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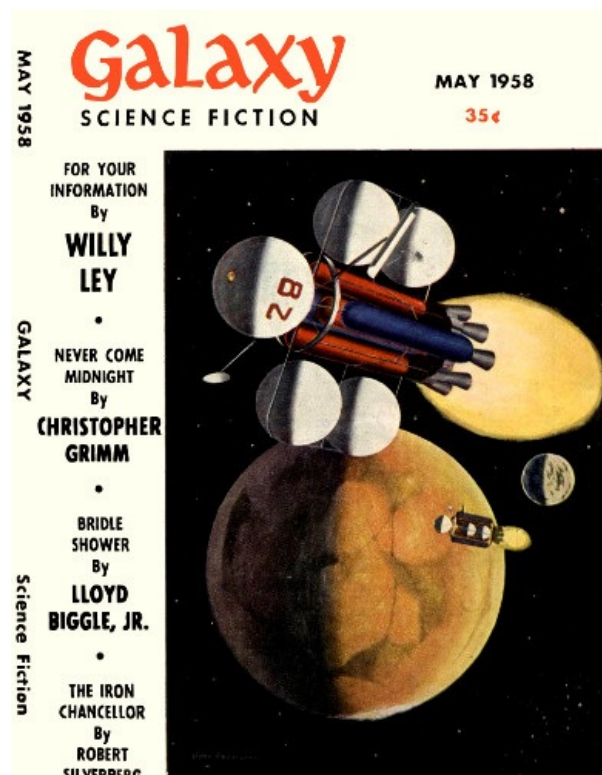
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PICK A CRIME ***



*Going straight meant crooked planning. He'd
never make it unless he somehow managed to*

PICK A CRIME

By **RICHARD R. SMITH**

Illustrated by **DICK FRANCIS**

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The girl was tall, wide-eyed and brunette. She had the right curves in the right places and would have been beautiful if her nose had been smaller, if her mouth had been larger and if her hair had been wavy instead of straight.

"Hank said you wanted to see me," she said when she stopped beside Joe's table.

"Yeah." Joe nodded at the other chair. "Have a seat." He reached into a pocket, withdrew five ten-dollar bills and handed them to her. "I want you to do a job for me. It'll only take a few minutes."

The girl counted the money, then placed it in her purse. Joe noticed a small counterfeit-detector inside the purse before she closed it. "What's the job?"

"Tell you later." He gulped the remainder of his drink, almost pouring it down his throat.

"Hey. You trying to make yourself sick?"

"Not sick. Drunk. Been trying to get drunk all afternoon." As the liquor settled in his stomach, he waited for the warm glow. But the glow didn't come ... the bartender had watered his drink again.

"Trying to get drunk?" the girl inquired. "Are you crazy?"

"No. It's simple. If I get drunk, I can join the AAA and get free room and board for a month while they give me a treatment."

It was easy enough to understand, he reflected, but a lot harder to do. The CPA robot bartenders saw to it that anyone got high if they wanted, but comparatively few got drunk. Each bartender could not only mix drinks but could also judge by a man's actions and speech when he was on the verge of drunkenness. At the proper time—since drunkenness was illegal—a bartender always watered the drinks.

Joe had tried dozens of times in dozens of bars to outsmart them, but had always failed. And in all of New York's millions, there had been only a hundred cases of intoxication during the previous year.

The girl laughed. "If you're that hard up, I don't know if I should take this fifty or not. Why don't you go out and get a job like everyone else?"

As an answer, Joe handed her his CPA ID card. She grunted when she saw the large letters that indicated the owner had Dangerous Criminal Tendencies.

When she handed the card back, Joe fought an impulse to tear it to pieces. He'd done that once and gone through a mountain of red tape to get another—everyone was required by law to carry a CPA ID card and show it upon request.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I didn't know you were a DCT."

"And who'll hire a guy with criminal tendencies? You know the score. When you try to get a job, they ask to see your ID before they even tell you if there's an opening or not. If your CPA ID says you're a DCT, you're SOL and they tell you there's no openings. Oh, I've had several jobs ... jobs like all DCTs get. I've been a garbage man, street-cleaner, ditch-digger—"

On the other side of the room, the jukebox came to life with a roar and a group of teen-agers scrambled to the dance floor.

