

This is a work of fiction. Names of characters are a product of *If you purchased this book without a cover, be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported 'unsold and destroyed' to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."* Call the FBI

the author's imagination and are used fictitiously. Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The Reluctant Jurist

Peter Sharp Legal Adventure #8

All rights reserved
© MMVIII Gene Grossman

This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author. For written permission, contact: Magic Lamp - Box 9547 Marina del Rey, CA 90295.

Magic Lamp



Press™

www.PeterSharpBooks.com

ISBN: 1-882629-72-8

The Peter Sharp Legal Mystery Series

Single Jeopardy

...By Reason of Sanity

A Class Action

Conspiracy of Innocence

...Until Proven Innocent

The Common Law

The Reluctant Jurist

The Magician's Legacy

The Final Case

An Element of Peril

A Good Alibi

Legally Dead

How to Rob a Bank

All now available at www.LegalMystery.com

1

While watching an interesting television documentary about manufacturing in China, I was surprised to learn how many products they make there. Unfortunately, they're mostly fake. They make copies of the best of everything, including wristwatches, purses, golf clubs, luggage, DVD's, clothing, and just about any other internationally known successful brand name products.

The 'knock-offs' they produce sell for as little as one twentieth of what the genuine thing would ordinarily cost here in the U.S.

Once the counterfeit merchandise reaches this country it gets bought up by people who don't really care that it's phony, because it looks real. No one cares that the

wristwatch may stop running next month, because during that month it will have served the main purpose of image boosting. Aside from the fact that the watch company is justified in protecting its copyright, it should also realize that any person who spends forty bucks for a phony Rolex would never spend eight grand for a real one, so they shouldn't whine about losing a customer they never would have had to begin with.

The 'knock-off' mentality doesn't stop with the counterfeiting of merchandise. It extends to many types of scams against governments and organizations, like welfare fraud, exaggeration of federal income tax deductions, staged auto accidents, phony workmen's compensation claims, inflation of corporate income to bolster stock prices, and many more types of scams. The new class of perpetrators is no longer just small time street hustlers. Many of them now wear tailored Italian suits and spend their time in boardrooms... but whether next to a wall on the street - or on Wall Street, they all share the common trait of a complete disregard for business ethics... and I'm sorry to say that the legal profession is not without its bad apples.

As for my own situation, I live on a genuine fifty-foot Chinese-built Grand Banks Yacht here in Marina del Rey California, along with little Suzi Braunstein, a Chinese-built pre-teen girl and 'Bernie,' her huge Saint Bernard. Both the girl and dog are part of a package deal foisted upon me when her late stepfather's Will specified that I was to be appointed as her legal guardian. Suzi is a cupie doll with genius computer skills that are often put to use fulfilling requests from many of the local cops who eat around the corner at Murray's Chinese restaurant, where her late mother was the manager. Suzi still makes her daily lunchtime appearances there and has become sort of a 'mascot' to all of the uniformed police regulars who eat there and where they hold their monthly inter-agency law enforcement luncheons.

The one problem I'll never have to worry about with Suzi is her asking me for an allowance – and that's because she's worth several million dollars, as the result of civil settlements from the death of her mother in an auto accident and her stepfather in a plane crash. But even without that money she would still be okay, because with her

incredible computer skills she could easily earn six figures a year. But that'll never happen because she's already got a job. She runs our little law firm... the one we operate off of this boat. She's the brains and has a couple of two-hundred-pound animals to boss around. I'm the one that makes the court appearances.

We've been doing pretty good as of late, so I don't have any financial problems either, which can be boring. It was a lot different years ago when my ex-wife and I were newlyweds. I was a struggling lawyer and my wife Myra was a legal secretary. When we got married, the common bond that held us together was our mutual efforts to pay the rent, drive dependable cars, and have decent wardrobes. That was definitely not a boring time, and stayed that way until my practice started to pick up and she started law school. The money problems were slowly coming to an end, but the philosophical conflicts were starting to replace them.

Like most women, my wife was born with a 'prosecution' chromosome in her genome. But being a good-natured criminal defense attorney, my DNA doesn't include one of

those genes, and that's where our problems began.

What happened to our marriage is public record. It includes my disciplinary problems with the State Bar, her passing the Bar exam and getting hired as a Deputy District Attorney, our divorce, and after I was out of the picture completely, she inherits a zillion dollars from her grandfather. How's that for timing? It seems like I'm always either an hour late or a dollar short.

I was finally able to prove that my being disbarred was a frame-up, so my ticket to practice law was returned, but I still regret missing out on a chance to share in Myra's inheritance.

