'clock the new duty section came on; the deAngelis operator, whose name was Chuck Matesic, was replaced by an operator named Charlie Blaney.

"Nothing to report," Chuck told Charlie. "Rhubarb down at the point at the Forbes Municipal Field, but that's about all."

The new operator scarcely glanced at the mottled board, it was that kind of a day. He noted an occasional high in his log book, but most signals were ignored. At 5:14 he noted a severe reading of 87 which stayed on the board; at 5:16 another light came on, climbed slowly through the sixties, then soared to 77 where it held steady. Neither light was an honest red, their angry overtones chased each other rapidly.

The deAngelis operator called over to the audio controller, "Got us a case of crinkle fender, I think."

"Where?" the controller asked.

"Can't tell yet," Blaney said. "A hot-head and a citizen with righteous indignation. They're clear enough, but not too sharp." He swiveled in his chair and adjusted knobs before a large circular screen. Pale streaks of light glowed briefly as the sweep passed over them. There were milky dots everywhere. A soft light in the lower left hand corner of the screen cut an uncertain path across the grid, and two indeterminate splotches in the upper half of the scope flared out to the margin.

"Morningside," the operator said.

The splashes of light separated; one moved quickly off the screen, the other held stationary for several minutes, then contracted and began a steady, jagged advance toward the center of the grid. One inch down, half an inch over, two inches down, then four inches on a diagonal line.

"Like I said," said Blaney. "An accident."

Eight minutes later, at 5:32, a slightly pompous and thoroughly outraged young salesman marched through the doors of the station house and over to the desk sergeant.

"Some clown just hit me ..." he began.

"With his fist?" asked the sergeant.

"With his car," said the salesman. "My car ... with his car ... he hit my car with his car."

The sergeant raised his hand. "Simmer down, young feller. Let me see your driver's license." He reached over the desk for the man's cards with one hand, and with the other he sorted out an accident form. "Just give it to me slowly." He started filling out the form.

The deAngelis operator leaned back in his chair and winked at the controller. "I'm a whiz," he said to the young reporter, "I'm a phenom. I never miss." The reporter smiled and walked back to his colleague who was playing gin with the book ... businessman.

The lights glowed on and off all evening, but only once had they called for action. At 10:34 two sharp readings of 92.2 and 94 even, had sent Blaney back to his dials and screen. He'd narrowed it down to a four-block area when the telephone rang to report a fight at the Red Antler Grill. The controller dispatched a beat cop already in the area.

Twenty minutes later, two very large—and very obedient young toughs stumbled in, followed by an angry officer. In addition to the marks of the fight, both had a lumbering, off-balance walk that showed that the policeman had been prodding them with his riot club. It was called an "electronic persuader"; it also doubled as a carbine. Police no longer carried sidearms.

He pointed to the one on the left, "This one hit me." He pointed to the one on the right, "This one kicked me."

The one on the left was certain he would never hit another cop. The one on the right knew he would never kick another cop.

"Book 'em," the sergeant said. He looked at the two youths. "You're going in the can ... you want to argue." The youths looked down. No one else said anything. The younger reporter came over and took down the information as the cop and the two toughs gave it to the sergeant. Then he went back to his seat at the card table and took a minityper from his pocket. He started sending to the paper.

"You ought to send that stuff direct," the card player said.

"I scribble too bad," the reporter answered.

"Bat crap," said the older man, "that little jewel can transcribe chicken scratches."

The cub scrunched over his minityper. A few minutes later he looked up at his partner, "What's a good word for hoodlum?"

The other reporter was irritated. He was also losing at gin. "What are you, a Steinbeck?" He laid down his cards. "Look kid, just send it, just the way you get it. That's why they pay re-write men. We're reporters. We report. O.K.?" He went back to his cards.

At 11:40 a light at the end of the second row turned pinkish but no reading showed on the dial below. It was only one of a dozen bulbs showing red. It was still pinkish when the watch was changed. Blaney was replaced by King.

"Watch this one," Blaney said to King, indicating an entry in the log. It was numbered 8:20:18:3059:78:4a. "I've had it on four times now, all in the high seventies. I got a feeling." The number indicated date, estimated area and relation to previous alerts in the month, estimated intent, and frequency of report. The "a" meant intermittent. Only the last three digits would change. "If it comes on again I think I'd lock a circuit on it right away." The rules called for any continuous reading over 75 to be contacted and connected after its sixth appearance.