Feeling safe from hidden microphones because of the uproar, he leaned across the table and whispered in the girl's ear, "That's what I want to hire you for. I want you to help me commit a crime. If I get convicted of a crime, I'll be able to get a good job!"

The girl's lips formed a bright red circle. "Say! You really got big plans, don't you?"

He smiled at her admiration. It *was* something big to plan a crime. A civilization weary of murder, robbery, kidnapping, counterfeiting, blackmail, rape, arson, and drunkenness had originated the CPA—Crime Prevention Association. There were no longer any prisons—CPA officials had declared loudly and emphatically that their job was to prevent crime, not punish it. And prevent it they did, with thousands of ingenious crime-prevention devices and methods. They had made crime almost impossible, and during the previous year, only a few hundred men in the whole country had been convicted of criminal acts.

No crime was ever punished. If a man was smart enough to kill someone, for instance, he wasn't sent to prison to be punished; he wasn't punished at all. Instead, he was sent to a hospital where all criminal tendencies were removed from his mind by psychologists, shock treatments, encephalographic devices, a form of prefrontal lobotomy and a dozen other methods. An expensive operation, but since there were few criminals—only ten in New York during the past year—any city could afford the CPA hospitals.

The CPA system was, actually, cheaper than previous methods because it did away with the damage caused by countless crimes; did away with prisons and their guards, large police forces, squad cars and weapons.

And, ironically, a man who *did* commit a crime was a sort of hero. He was a hero to the millions

of men and women who had suppressed impulses to kill someone, beat their mates, get drunk, or kick a dog. Not only a hero, but because of the CPA Treatment, he was—when he left one of the CPA hospitals—a thoroughly honest and hard-working individual ... a man who could be trusted with any responsibility, any amount of money. And therefore, an EX (a convicted criminal who received the treatment was commonly called an Ex because he was in the strictest sense of the word an Ex-criminal) ... an Ex was always offered the best jobs.

"Well," the girl said. "I'm honored. Really. But I got a date at ten. Let's get it over with. You said it'd only take a few minutes."

"Okay. Let's go."

The girl followed him across the room, around tables, through a door, down a hall, through a back door and into the alley.

She followed him up the dark alley until he turned suddenly and ripped her blouse and skirt.

He surprised her completely, but when she recovered, she backed away, her body poised like a wrestler's. "What's the big idea?"

"Scream," Joe said. "Scream as loud as you can, and when the cops get here, tell 'em I tried to rape you."

The plan was perfect, he told himself. Attempted rape was one of the few things that was a crime merely because a man attempted it. A crime because it theoretically inflicted psychological injury upon the intended victim—and because millions of women voters had voted it a crime. On the other hand, attempted murder, robbery, kidnapping, etc., were not crimes. They weren't crimes because the DCT didn't complete the act, and if he didn't complete the act, that meant simply that the CPA had once again functioned properly.

The girl shook her head vigorously. "Sorry, buddy. Can't help you that way. Why didn't you tell me what you wanted?"

"What's the matter?" Joe complained. "I'm not asking you to do anything wrong."

"You stupid jerk. What do you think this is—the Middle Ages? Don't you know almost every woman knows how to defend herself? I'm a sergeant in the WSDA!"

Joe groaned. The WSDA—Women's Self-Defense Association—a branch of the CPA. The WSDA gave free instruction in judo and jujitsu, even developed new techniques of wrestling and instructed only women in those new techniques.

The girl was still shaking her head. "Can't do it, buddy. I'd lose my rank if you were convicted of —"

"Do I have to *make* you scream?" Joe inquired tiredly and advanced toward the girl.

"—and that rank carries a lot of weight. Hey! *Stop it!*"

Joe discovered to his dismay that the girl was telling the truth when she said she was a sergeant in the WSDA. He felt her hands on his body, and in the time it takes to blink twice, he was flying through the air.



The alley's concrete floor was hard—it had always been hard, but he became acutely aware of its lack of resiliency when his head struck it. There was a wonderful moment while the world was filled with beautiful stars and streaks of lightning through which he heard distant police sirens. But the wonderful moment didn't last long and darkness closed in on him.

