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## Good Samaritans

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## The Good Samaritans

Williger had been shot while walking through a skinned cluster of trees on one end of a sandy park called Williger's playground. There were, of course, no witnesses—not in Pearl City. They were more sophisticated than that. So the shot which killed Williger raised no more eyebrows than would the slam of a neighbor's door.

Williger's body lay on the sand facing the sky. A plump mother joggled up pushing a Gerber's baby in a shiny stroller. She was staring at nothing. Then she zeroed in on Williger's body just a few feet in front of her.

"Oh oh," she murmured. She shook off a shudder.

"Mommie, man got owwie," squealed the child, pointing a pink-sucked-on finger.

"Ye-e-e-s. Bad, bad owwie," agreed the mother. She left her stroller and flicked a blackbird from the man's chest.

"Mommie, man needs a band-aid," said the child.

"Ye-e-s, big, big band-aid," nodded the mother. "Better call the police, don't you think?" She looked to the child for approval as she returned to the stroller, but the child appeared to be thinking. They left Williger lying on the sand.

Next came a lady with her grey, neatly trimmed poodle. It had escaped from her dog-walker, so she, with her chauffeur, had driven out in search of the darling. She had spotted her dog in the middle of the sandy park, so while her chauffeur spun the Cadillac around the block, she hiked cross-park on high heels. When she had caught up with her poodle, it led the way to Williger's body. This she resisted though, saying, "No, Andrew Jackson, just up to the tree."

But Andrew Jackson had gotten within reach of the body and was lapping something from the hollow of the man's neck. The sound of the lapping tilted the lady's head until she saw the body on the ground.

"No! No! Andrew Jackson. Dirty Dirty." She milked the droplets from the dog's whiskers with her silk handkerchief, then stood up and hurried away, cuddling her poodle. "Poor Andrew Jackson," she was murmuring as she left to inform the Park Director.

Soon after, a neatly dressed man with a neatly dressed son came walking by. "Life is a process of learning to adjust," the father was saying to his son. "That's what I was always taught."

"Look, Daddy, over there!" cried the son.

"What? What do you see?" queried the father.

"There. Up ahead by the tree. A man's sleeping." The boy let go of his father's hand and ran ahead, his father following in his footsteps.

"One must adjust to adverse situations with poise and resolution," the father observed as he came to Williger's side.

"Looks bad," he said, as he knelt beside the body. His son sat on one knee beside him.

"The man's been shot, see?" pointed out the father. "But there's no need to get excited. He'll be all right. Or at least comfortable," he added.

"Who did it, Daddy?" asked the son.

"We don't know, son," responded the father, bringing a thumb and forefinger to his chin. He adjusted his thoughts to objects. "See the BB's in his cheeks? Must have been a shotgun from close up. Hit him right here," he concluded, pointing.

"What's this, Daddy?" asked the boy, pointing to a protruding object hanging where the ear should have been.

"That's his eyeball, son. Did you know that our eyes are really round like. . .like marbles?" The man looked up for a moment. Again this vague feeling came over him, the feeling that he should probably call someone. Meanwhile his son put something into his shirt pocket.

Looking down at the body again, the father took out his white handkerchief. "I better cover the man's face," he said to his son. "We must always cover dead bodies." The red stains spread like a grass fire to the hems.

The father had a sudden inspiration—the solution. "We had better call a mortician," he suggested, taking the boy's hand and backing away. "They fix up dead bodies so that they look just like new. C'mon son," he said, "we've no time to waste." As he spoke, he looked down at his son and noticed that his son was peeking into his shirt pocket. The bulging pocket blotched with red stopped the father in his tracks.

"What have you got there, son?"

The son pressed the shirt pocket shut with his hand. "Nothin."

"Let me see." He pulled the son's hand from the pocket. From the pocket's bottom stared the man's eye.

"You naughty boy," scolded the father impulsively. "What on earth got into you?"

"I was going to show my science teacher," explained the son, his bottom lip quivering.

"Oh. Well. . .well that was a nice thought." He would have walked on, but the eye held him. So he reprimanded his son, but calmly this time. "Son, we must think of the poor mortician. He can't make the man look nice without the eye, can he? You must bring it back."

The boy's eyes blinked rapidly, but he did not answer.