"What about that one?" King said, pointing to a 70.4 that was unblinking in its intensity.

"Some drunk," said Blaney. "Or a baby with a head cold. Been on there for twenty minutes. You can watch for it if you like." His tone suggested that to be a waste of time.

"I'll watch it," said King. His tone suggested that he knew how to read a circuit, and if Blaney had any suggestions he could keep them to himself.

Joe Millsop finally staggered home, exhausted. He was half-drunk, and worn out from being on his feet all day, but the liquor had finally done its work. He could think about the incident without flushing hot all over. He was too tired, and too sorry for himself to be angry at anyone. And with his new-found alcoholic objectivity he could see now where he had been in the wrong. Old Bloomgarten shouldn't have chewed him out in front of a customer like that, but what the hell, he shouldn't have sassed the customer, even if she was just a dumb broad who didn't know what she wanted. He managed to get undressed before he stumbled into bed. His last coherent thought before he fell into a drugged sleep was that he'd better apologize in the morning.

8:20:18:3059:78:4a stayed off the board.

At 1:18 am, the deAngelis flared to a 98.4 then started inching down again. The young reporter sat up, alert, from where he had been dozing. The loud clang of a bell had brought him awake.

The older reporter glanced up from his cards and waved him down. "Forget it," he said, "some wife just opened the door and saw lipstick on her husband's neck."

"Oh Honey, how could you ... fifty dollars ..." She was crying.

"Don't, Mother ... I thought I could make some money ... some real money." The youngster looked sick. "I had four nines ... four nines ... how could I figure him for a straight flush, he didn't have a thing showing."

"... How could you," sobbed the mother. "... Oh how could you."

The book ... businessman dealt the cards. The reporter picked his up and arranged them in his hand, he discarded one; the businessman ignored it and drew from the deck, he discarded; the reporter picked the discard and threw away a card from his hand; the businessman drew from the deck and discarded the same card he'd drawn; the reporter picked it up, tapped it slowly in

place with his elbow, placed his discard face down, and spread his hand.

"Gin," he said.

"Arrrgh," said the businessman. "Damn it, you play good. You play real good."

A light on the deAngelis flashed red and showed a reading of 65.4 on the dial.

"Can't beat skill," said the reporter. "Count!"

"Fifty-six," said the businessman. "That's counting gin," he added.

"Game," the reporter announced. "I'll figure the damage."

"You play good," said the businessman in disgust.

"You only say that 'cause it's true," the reporter said. "But it's sweet of you all the same."

"Shut up!" said the businessman.

The reporter looked up, concerned. "You stuck?" he asked solicitously. He seemed sincere.

"Certainly I'm stuck," the businessman snarled.

"Then stay stuck," said the reporter in a kindly tone. He patted the businessman on the cheek.

The same light on the deAngelis flashed red. This time the dial registered eighty-two. The operator chuckled and looked over at the gamblers, where the reporter was still adding up the score.

"How much you down, Bernie?" he asked the businessman.

"Four dollars and ninety-six cents," the reporter answered.

"You play good," Bernie said again.

The deAngelis went back to normal, and the operator went back to his magazine. The bulb at the end of the second row turned from a light pink to a soft rose, the needle on its dial finally flickered on to the scale. There were other lights on the board, but none called for action. It was still just a quiet night in the middle of the week.

The room was filthy. It had a natural filth that clings to a cheap room, and a man-made, careless filth that would disfigure a Taj Mahal. It wasn't so much that things were dirty, it was more that nothing was clean. Pittsburgh was no longer a smokey city. That problem had been solved long before the mills had stopped belching smoke. Now, with atomics and filters on every stack in every home, the city was clean. Clean as the works of man could make it, yet still filthy as only the minds of man could achieve. The city might be clean but there were people who were not, and the room was not. Overhead the ceiling light still burned, casting its harsh glare on the trashy room, and the trashy, huddled figure on the bed.