Once my wife decided to downsize the household, I became history and was exiled to an old forty-foot wooden cabin cruiser I had been restoring in our back yard, which thanks to my dear old classmate Melvin Braunstein, ultimately wound up here in the Marina.

When I started practicing law again I sort of accidentally discovered some compromising photos that convinced Myra's opponent to

withdraw from the election, so she is now the elected District Attorney of this county, and I'm a successful attorney, no thanks to anything she's ever done for me. If it wasn't for little Suzi's constant conspiring to get Myra and I back together again, we probably wouldn't even be speaking socially at all - but today is one of the days we will be because Suzi needs a ride downtown to take another one of her periodic home-schooling progress tests.

Her grades in the past were so high that the Board of Education's big shots now insist she take her exams under their proctoring so they can make sure she's not cheating. Those bureaucrats just can't seem to believe that this kid is smarter than they are. Suzi doesn't complain about the in-person testing requirement because it gives her a chance to see Myra, who has become a role model for her. She also doesn't mind taking the tests in person, because it eliminates the need for a home-school teacher to certify the test results. I have a sneaking suspicion that there is no home-school teacher, because I've never seen one around. I think the kid teaches herself by using a class teaching schedule, a lesson plan, the internet, and a local library.

Whatever she's doing seems to be working, because her test scores are usually almost perfect, which doesn't stop her from talking Myra into joining us on these test days under the guise of needing some extra moral support. We all know that's not true, but it does bring us together for lunch.

Myra and Suzi sit holding hands in the back seat of my big Yellow Hummer and Bernie has a permanent claim on the front passenger seat, so he can ride with his head poking up out of the open sunroof. Suzi bought him a pair of 'Doggles' to wear. They're aviation-style eye-protection goggles designed for dogs to wear while riding in cars with their heads sticking out in the wind. With his Doggles on and those big ears flapping in the wind, he looks like a World War I air ace. We've dubbed him the Brown Baron.

We're quite an impressive sight driving down the busy Los Angeles streets, with the Baron's head sticking out of its cockpit and camera-toting tourists photographing us. Without a picture to prove it, they'd never be able to convince their friends back home about the unique sight they saw here of the

big Swiss-made Saint Bernard wearing his Doggles.

Not too long ago we heard that some mainland Chinese menus included Saint Bernard meat. Suzi's response to that awful rumor was to immediately tell the Chinese government that the Swiss have decided to add Giant Panda meat to their restaurant offerings unless a mutual 'non-eating' truce is entered into between the respective countries. She's still waiting for a response from Beijing.

This afternoon's events are a given. Suzi will 'ace' her tests and the three of us will stay in downtown Los Angeles so we can eat at the Pantry on Ninth and Figueroa, Suzi's favorite non-Chinese restaurant. Bernie will wait outside for us with his friend the newsstand guy until we return with a doggie-bag treat for him... he loves the Pantry's famous coleslaw.

Suzi usually wears one of her hats during lunch there because if she didn't, the many customers who walk by and can't seem to resist patting her would wear off all of the hair on top of her head. We'll have a pleasant lunch because I make a concerted

effort to avoid discussing criminal defense cases with my fascist wife. That keeps my legal conflicts with her militant prosecution to a minimum. Suzi just usually sits there quietly, relishing the time she can spend with the closest thing she has to a family, and absorbs every word we say. The kid has already expressed her intention to attend Harvard Law School and once in a very rare expression of generosity, she informed Myra that she will always be welcome as an associate in the Suzi B. Law Firm. I like to think that she'll keep me on too.

Back at the boat I see there's a message from the offices of my close friend and frequent client Stuart Schwarzman, who is the most entrepreneurial person I've ever met. The many businesses he's built into successes during the past couple of years are too numerous to list, but the one that stands out most is probably his armored car.

He bought an old one from Brink's Armored Transport and had the words '**He's taking it with him**' painted on the side. Disgruntled heirs hire the truck for up to five hundred bucks a day to have it driven behind the

hearse from the funeral parlor, all the way to the cemetery. Stuart's employee Vinnie drives it while wearing a phony uniform, complete with unloaded weapon. The armored car business got so successful that Stuart had to buy a second one, which is now driven by Vinnie's fiancée Olive, who is the subject of today's desperate message on my answering machine.

"Mister Sharp, this is Vinnie, and you've got to see us as soon as possible... it's about some surgery for Olive."

This lunatic couple have become like close friends of mine over the past year or so, and the mere mention of surgery sounds very serious, so I immediately return Vinnie's call to see what strange problem they're having this time. Vinnie answers on the first ring, recognizing my number on his caller ID display.

"Oh Mister Sharp... thanks for calling back. How'd Suzi do on her tests today?"