When he awoke, a rough voice was saying, "Okay. Snap out of it."

He opened his eyes and recognized the police commissioner's office. It would be hard not to recognize: the room was large, devoid of furniture except for a desk and chairs, but the walls were lined with the controls of television screens, electronic calculators and a hundred other machines that formed New York's mechanical police force.

Commissioner Hendricks was a remarkable character. There was something wrong with his glands, and he was a huge, greasy bulk of a man with bushy eyebrows and a double chin. His steel-gray eyes showed something of his intelligence and he would have gone far in politics if fate hadn't made him so ugly, for more than half the voters who elected men to high political positions were women.

Anyone who knew Hendricks well liked him, for he was a friendly, likable person. But the millions of women voters who saw his face on posters and on their TV screens saw only the ugly face and heard only the harsh voice. The President of the United States was a capable man, but also a very handsome one, and the fact that a man who looked something like a bulldog had been elected as New York's police commissioner was a credit to Hendricks and millions of women voters.

"Where's the girl?" Joe asked.

"I processed her while you were out cold. She left. Joe, you—"

"Okay," Joe said. "I'll save you the trouble. I admit it. Attempted rape. I confess."

Hendricks smiled. "Sorry, Joe. You missed the boat again." He reached out and turned a dial on his desk top. "We had a microphone hidden in that alley. We have a lot of microphones hidden in a lot of alleys. You'd be surprised at the number of conspiracies that take place in alleys!"

Joe listened numbly to his voice as it came from one of the hundreds of machines on the walls, "*Scream. Scream as loud as you can, and when the cops get here, tell 'em I tried to rape you.*" And then the girl's voice, "*Sorry, buddy. Can't help—*"

He waved his hand. "Okay. Shut it off. I confess to conspiracy."

Hendricks rose from behind the desk, walked leisurely to where Joe was slouched in a chair. "Give me your CPA ID."

Joe handed him the card with trembling fingers. He felt as if the world had collapsed beneath him. Conspiracy to commit a crime wasn't a crime. Anyone could conspire. And if the

conspirators were prevented from committing a crime, then that meant the CPA had functioned properly once again. That meant the CPA had once again *prevented* crime, and the CPA didn't punish crimes or attempted crimes, and it didn't attempt to prevent crimes *by* punishment. If it did, that would be a violation of the New Civil Rights.

Hendricks crossed the room, deposited the card in a slot and punched a button. The machine hummed and a new card appeared.

When Hendricks handed him the new card, Joe saw that the words DANGEROUS CRIMINAL TENDENCIES were now in red and larger than before. And, in slightly smaller print, the ID card stated that the owner was a DCT First Class.

"You've graduated," Hendricks said coldly. "You guys never learn, do you? Now you're a DCT First Class instead of a Second Class. You know what that means?"

Hendricks leaned closer until Joe could feel his breath on his face. "That means your case history will be turned over to the newspapers. You'll be the hobby of thousands of amateur cops. You know how it works? It's like this. The Joneses are sitting around tomorrow night and they're bored. Then Mr. Jones says, 'Let's go watch this Joe Harper.' So they look up your record—amateur cops always keep records of First Classes in scrapbooks—and they see that you stop frequently at Walt's Tavern.

"So they go there and they sit and drink and watch you, trying not to let you know they're watching you. They watch you all night, just hoping you'll do something exciting, like trying to kill someone, so they can be the first ones to yell '*Police!*' They'll watch you because it's exciting to be an amateur cop, and if they ever *did* prevent you from committing a crime, they'd get a nice reward and they'd be famous."

"Lay off," Joe said. "I got a headache. That girl—"

Hendricks leaned even closer and glared. "You listen, Joe. This is interesting. You see, it doesn't stop with Mr. and Mrs. Jones. There's thousands of people like them. Years ago, they got their kicks from reading about guys like you, but these days things are dull because it's rare when anyone commits a crime. So every time you walk down the street, there'll be at least a dozen of 'em following you, and no matter where you go, you can bet there'll be some of 'em sitting next to you, standing next to you.