He was an old man, lying on the bed fully clothed, even to his shoes. He twisted fretfully in his sleep; the body tried to rise, anticipating nature even when the mind could not. The man gagged

several times and finally made it up to a sitting position before the vomit came. He was still asleep, but his reaction was automatic; he grabbed the bottom of his sweater and pulled it out before him to form a bucket of sorts. When he finished being sick he sat still, swaying gently back and forth, and tried to open his eyes. He could not make it. Still asleep, he ducked out of the fouled sweater, made an ineffectual dab at his mouth, wadded the sweater in a ball, and threw it over in front of the bathroom door.

He fell back on the bed, exhausted, and went on with his fitful sleep.

At 4:15 in the morning a man walked into the station house. His name was Henry Tilton. He was a reporter for the *Evening Press*. He waved a greeting to the desk sergeant and went over to kibitz the card game.

Both players looked up, startled. The reporter playing cards said, "Hello, Henry." He looked at his watch. "Whoosh! I didn't realize it was that late." He turned to the businessman. "Hurry up, finish the hand. Got to get my beauty sleep."

"Whaddaya mean, hurry up," said Bernie, "you're into me for fifteen bucks."

"Get it back from Hank here," the reporter said. He nodded at the newcomer, "Want this hand? You're fourteen points down. Lover boy's got sixty-eight on game, but you're a box up."

"Sure," said Tilton. He took the cards.

The morning news reporters left. The businessman dealt a new hand. Tilton waited four rounds, then knocked with ten.

Bernie slammed down his cards. "You lousy reporters are all alike! I'm going home." He got up to put on his coat. "I'll be back about ten, you still be here?"

"Sure," said Tilton, "... with the score." He folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

The businessman walked out and Tilton went over to the deAngelis board. "Anything?" he asked.

"Nah," said King. He pointed to the lights, "Just lovers' quarrels tonight; all pale pink and peaceful."

Tilton smiled and ambled back to the cell block. The operator put his feet up on his desk, then frowned and put them down again. He leaned toward the board and studied the light at the end of the second row. The needle registered sixty-six. The operator pursed his lips, then flicked a switch that opened the photo file. Every five minutes an automatic camera photographed the deAngelis board, developed the film, and filed the picture away in its storage vault.

King studied the photographs for quite awhile, then pulled his log book over and made an entry. He wrote: 8:20:19:3142:1x. The last three digits meant that he wasn't sure about the intensity, and the "x" signified a continuous reading.

King turned to the audio controller, "Do me a favor, Gus, but strictly unofficial. Contact everybody around us: Oakland, Squirrel Hill, Point Breeze, Lawrenceville, Bloomfield ... everybody in this end of town. Find out if they've got one low intensity reading that's been on for hours. If they haven't had it since before midnight, I'm not interested."

"Something up?" the controller asked.

"Probably not," said the operator. "I'd just like to pin this one down as close as I can. On a night like this my screen shows nothing but milk."

"Give you a lift home?" the older reporter asked.

"Thanks," said the cub shaking his head, "but I live out by the Youghiogheny River."

"So?" the older man shrugged. "Half hour flight. Hop in."

"I don't understand," the cub said.

"What? Me offering you a lift."

"No," said the cub. "Back there in the station house. You know."

"You mean the deAngelis?"

"Not that exactly," said the cub. "I understand a deAngelis board; everybody broadcasts emotions, and if they're strong enough they can be received and interpreted. It's the cops I don't understand. I thought any reading over eighty was dangerous and had to be looked into, and anything over ninety was plain murder and had to be picked up. Here they been ignoring eighties and nineties all night long."

"You remember that children's story you wrote last Christmas about an Irish imp named Sean O'Claus?" his companion asked him.

"Certainly," the cub said scowling. "I'll sell it some day."

"You remember the Fashion Editor killed it because she thought 'See-Ann' was a girl's name, and it might be sacrilegious."

"You're right I remember," the cub said, his voice rising.

"Like to bet you didn't register over ninety that day? As a matter of fact, I'll head for the nearest precinct and bet you five you're over eighty right now." He laughed aloud and the young man calmed down. "I had that same idea myself at first. About ninety being against the law. That's one of the main troubles, the law. Every damn state in the dominion has its own ideas on what's dangerous. The laws are all fouled up. But what most of them boil down to is this—a man has to have a continuous reading of over ninety before he can be arrested. Not arrested really, detained. Just a reading on the board doesn't prove a thing. Some people walk around boiling at ninety all their lives—like editors. But the sweet old lady down the block, who's never sworn in her life, she may hit sixty-five and reach for a knife. And that doesn't prove a thing. Ninety sometimes means murder, but usually not; up to a hundred and ten usually means murder, but sometimes not; and anything over one-twenty always means murder. And it still doesn't prove a thing. And then again, a psychotic or a professional gunsels may not register at all. They kill for fun, or for business—they're not angry at anybody."