"Go on," insisted the father, nudging his son. He began to worry that this demand of his might some day be ferreted out by some psychoanalyst, and he blushed as he imagined the accusing finger pointed at him. He knew it was old fashioned to be so demanding, but he reiterated his command. "Bring it back to where you got it, son."

The boy took two reluctant steps back, then pitched the eyeball as he had seen his father pitch horseshoes. The eyeball landed right on target. "Nice. . ." began the father. "Nice boy," he completed. The form and the footwork had been exemplary. He reached to pat his son's back, but grasped the sticky, outstretched hand instead. He turned quickly then, and was surprised by a tall, slightly disheveled man, his shoe laces still loose, just a few paces away.

"Did you hear a shot around here a little bit ago?" inquired the tall man nonchalantly. "The wife said she heard a shot."

"Yes, a man's been shot. Right down there," broke in the father,

pointing. "Half his face is blown off. I'm just going to call a mortician now." The father and son walked on then as the newcomer went to inspect the body.

"It's Williger!" he gulped, seeing in his mind the fence that separated their lots. He felt for a pulse.

"Hey!" he yelled. The father and son, a long way off now, stopped. "Better make that an ambulance. He's still got a pulse." The father nodded as though he heard.

Kneeling beside Williger, the tall man remembered the conversation of a few days ago. "Yeah, Williger," he had said, "I suppose before long you'll have to be moving out of your house and into a rest home. And they cost money," he had warned, remembering the estates he had handled as a lawyer. "I suppose you'll have to sell your house and lot to pay for that." He had not given him an offer, in deference to Williger's feelings.

Now, however, seeing Williger's blood-matted hair, his mangled face, he even remembered what he was going to offer him. "My neighbor," he said aloud suddenly, but was embarrassed when he heard his own voice. He looked sheepishly around to see if anyone had heard, but he saw no one. Williger's loud "No rest home for me" came back to him now. "No, Williger," he said comfortingly, "I guess you won't have to waste away in a rest home after all." He took hold of the wrist again to feel for a pulse. The limp hand felt heavy as he lifted the wrist.

Suddenly the tall man felt a tap on his shoulder. He spun around so quickly that he nearly skinned his nose on a badge which a man was concealing in the palm of his left hand. In his right hand he held a pad and pen. He wore a plain brown suit topped by a small-rimmed hat pushed firmly onto his forehead.

"Special Investigator," he said almost inaudibly.

"Oh," murmured the tall neighbor meekly, still kneeling.

"You've a constitutional right to say nothing if you don't want to," said the Investigator politely, holding his pen to his pad. "But," he added with a seductive smile, "would you like to confess?"

"Oh, no, you've got this all wrong," replied the neighbor. "I just came here. Wife thought she heard a shot or firecracker so I came out to look." He noticed his own loose shoe laces at this point and started to tie them. The Investigator's hand was scribbling furiously. Finally, he looked up. "Care to tell me what you saw?" he purred.

The neighbor, still on one knee, stopped tying his shoes. "Well, sure. Saw a man and his son coming away from Williger here." He motioned with his head. "I asked them if they'd heard a shot." The Investigator started to write, but stopped.

"Did you inform them of their right not to answer you?" he asked.

"Well, no, don't believe I did," replied the neighbor. He started to tie his shoe again.

"I was afraid so," remarked the Investigator. He began to erase.

Just then another man walked up. He was pointing impressively to a patch on his sleeve while still ten yards away.

"Park Director," he informed them. "This man must be moved

immediately." He eyed the Investigator quizzically. "If you don't mind, sir, I don't want this accident to have happened in my park."

"Oh, I see," said the Investigator meekly, erasing furiously. "Where shall it have happened?"

"How about on the sidewalk just off the park," suggested the Park Director, taking hold of Williger's leg to drag him to the sidewalk.

"Can't you wait? Please?" asked the neighbor, blushing profusely. "I think an ambulance is coming now. I hear a siren."

"Well, I suppose," said the Park Director, sulking. "Just don't want anyone to think it happened in my park." He walked over to Williger's head and began covering the blood-stained sand with clean sand. He toiled silently, landscaping first with the side of one foot and then with the side of the other. The Investigator walked over to protest, but after observing for a moment, he said, "My son should be here. He has a toy bulldozer."