"During the day, they'll take your picture with their spy cameras that look like buttons on their coats. At night, they'll peep at you through your keyhole. Your neighbors across the street will watch you through binoculars and—"

"Lay off!"

Joe squirmed in the chair. He'd been lectured by Hendricks before and it was always an unpleasant experience. The huge man was like a talking machine once he got started, a machine that couldn't be stopped.

"And the kids are the worst," Hendricks continued. "They have Junior CPA clubs. They keep records of hoodlums like you in little cardboard boxes. They'll stare at you on the street and stare at you through restaurant windows while you're eating meals. They'll follow you in public rest rooms and watch you out of the corners of their eyes while they wash their little hands, and almost every day when you look back, you'll see a dozen freckle-faced little boys following you half a block behind, giggling and gaping at you. They'll follow you until the day you die, because you're a freak!"

Joe couldn't stand the breath in his face any longer. He rose and paced the floor.

"And it doesn't end *there*, Joe. It goes on and on. You'll be the object of every do-gooder and parlor psychologist. Strangers will stop you on the street and say, 'I'd like to help you, friend.' Then they'll ask you queer questions like, 'Did your father reject you when you were a child?' 'Do you like girls?' 'How does it feel to be a DCT First Class?' And then there'll be the strangers who hate DCTs. They'll stop you on the street and insult you, call you names, spit on you and—"

"Okay, goddam it! *Stop it!*"

Hendricks stopped, wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief and lit a cigarette.

"I'm doing you a favor, Joe. I'm trying to explain something you're too dumb to realize by yourself. We've taught everyone to hate crime and criminals ... to *hate* them as nothing has ever been hated before. Today a criminal is a freak, an alien. Your life will be a living hell if you don't leave New York. You should go to some small town where there aren't many people, or be a hermit, or go to Iceland or—"

Joe eyed the huge man suspiciously. "*Favor*, did you say? The day you do *me* a favor—"

Hendricks shrugged his shoulders negligently. "Not entirely a favor. I want to get rid of you. Usually I come up here and sit around and read books. But guys like you are a nuisance and take up my time."

"I couldn't leave if I wanted to," Joe said. "I'm flat broke. Thanks to your CPA system, a DCT can't get a decent job."

Hendricks reached into a pocket, withdrew several bills and extended them. "I'll loan you some money. You can sign an IOU and pay me back a little at a time."

Joe waved the money away. "Listen, why don't you do me a favor? Why don't you frame me? If I'm such a nuisance, pin a crime on me—any crime."

"Can't do it. Convicting a man of a crime he didn't commit is a violation of Civil Rights and a crime in itself."

"Umm."

"Why don't you take the free psycho treatment? A man doesn't *have* to be a DCT. With the free treatment, psychologists can remove all your criminal tendencies and—"

"Go to those *head-shrinkers*?"

Hendricks shrugged again. "Have it your way."

Joe laughed. "If your damned CPA is so all-powerful, why can't you *make* me go?"

"Violation of Civil Rights."

"Damn it, there must be some way you can help me! We both want the same thing. We both want to see me convicted of a crime."

"How can I help you without committing a crime myself?" Hendricks walked to his desk, opened a drawer and removed a small black book. "See this? It contains names and addresses of all the people in New York who aren't properly protected. Every week we find people who aren't protected properly—blind spots in our protection devices. As soon as we find them, we take steps to install anti-robbery devices, but this is a big city and sometimes it takes days to get the work done."

"In the meantime, any one of these people could be robbed. But what can I do? I can't hold this book in front of your nose and say, 'Here, Joe, pick a name and go out and rob him.'" He laughed nervously. "If I did that, I'd be committing a crime myself!"

He placed the book on the desk top, took a handkerchief from a pocket again and wiped sweat from his face. "Excuse me a minute. I'm dying of thirst. There's a water cooler in the next room."

Joe stared at the door to the adjoining office as it closed behind the big man. Hendricks was—unbelievably—offering him a victim, offering him a crime!

Almost running to the desk, Joe opened the book, selected a name and address and memorized it: *John Gralowski, Apt. 204, 2141 Orange St.*

When Hendricks came back, Joe said, "Thanks."