"She did fine, Vin. What's this I hear about Olive having some surgery? Is she okay? Was there an accident of some sort?"

“No, no, Mister Sharp. It’s worse than that...she wants to have some surgery done to her face.”

I can’t help but think that Olive is definitely not a raving beauty, but I never noticed anything radically wrong with her face.

“Listen Mister Sharp, we’re coming to the boat in a little while because Olive is taking Suzi shopping at the pet store, so I thought if I was there you might be able to spend a little time helping me convince her not to have this surgery done.”

“Sure Vinnie. You can tell me about it while they’re out shopping, and when they return maybe we can get to the bottom of this.”

Vinnie seems relieved, so having at least offered my good deed for the day, I’m now going to sit back and watch the BBC news that they broadcast every afternoon on PBS. I like this international program much better than the local news because they cover all the violence that occurs outside of Southern California. It’s really not that different than the local violence, but the BBC has a nice female anchorperson with

one of those classy British accents that turns me on.

It never ceases to amaze me how many countries there are that I've never heard of before, whose national newsworthiness all seem to be civil wars and starving refugees. The most common occupation in those third world countries seems to be 'rebel' or 'insurgent,' and I don't understand what they're always fighting about, because if all the victors want is the 'spoils,' they don't have to waste their time fighting... there seem to be plenty of spoils around in those underdeveloped civilizations. Is having three mud huts that much better than having just one?

Now that the opening 'if it bleeds, it leads' portion of the program is over, we can get to the good stuff. Today's health and fitness report has two topics. First is a report on how much hypochondria costs the world's health systems by those people who always imagine they're sick with something clogging up all the doctors' offices and emergency rooms. If they'd only ask me, I think I have a cure for hypochondria: disease. Maybe they should inject some chronic ailment germ into the arm of each whining hypochondriac... then they'd have

something real to take care of, and stop bothering doctors about those non-existent ailments.

The second item is about a strain of flu that's spreading all around in the United States. This is news to me. The anchor then turns to a correspondent who tells us about the horrible influenza pandemic that hit this country and the rest of the world back in 1918. From what he says, an estimated 675,000 Americans lost their lives to the flu, which was only a small percentage of the more than twenty million killed by the disease all over the world in just a few short years. I also learn that a 'pandemic' is an 'epidemic' that goes international.

Modern medicine has really improved, because back then, millions of people died from a sickness that we now can treat with over-the-counter drugs, and also try to avoid by using proper sterile practices in hospitals. Looking for a little more info about this subject on the internet, I learn that the government was operating with the same efficiency then that it does now, as evidenced by the fact that in November of 1918, the San Francisco health authorities used the air raid sirens to proclaim the end

of World War I and let San Franciscans know the flu epidemic was over, and that it was okay for them to celebrate. The citizenry believed the officials and 30,000 of them went out into the streets for a big party. The very next month, 5,000 new cases of influenza were reported in San Francisco. Nice work, health officials. I guess their descendants were working for the VA seventy-five years later, proclaiming that there is no such thing as bad effects from Agent Orange, and that there's no such thing as Gulf War Syndrome.

I also seem to remember Myra complaining about her trial deputies being required to put in longer days now because of the number of other employees and judges out with the flu. The court calendars are all backed up and they're trying to figure out some way to ease the situation. Thank goodness I'm not involved in that mess downtown. I hate driving down there and back in rush-hour traffic, and the parking situation is especially horrendous because of the big yellow Hummer I ride in. It's not a wussy H-2 or H-3, designed for soccer moms to drive, it's the original 8-foot wide model that the military uses, and one of the first ones released as a domestic model.

Fortunately I don't usually go much farther than the Santa Monica courthouse, because the Uniman Insurance Company assigns some of their smaller west-side auto accident cases to us. After saving old man Uniman from paying out some very large sums on fraudulent insurance claims, he's been showing his appreciation by allowing me to handle some of his less-important auto accident defense cases. The usual procedure is for him to have a case file messengered to the boat, along with an initial retainer fee. My first job on each one is to file an answer to the plaintiff lawyer's lawsuit and then start the civil discovery process by sending out a set of written interrogatories for the plaintiff to answer under oath. If anything appears interesting in the answers to our 'interrogs,' then we arrange to take depositions of the plaintiff and any others who might be helpful to our defense.

The knocking on our hull must be Vinnie and Olive, and the fact that the dog hasn't even opened one of his eyes indicates that the people who are now stepping up our boarding ladder are 'friendlies,' a category that includes all of our acquaintances and

every sworn peace officer who serves west of Sepulveda Boulevard.