The keen of the siren stirred the neighbor's thinking. Something in him wanted to help put Williger onto a stretcher. "Yes, I helped put old man Williger on a stretcher, helped toss him on the wagon yet," he would recount for his golfing partners tomorrow. "Told them to take good care of him, and if he couldn't pay, I would." He imagined himself saying this, saying it because he knew that he wouldn't have to pay. But he feared that his golfing partners might not comprehend his subtlety. They might say as he approached them later, "There's a guy who'd give you the shirt off his back." He could not bear such humiliation. He would have to laugh loudly when he said it to his golfing partners, if he said it at all.

In a moment the ambulance swooped in. A driver and another male nurse's aid, both dressed in white, tumbled out. A couple of small boys came shuffling up from the other direction at the same time. The Investigator wrote down the license number of the ambulance. The Park Director accosted the ambulance driver. He tapped his shoulder patch ominously. "Remember, Bud, it's illegal to drive a motor vehicle on city playgrounds, so don't forget that you picked up your cargo outside of this playground, not in it." The aid rolled out the stretcher. The neighbor was about to speak. "Doc," he was going to say, "this man's been shot." He was waiting for the aid to look at him.

"Move aside, Mister," said the aid. The neighbor hop-scotched over. As the aid placed the stretcher beside Williger, the two boys nosed in, one moving to the head, the other to the feet.

"I took his pulse," the neighbor said finally.

The Investigator was writing furiously. The Park Director was stock-piling sand between his feet in anticipation of their moving Williger. The two men in white moved silently beside the body.

"Now, let's the three of us lift him," said the driver. The neighbor, the aid, and the driver kneeled beside Williger. "Now when we lift him, you boys each shove your end of the stretcher under him," instructed the driver. The boys looked at each other, and each took hold of an end with one eye on the other. "All set?" asked the driver. Then to the men beside him he said, "Ready, lift."

No sooner had they raised the limp Williger than several coins fell out

of his pocket. Both boys let go of the stretcher and dove under the uplifted body. Their arms and legs thrashed about as they wrestled underneath Williger for his coins.

"Oh no you don't." "It's mine." "Give it here." "You bastard." "Ouch!" The Investigator was on his haunches nearby measuring the distance from Williger to the nearest tree. The Park Director was hastily shoving clean sand over the red-stained sand underneath Williger's uplifted head. Suddenly the one boy rolled out and took off like a rabbit out of the brush, hotly pursued by the other. The three men, straining to maintain their balance, still held Williger on their outstretched forearms.

"Those kids show real promise," observed the driver. He looked at the stretcher a few yards away. He considered the Park Director with the sand between his feet, then the Investigator on his haunches. Then to the aid and the neighbor beside him he said, "Let's try making it to the stretcher." They walked like three penguins to an altar, then bowed Williger onto the stretcher. The neighbor was thinking how he would be saying tomorrow, "My arms nearly broke off. He must have weighed two hundred and twenty pounds."

They had just hoisted the stretcher into the ambulance when the mortician arrived.

"Hey, stealing my customer?" he asked. He hopped into the rear door of the ambulance before the aid could close it and huddled by the body of Williger. The driver started the engine while his aid slammed the door with the mortician inside. The neighbor was thinking of saying, "Remember, if you need any help, just call on me," but he wasn't sure his boisterous laugh would allay their accusing glances. The Investigator was measuring the height of the wet spot on the tree, computing the size of the dog who had stopped by. The Park Director stood duck-footed, with little mounds of sand inside the arch of each foot, ready to cover the tracks of the ambulance.

Just as the ambulance began to move, the mortician shouted with glee. "Wait! Wait! Open the chute! He's dead! He's mine! Stop the buggy! I'll back my wagon by."

The Park Director sprinted to the driver's window. "Don't you stop until you're off this park or I'll give you a summons. Do your switching on the road." The Investigator heaved an audible sigh. Homicide could take over the case now. He ripped several sheets of paper from his pad and pitched them to the wind. The neighbor was calculating the value of Williger's property when he heard the mortician's shout. He reached up and caught one of the floating sheets of the Investigator to do some figuring as he followed the ambulance to the hearse. He thought of how tomorrow he would be saying, "Yeah, I helped dump poor old Williger out of the ambulance into the hearse."

Williger evaporated behind the closed doors of the sleek hearse.

The zealous mortician shouldered the last burden—molding the lump of clay before him into an effective advertisement for Don's Funeral Parlor. But only the neighbor peeked in to see it. When he did, the strains of "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" caressed the garnished coffin. He whistled the tune over and over the next day as he golfed.