"Huh? Thanks for what? I didn't do anything."

When Joe reached the street, he hurried toward the nearest subway. As a child, he had been frightened of the dark. As a man, he wasn't afraid of the dark itself, but the darkened city always made him feel ill at ease. The uneasiness was, more than anything else, caused by his own imagination. He hated the CPA and at night he couldn't shrug the feeling that the CPA lurked in every shadow, watching him, waiting for him to make a mistake.

Imagination or not, the CPA was almost everywhere a person went. Twenty-four hours a day, millions of microphones hidden in taverns, alleys, restaurants, subways and every other place imaginable waited for someone to say the wrong thing. Everything the microphones picked up was routed to the CPA Brain, a monster electronic calculator.

If the words "Let's see a movie" were received in the Brain, they were discarded. But if the words "Let's roll this guy" were received, the message was traced and a police helicopter would be at the scene in two minutes. And scattered all over the city were not only hidden microphones, but hidden television cameras that relayed visual messages to the Brain, and hidden machines that could detect a knife or a gun in someone's pocket at forty yards.

Every place of business from the largest bank to the smallest grocery store was absolutely impenetrable. No one had even tried to rob a place of business for years.

Arson was next to impossible because of the heat-detectors—devices placed in every building that could detect, radarlike, any intensity of heat above that caused by a cigarette lighter. Chemical research had made poisoning someone an impossibility. There were no drugs containing poison, and while an ant-poison might kill ants, no concentrated amount of it would kill a human.

The FBI had always been a powerful organization, but under the supervision of the CPA, it was a scientific colossus and to think of kidnapping someone or to contemplate the use of narcotics was pointless. A counterfeiter's career was always short-lived: every place of business and millions of individuals had small counterfeit-detectors that could spot a fake and report it directly to the Brain.

And the percentage of crimes had dwindled even more with the appearance of the robot police officers. Many a criminal in the past had gambled that he could outshoot a pursuing policeman. But the robots were different: they weren't flesh and blood. Bullets bounced off them and their aim was infallible.

It was like a fantastic dream come true. Only the dream wasn't fantastic any more. With the huge atomic power plants scattered across the country and supplying endless electrical power at ridiculously low prices, no endeavor that required power was fantastic. The power required to operate the CPA devices cost each taxpayer an average of four dollars a year, and the invention, development and manufacture of the devices had cost even less.

And the CPA had attacked crime through society itself, striking at the individual. In every city there were neon signs that blinked subliminally with the statement, CRIME IS FILTH. Listening to a radio or watching television, if a person heard station identification, he invariably heard or saw just below perception the words CRIME IS FILTH. If he went for a walk or a ride, he saw the endless subliminal posters declaring CRIME IS FILTH, and if he read a magazine or newspaper he always found, in those little dead spaces where an editor couldn't fit anything else, the below-perception words CRIME IS FILTH.

It was monotonous and, after a while, a person looked at the words and heard them without thinking about them. And they were imprinted on his subconscious over and over, year after year, until he knew that crime was the same as filth and that criminals were filthy things.

Except men like Joe Harper. No system is perfect. Along with thousands of other DCTs, Joe refused to believe it, and when he reached apartment 204 at 2141 Orange Street, he felt as if he'd inherited a gold mine.

The hall was dimly lit, but when he stood before the door numbered 204, he could see that the wall on either side of it was *new*. That is, instead of being covered with dust, dirt and stains as the other walls were, it was clean. The building was an old one, the hall was wide, and the owner had obviously constructed a wall across the hall, creating another room. If the owner had reported the new room as required by law, it would have been wired with CPA burglarproof devices, but evidently he didn't want to pay for installation.

When Joe entered the cubbyhole, he had to stand to one side in order to close the door behind him. The place was barely large enough for the bed, chair and bureau; it was a place where a man could fall down at night and sleep, but where no normal man could live day after day.

Fearing that someone might detect him before he actually committed the crime, Joe hurried to the bureau and searched it.

He broke out in a sweat when he found nothing but underwear and old magazines. If he stole underwear and magazines, it would still be a crime, but the newspapers would splash satirical headlines. Instead of being respected as a successful criminal, he would be ridiculed.