"It's all up to the deAngelis operators. They're the kingpins, they make the system work. Not Simon deAngelis who invented it, or the technicians who install it, or the Police Commissioner who takes the results to City Hall. The operators make it or break it. Sure, they have rules to follow—if they want. But a good operator ignores the rules, and a bad operator goes by the book, and he's still no damn good. It's just like radar was sixty, seventy years ago. Some got the knack, some don't."

"Then the deAngelis doesn't do the job," said the cub.

"Certainly it does," the older man said. "Nothing's perfect. It gives the police the jump on a lot of crime. Premeditated murder for one. The average citizen can't kill anyone unless he's mad enough, and if he's mad enough, he registers on the deAngelis. And ordinary robbers get caught; their plans don't go just right, or they fight among themselves. Or, if they just don't like society—a good deAngelis operator can tell quite a bit if he gets a reading at the wrong time of day or night, or in the wrong part of town."

"But what about the sweet old lady who registers sixty-five and then goes berserk?"

"That's where your operator really comes in. Usually that kind of a reading comes too late. Grandma's swinging the knife at the same time the light goes on in the station house. But if she waits to swing, or builds herself up to it, then she may be stopped.

"You know those poor operators are supposed to log any reading over sixty, and report downtown with anything over eighty. Sure they are! If they logged everything over sixty they'd have writer's cramp the first hour they were on watch. And believe me, Sonny, any operator who reported downtown on every reading over eighty would be back pounding a beat before the end of his first day. They just do the best they can, and you'd be surprised at how good that can be."

The old man woke up, but kept his eyes closed. He was afraid. It was too quiet, and the room was clammy with an early morning chill. He opened his eyelids a crack and looked at the window. Still dark outside. He lay there trembling and brought his elbows in tight to his body. He was going to have the shakes; he knew he'd have the shakes and it was still too early. Too early. He looked at the clock. It was only a quarter after five. Too early for the bars to be open. He covered his eyes with his hands and tried to think.

It was no use; he couldn't think. He sobbed. He was afraid to move. He knew he had to have a drink, and he knew if he got up he'd be sick. "Oh Lord!" he breathed.

The trembling became worse. He tried to press it away by hugging his body with his arms. It didn't help. He looked wildly around and tried to concentrate. He thought about the bureau ... no. The dresser ... no. His clothes ... he felt feverishly about his body ... no. Under the bed ... no ... wait ... maybe. He'd brought some beer home. Now he remembered. Maybe there was some left.

He rolled over on his stomach and groped under the bed. His tremulous fingers found the paper bag and he dragged it out. It was full of empty cans; the carton inside was ripped. He tore the sack open ... empty cans ... no! there was a full one ... two full ones—

He staggered to his feet and looked for an opener. There was one on the bureau. He stumbled over and opened his first beautiful, lovely can of beer. He put his mouth down close to the top so that none of the foam could escape him. He'd be all right 'til seven, now. The bars opened at seven. He'd be all right 'til seven.

He did not notice the knife lying beside the opener. He did not own a knife and had no recollection of buying one.

It was a hunting knife and he was not a hunter.

The light at the end of the second row was growing gradually brighter. The needle traveled slowly across the dial, 68.2, 68.4, 68.6....

King called over to the audio controller. "They all report in yet?"

The controller nodded. "Squirrel Hill's got your signal on, same reading as you have. Bloomfield thinks they may have it. Oakland's not too sure. Everybody else is negative." The controller walked over. "Which one is it?"

King pointed to the end of the second row.

"Can't you get it on your screen?"

"Hell, yes, I've got him on my screen!" King swiveled in his chair and turned on the set. The scope was covered with pale dots. "Which one is he? There?" He pointed to the left. "That's a guy who didn't get the raise he wanted. There?" He pointed to the center. "That's a little girl with bad dreams. She has them every night. There? That's my brother! He's in the Veteran's Hospital and wanted to come home a week ago."