Shortly after Vinnie and his fiancée come aboard, Olive, Suzi and Bernie leave on their shopping spree. Vinnie has a very concerned look on his face as he sits down with me on the boat's enclosed rear deck.

“Okay Vinnie, what’s this surgery stuff all about?”

“Mister Sharp, I don’t know why, but Olive wants to get a nose job.”

This is a surprise. Olive isn’t exactly a cover model, but I never thought her nose was too big. I guess that psychological illnesses like anorexia take a lot of forms. With some people, every time they look at their image in the mirror they see someone who is too fat. Others see an image of someone who definitely needs some bulking up, and others see deformities that need correcting. Olive may be needlessly obsessed with her nose and is seeing a problem that really doesn’t exist.

“So what, Vin? If she wants to get a nose job, let her get one. It’ll keep her happy, and that’s the important thing, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, sure, but what if that’s just the start? I’m afraid that once she gets her nose done, maybe she’ll want something else done... where does it end? I want my Olive just the way she is. I’ve seen some of those complete makeover shows on television and I don’t want her turning into something completely different. I like Olive this way. Why does she have to change?”

“I don’t know Vin. Do you think there could be some other reasons involved? Has she been depressed or going through any other type of changes in her life?”

“Well, you know we’re going to set another wedding date soon, but that shouldn’t bother her. She’s the one who’s in a rush for us to get married.”

Our conversation gets interrupted a few times by phone calls that come in for Suzi from local police agencies inquiring about some of the crime-fighting software she has installed on her computers. After answering their questions and talking a little more to

Vinnie, almost an hour has flown by and I hear paws coming up the boarding ladder.

Suzi and the dog are now in their forward stateroom returning calls to the police, so I take this opportunity to speak to Olive alone while Vinnie relaxes on the aft deck.

“What’s going on Olive? Vinnie told me about you wanting to have your nose done. I don’t see anything wrong with it. You’ve got a very nice nose. Is there some medical problem I don’t know about? Because lacking that, I don’t know why you’d want to do a thing like that.”

Every excuse she comes up with seems like it’s not the real reason. I guess that a nose job might possibly improve her appearance a little, and that Stuart’s insurance will cover all the costs, but I still feel there’s something she’s not telling me.

“Olive, I know you for a while now, so I’m only going to ask you this question once, and I’d like you to consider something. I’ve always tried as much as I could to help you and Vinnie out, and you know that I’ve never lied to you or held anything back. Now I’d like you, as a friend, to give me the

same consideration and let me know the real reason why you want to have this elective surgery on your nose.”

She thinks about what I’ve just told her and then starts to slowly explain the real reason.

“Well Mister Sharp, you know we’re going to be married soon, and after that we’ll probably have kids...”

“Okay Olive, a lot of people do that without getting nose jobs.”

“I know Mister Sharp, but I’d like to have the surgery before we get married.”

“What’s the big rush, Olive? You can always have that surgery done. Why do feel it’s necessary before you get married?”

“So that my kids won’t be born with big noses.”

So much for logic. No sense trying to burst her balloon, so I just tell her to make sure she lets the insurance company know her real reason. I’m sure they’ll fill her in on the facts of life. They’re experts when it comes

to turning down requests for medical procedures.

The phone is ringing and it looks very close to Myra's number, so it must be from some other phone extension inside the Criminal Courts Building where her office is located. I answer it and learn that it's Sally Hearn, the presiding judge's clerk.

"Mister Sharp, how are you feeling today?"

"I'm fine Sally, how about yourself?"

"Oh, I'm fine too Mister Sharp. But really, how are you feeling?"

This is a little strange. The only other times Sally has called me in the past was to come in and get appointed to represent some indigent criminal defendant... but now she's calling to inquire about my health.

"Sally, I assure you that I'm really okay. Is there anything else I can do for you today other than give you a progress report on my health?"

"I'm sorry Mister Sharp, but there's been so much flu going around here lately that

we're really concerned about anyone who comes to the courtrooms."

"That's nice Sally, but in case you haven't noticed, I haven't been around there for a while. I'm doing more civil work now, so the criminal courts aren't part of my rounds."

"Yes I know, and that's why the Honorable Morgan Russell, our new presiding judge, asked me to request that you come down here for an appointment."

"I don't know Sally. I'm really trying to concentrate more on civil matters now, and another criminal case..."

She cuts me off mid-sentence.

"Oh, not to worry Mister Sharp, the judge will see to it that you're not on a criminal case."

"I don't understand what you mean by that Sally. The court doesn't appoint lawyers to represent parties in civil disputes, so what can Judge Russell possibly want me for?"

“It’s not to represent a party Mister Sharp, you’ve been selected to act as a temporary judge.”