He stopped sweating when he found a watch under a pile of underwear. The crystal was broken, one hand was missing and it wouldn't run, but—perfection itself—engraved on the back was the inscription, *To John with Love*. His trial would be a clean-cut one: it would be easy for the CPA to prove ownership and that a crime had been committed.

Chuckling with joy, he opened the window and shouted, "*Thief! Police! Help!*"

He waited a few seconds and then ran. When he reached the street, a police helicopter landed next to him. Strong metal arms seized him; cameras clicked and recorded the damning evidence.

When Joe was securely handcuffed to a seat inside the helicopter, the metal police officers rang doorbells. There was a reward for anyone who reported a crime, but no one admitted shouting the warning.

He was having a nightmare when he heard the voice, "Hey. Wake up. Hey!"

He opened his eyes, saw Hendricks' ugly face and thought for a minute he was still having the nightmare.

"I just saw your doctor," Hendricks said. "He says your treatment is over. You can go home now. I thought I'd give you a lift."

As Joe dressed, he searched his mind and tried to find some difference.

During the treatment, he had been unconscious or drugged, unable to think. Now he could think clearly, but he could find no difference in himself.

He felt more relaxed than he'd ever felt before, but that could be an after-effect of all the sedatives he'd been given. And, he noticed when he looked in the mirror, he was paler. The treatment had taken months and he had, between operations, been locked in his room.

Hendricks was standing by the window. Joe stared at the massive back. Deliberately goading his mind, he discovered the biggest change: Before, the mere sight of the man had aroused an intense hatred. Now, even when he tried, he succeeded in arousing only a mild hatred. They had toned down his capacity to hate, but not done away with it altogether.

"Come here and take a look at your public," said Hendricks.

Joe went to the window. Three stories below, a large crowd had gathered on the hospital steps: a band, photographers, television trucks, cameramen and autograph hunters. He'd waited a long time for this day. But now—another change in him—

He put the emotion into words: "I don't feel like a hero. Funny, but I don't."

"Hero!" Hendricks laughed and, with his powerful lungs, it sounded like a bull snorting. "You think a successful criminal is a hero? You stupid—"

He laughed again and waved a hand at the crowd below them. "You think those people are down there because they admire what you did? They're down there waiting for you because they're curious, because they're glad the CPA caught you, and because they're glad you're an Ex. You're an *ex*-criminal now, and because of your treatment, you'll never be able to commit another crime as long as you live. And that's the kind of guy they admire, so they want to see you, shake your hand and get your autograph."

Joe didn't understand Hendricks completely, but the part he did understand he didn't believe. A crowd was waiting for him. He could see the people with his own eyes. When he left the hospital, they'd cheer and shout and ask for his autograph. If he wasn't a hero, *what was he?*

It took half an hour to get through the crowd. Cameras clicked all around him, a hundred kids asked for his autograph, everyone talked at once and cheered, smiled, laughed, patted him on the back and cheered some more.

Only one thing confused him during all the excitement: a white-haired old lady with tears in her eyes said, "Thank heaven it was only a watch. Thank heaven you didn't kill someone! God bless you, son." And then the old lady had handed him a box of fudge and left him in total confusion.

What she said didn't make sense. If he had killed someone rather than stealing a watch, he would be even more of a hero and the crowd would have cheered even louder. He knew: he had stood outside the CPA hospitals many times and the crowds always cheered louder when an ex-murderer came out.

In Hendricks' robot-chauffeured car, he ate the fudge and consoled himself with the thought, *People are funny. Who can understand 'em?*

Feeling happy for one of the few times in his life, he turned toward Hendricks and said, "Thanks for what you did. It turned out great. I'll be able to get a good job now."

"That's why I met you at the hospital," Hendricks said. "I want to explain some things. I've known you for a long time and I know you're spectacularly dumb. You can't figure out some things for yourself and I don't want you walking around the rest of your life thinking I did you a favor."

Joe frowned. Few men had ever done him a favor and he had rarely thanked anyone for anything. And now ... after thanking the man who'd done him the biggest favor of all, the man was denying it!