"So don't get excited," said the controller. "I only asked."

"I'm sorry, Gus," King apologized. "My fault. I'm a little edgy ... probably nothing at all."

"Well you got it narrowed down anyway," Gus said. "If you got it, and Squirrel Hill's got it, then he's in Shadyside. If Oakland doesn't have him, then he's on this side of Aiken Avenue." The controller had caught King's fever; the "it" had become a "him". "And if Bloomfield doesn't have him, then he's on the other side of Baum Boulevard."

"Only Bloomfield might have him."

"Well what the hell, you've still got him located in the lower half of Shadyside. Tell you what, I'll send a man up Ellsworth, get Bloomfield to cruise Baum Boulevard in a scout car, and have Squirrel Hill put a patrol on Wilkens. We can triangulate."

"No," said King, "not yet. Thanks anyway, Gus, but there's no point in stirring up a tempest in a teapot. Just tell them to watch it. If it climbs over 75 we can narrow it down then."

"It's your show," said Gus.

The old man finished his second can of beer. The trembling was almost gone. He could stand and move without breaking out in a cold sweat. He ran his hand through his hair and looked at the clock. 6:15. Too early. He looked around the room for something to read. There were magazines and newspapers scattered everywhere; the papers all folded back to the sports section. He picked up a paper, not even bothering about the date, and tried to interest himself in the batting averages of the Intercontinental League. Yamamura was on top with .387; the old man remembered when Yamamura came up as a rookie. But right now he didn't care; the page trembled and the type kept blurring. He threw the paper down. He had a headache.

The old man got up and went over to the bathroom. He steadied himself against the door jamb and kicked the wadded sweater out of sight beneath the dresser. He went into the bathroom and turned on the water. He ran his hands over his face and thought about shaving, but he couldn't face the work involved. He managed to run a comb through his hair and rinse out his mouth.

He came back into the room. It was 6:30. Maybe Freddie's was open. If Freddie wasn't, then maybe the Grill. He'd have to take his chances, he couldn't stand it here any longer. He put on his coat and stumbled out.

At eight o'clock the watch was changed; Matesic replaced King.

"Anything?" asked Matesic.

"Just this one, Chuck," said King. "I may be a fool, but this one bothers me." King was a diplomat where Blaney was not.

King showed him the entry. The dial now stood at 72.8. "It's been on there all night, since before I had the watch. And it's been climbing, just slow and steady, but all the time climbing. I locked a circuit on him, but I'll take it off if you want me to."

"No," said Matesic, "leave it on. That don't smell right to me neither."

The old man was feeling better. He'd been in the bar two hours, and he'd had two pickled eggs, and the bartender didn't bother him. Beer was all right, but a man needed whiskey when he was sick. He'd have one, maybe two more, and then he'd eat some breakfast. He didn't know why, but he knew he mustn't get drunk.

At nine o'clock the needle on the dial climbed past seventy-five. Matesic asked for coverage. That meant that two patrolmen would be tied up, doing nothing but searching for an echo. And it might be a wild goose chase. He was explaining to the Captain, but the Captain wasn't listening. He was looking at the photographs in the deAngelis file.

"You don't like this?" the Captain asked.

Matesic said he didn't like it.

"And King said he didn't like it?"

"King thinks the same way I do, he's been on there too damn long and too damn consistent."

"Pick him up," the Captain turned and ordered the audio controller. "If we can't hold him, we can at least get a look at him."

"It's not too clear yet," said Matesic, "it'll take a spread."

"I know what it'll take," the Captain roared. "Don't tell me my job! Put every available man on this, I want that guy brought in."

The old man walked back to his room. He was carrying a dozen cans of beer, but the load was light and he walked upright. He felt fine, like a million dollars. And he was beginning to remember.

When he entered the room he saw the knife and when he saw the knife he smiled. A man had to be smart and a man had to be prepared. They were smart ... wicked and smart ... but he was smarter. He'd bought the knife a long, long time ago, in a different world—they couldn't fool him that way. They were clever all right, they fooled the whole world.

He put his beer on the bureau, then walked into the bathroom and turned on the water in the tub. He came back out and started to undress. He was humming to himself. When he finished undressing he went over to the bureau and opened a can of beer. He carried it into the bathroom, put it beside the tub, and lowered himself into the water.

Ah ... that was the ticket. Water and being clean. Clean and being water. Being water and being candy and being smart. They fooled the whole world, but not him. The whole, wide world, but they couldn't fool him. He was going to fool them. All pretty and innocent. Hah! Innocent! He knew. They were rotten, they were rotten all the way through. They fooled the whole world but they were rotten ... rotten ... and he was the only one who knew.

He finished the beer and stood up in the tub. The water ran off his body in greasy runlets. He didn't pull the plug. He stepped out of the tub and over to the bathroom mirror. His face looked fine, not puffy at all. He'd fool them. He sprinkled himself with lilac water, put the bottle to his lips, and swished some of it in his mouth. Oh yes, he'd fool them. A man couldn't be too clever, they were clever, so he had to be clever. He began to shave.

The Captain was on an audio circuit, talking to an Assistant Commissioner. "Yes, Sir, I know that—Yes, Sir, it could be, but it might be something else—Yes, Sir, I know Squirrel Hill has problems, but we need help—Yes, Commissioner, it's over ninety now (The Captain signaled wildly to Matesic; Matesic held up four fingers, then two) 94.2 and still going up—No, Sir, we don't know. Some guy gonna quit his job ... or kill his boss. Maybe he found out his wife is cheating on him. We can't tell until we pick him up—Yes, Sir—Yes, Sir—Thank you, Sir."

The Captain hung up. "I hate politicians," he snarled.

"Watch it, Captain," said Matesic, "I'll get you on my board."

"Get me on it, Hell," the Captain said, "I've never been off."

The old man finished dressing. He knotted his tie and brushed off the front of his suit with his hand. He looked fine. He'd fool them, he looked just like anybody else. He crossed to the bureau and picked up the knife. It was still in the scabbard. He didn't take it out, he just put it in his pocket. Good. It didn't show.

He walked out on the street. The sun was shining brightly and heat waves were coming up from the sidewalk. Good. Good. This was the best time. People, the real people, would be working or lying down asleep. But they'd be out. They were always out. Out all sweet and innocent in the hot sun.

He turned down the street and ambled toward the drug store. He didn't want to hurry. He had lots of time. He had to get some candy first. That was the ticket, candy. Candy worked, candy always worked. Candy was good but candy was wicked. He was good but they were wicked. Oh, you had to be smart.

"That has to be him," Matesic said. The screen was blotched and milky, but a large splash of light in the lower left hand corner outshone everything else. "He's somewhere around Negley Avenue." He turned to the Captain. "Where do you have your men placed?"

"In a box," the Captain said. "Fifth and Negley, Aiken and Negley, Center and Aiken, and Center and Negley. And three scout cars overhead."

The old man walked up Ellsworth to the Liberty School. There were always lots of young ones

around Liberty School. The young ones were the worst.

"I'm losing him."

"Where are you?"

"Center and Aiken."

"Anybody getting him stronger?"

"Yeah. Me. Negley and Fifth."

"Never mind. Never mind, we got him. We see him now."

"Where?"

"Bellefonte and Ivy. Liberty School."

She was a friendly little thing, and pretty. Maybe five, maybe six, and her Mommy had told her not to talk to strangers. But the funny old man wasn't talking, he was sitting on the curb, and he was eating candy, and he was offering some to her. He smiled at the little girl and she smiled back.

The scout car settled to earth on automatic. Two officers climbed out of the car and walked quietly over to the old man, one on either side. They each took an arm and lifted him gently to his feet.

"Hello there, Old Timer."

"Hi, little girl."

The old man looked around bewildered. He dropped his candy and tried to reach his knife. They mustn't interfere. It was no use. The officers were very kind and gentle, and they were very, very firm. They led him off as though he were an old, old friend.

One of the officers called back over his shoulder, "Bye, bye, little girl."

The little girl dutifully waved 'bye.

She looked at the paper sack on the sidewalk. She didn't know what to do, but the nice old man was gone. She looked around, but no one was paying any attention, they were all watching the softball game. Suddenly she made a grab and clutched the paper bag to her body. Then she turned and ran back up the street to tell her Mommy how wonderful, wonderful lucky she was. ■

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CIRCUIT RIDERS ***

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