"You robbed Gralewski's apartment," Hendricks said. "Gralewski is a CPA employee and he doesn't live in the apartment you robbed. The CPA pays the rent for that one and he lives in another. We have a lot of places like that. You see, it gives us a way to get rid of saps like you before they do real damage. We use it as a last resort when a DCT First Class won't take the free psycho treatment or—"

"Well, it's still a favor."

Hendricks' face hardened. "Favor? You wouldn't know a favor if you stumbled over one. I did it because it's standard procedure for your type of case. Anyone can—free of charge—have treatment by the best psychologists. Any DCT can stop being a DCT by simply asking for the treatment and taking it. But you wouldn't do that. You wanted to commit a crime, get caught and be a hero ... an *Ex*."

The car passed one of the CPA playgrounds. Boys and girls of all ages were laughing, squealing with joy as they played games designed by CPA psychologists to relieve tension. And—despite the treatment, Joe shuddered when he saw the psychologists standing to one side, quietly watching the children. The whole world was filled with CPA employees and volunteer workers. Everywhere you went, it was there, quietly watching you and analyzing you, and if you showed criminal tendencies, it watched you even more closely and analyzed you even more deeply until it took you apart and put you back together again the way it wanted you to be.

"Being an Ex, you'll get the kind of job you always wanted," Hendricks continued. "You'll get a good-paying job, but you'll work for it. You'll work eight hours a day, work harder than you've ever worked before in your life, because every time you start to loaf, a voice in your head is going to say, *Work! Work!* Exes always get good jobs because employers know they're good workers."

"But during these next few days, you'll discover what being an Ex is like. You see, Joe, the treatment can't possibly take all the criminal tendencies out of a man. So the treatment does the next best thing—you'll find a set of laws written in your mind. You might *want* to break one now and then, but you won't be able. I'll give you an illustration...."

Joe's face reddened as Hendricks proceeded to call him a series of names. He wanted to smash the fat, grinning face, but the muscles in his arm froze before it moved it an inch.

And worse than that, a brief pain ripped through his skull. A pain so intense that, had it lasted a second longer, he would have screamed in agony. And above the pain, a voice whispered in his head, *Unlawful to strike someone except in self-defense.*

He opened his mouth to tell Hendricks exactly what he thought of him, the CPA, the whole world. But the words stayed in his throat, the pain returned, and the mental voice whispered, *Unlawful to curse.*

He had never heard how the treatment prevented an Ex from committing a crime. And now that he knew, it didn't seem fair. He decided to tell the whole story to the newspapers as soon as he could. And as soon as that decision formed in his mind, his body froze, the pain returned and the voice, *Unlawful to divulge CPA procedure.*

"See what I mean?" Hendricks asked. "A century ago, you would have been locked in a prison and taxpayers' money would have supported you until the day you died. With the CPA system, you're returned to society, a useful citizen, unable to commit the smallest crime. And you've got a big hand in your dirty little mind that's going to slap it every time you get the wrong kind of thought. It'll keep slapping you until you learn. It might take weeks, months or years, but you'll learn sooner or later to not even think about doing anything wrong."

He lit a cigarette and blew a smoke ring at the car's plush ceiling. "It's a great system, isn't it, Joe? A true democracy. Even a jerk like you is free to do what he wants, as long as it's legal."

"I think it's a lousy, filthy system." Joe's head was still tingling with pain and he felt suffocated. The CPA was everywhere, only now it was also inside his head, telling him he couldn't do this, couldn't do that. All his life it had been telling him he couldn't do things he wanted to do and *now....*

Hendricks laughed. "You'll change your opinion. We live in a clean, wonderful world, Joe. A world of happy, healthy people. Except for freaks like yourself, criminals are—"

"Let me out!" Joe grabbed at the door and was on the sidewalk, slamming the door behind him before the car stopped completely.

He stared at the car as it pulled away from the curb and glided into the stream of traffic again. He realized he was a prisoner ... a prisoner inside his own body ... made a prisoner by a world that hated him back.

He wanted to spit his contempt, but the increasingly familiar pain and voice prevented him.

It was unlawful to spit on a sidewalk.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PICK A CRIME ***

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