

'Cello.
"The Monstros and I"
(Written Sept. 24, 1950)

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|---------|---------|
| Collins' | Sept. 25, 1950. | Oct. 6. | Mum. |
| N. Yorker | Oct. 6. | Oct. 13 | " |
| Atlantic | Oct. 13 | Nov. 27 | Note |
| Harpers. | Nov. 30 th. | Dec. 19 | Mum |
| Post. | Feb. 27, 1951. | MAR. 15 | "SORRY" |

1st
Sept
20.
1950.

False start

Maida drove me to the 8:17 that morning because of the "monster", and I almost tripped over the damned thing getting out at the station. ~~The~~ ^{my} train was whistling "round the bend." "Tell them to be sure and have it ready for by Monday," Maida told me for the ~~hundredth~~ ^{thousandth} time, as I struggled to hold the ~~monster~~ ^{also find my change for the morning} and ~~buy a~~ ^{buy a} ~~local paper.~~

1st.
9/24/50.

THE MONSTER AND I

The Unstrung Cello.

FIRST CELLO: UNSTRUNG. A FELLOW ARTIST THE LIAR

Passenger
to
meas

dark

dark
plans and

I wrestled the monster and myself
 on the coach next to a little dark man with luxuriant
 mustaches and gave myself over to the bad news
 in the morning paper. The "monster" was my son's
 cello which I had unhappily been commissioned
 to haul into the city to be restrung. It was really when I thought of
 the thing for days. And I had postponed the thing for days. And I had
 strategems I had concocted to keep from being
 caught with the thing. First, I had taken 8:42 instead
 of my usual 8:17, so that I wouldn't run into the
 regular morning canasta gang. They would have ripped me unmercifully...
 caution, I had had Grace ~~to~~ ^{drive me to} meet me at the
 opposite end of the train, as far from the smoke as
 possible, so that I wouldn't run into any possible late
 stragglers. If one had caught me, all would have
 "Tell them to be sure and have it ready by
 tomorrow." Grace had warned me for the tenth time as
 I had tugged the ungainly cello cast out of the car.
 "Junior will need it for the rehearsal tomorrow night at the
 school." It was preposterous to try to kiss her goodbye with the monster
 instead, "Yes, Mrs. Fowler," I had gravely answered, "Your
 husband is ^{brilliant} deeply sensible that our son's musical future hangs
 in the balance. Then I had turned. "Good day, Madam," I had
 said and ^{sadly turned away}. The train clicked along to the next stop, I turned
 to the editorial page, thereby the better to fortify my
 favorite prejudices.
 "The cello -- you play it?" It was
 the little dark man sitting next to me. He was smiling.
 He spoke softly and ^{foreign} with quite a pronounced accent. From
 the briefcase he held on his lap I judged him to be
 a fellow lawyer, probably one of those suburban
 divorce lawyers, I concluded. Probably ^{the} ^{kind} that sells ^{fire}
 and ^{real estate} on the side.
 "I beg your pardon," I said, sparring for time.
 "You play the 'cello?" he repeated, smiling
 in a friendly way.

I found myself saying ^{utter} to my amazement, ^{and} ^{immediately} wondered ^{why} on earth I had ~~ever~~ ^{so} uttered such a chummy lie. But it seemed so much easier ^{and more dignified} than ^{to} explaining ^{that} I was carting my son's cello into the city to get ^{a set of} new strings.

"Oh," a beautiful instrument," the little dark man said. "You play ^{it} professionally," ^{somehow} ^{irresistibly} ^{impelled} ^{to} ^{pick} up an grotesque falsehood. "First cello with the symphony downtown." ^{There}, it was out.

"My my," the little man murmured ^{as} I buried ^{my} ^{head} in the editorial page, ^{wondering} what ^{strange} ^{hidden} ^{my} ^{quirks} of character would make a prosperous middle-aged lawyer ^{utter} such a grotesque series of lies. Perhaps, I thought, I had better ^{delve} the hateful ^{damned} cello and spend the rest of the day on ^{some} ^{psychiatrist's} couch. ^{What} ^{sort} ^{of} ^{frustration} ^{was} ^I ^{dredging} ^{up}?

The train ^{ground} ^{and} ^{grated} to another suburban stop, and I was debating whether or not to leap off ^{the} train and grab a cab ^{into} the city when I ^{suddenly} overheard a conversation between the two women ^{who} ^{sat} behind me. I was suddenly ^{frozen} in ^{my} seat. Where were ^{my} ^{falsehoods} taking me?

"I'm positive it's him," ^{one} ^{of} ^{the} ^{women} ^{said} ^{earnestly} ^{to} ^{the} ^{other} "I heard him playing ^{at} ^a ^{great} his own 'cello concerto in Boston last winter. ^{They} ^{say} ^{his} ^{is} ^{by} ^{far} the best since ^{Casals} ^{went} ^{into} ^{retirement}. I ^{listen} ^{to} ^{it} ^{often}."

"Imagine such a celebrated ^{artist} ^{and} ^{composer} ^{being} ^{on} ^{this} ^{suburban} ^{train}," the other said in an ^{quiet} ^{voice}. I glanced ^{quickly} at the little dark man. ^{He} ^{had} ^{heard}, ^{too}. I quickly placed ^{my} ^{hand} ^{to} ^{my} ^{brow}, head bent, eyes closed, in a attitude ^{which} ^{conveyed} ^{an} ^{appropriate} ^{artistic} ^{detachment}; at once languid and emotionally ^{consecrated}; as though I were inwardly consumed by the wild fires of ^{the} music I had not yet written.

As the train started ^{again} I heard the first woman ^{chatter} ^{to} ^{the} ^{other} ^{woman}.

and reputable

hateful
comfortable

companion

by far
caught in a

The first end...

4) Never, ^{as a lawyer} had I felt such a sense of importance; of accomplishment; of really belonging...

say: "I wonder, ^{my dear,} if he would think it, ^{too} bold of me if I spoke to him. ^{This music gave me such deep pleasure --} The rest of her words were drowned in the clatter of the ^{moving} train.

On a ^{sudden} charming impulse I turned and flashed my most winning, courtroom smile at the two ^{accompanied by an understanding little nod,} women, and ^{then} immediately returned to my musical reverie, ^{at the same time} carelessly brushing my newspaper to the floor. ^{After all, and} the composer and ~~the~~ celebrated virtuoso on the 'cello could scarcely waste his time sit there reading ^{anything as} prosaic editorials. ^{as newspaper}

"May I?" ^{still smiling,} It was the little man pointing at my ^{discarded} newspaper. I nodded ^{grave assent} and returned to my ~~own~~ ^{somber} contemplation of my muse. Instead I was debating how I ^{might} could bolt from the ^{innocent} train when we reached the city before one of these ^{filendish} people lured me into further falsehoods. ~~I stole~~ The train clackety-clacked its way to the city. I ^{stealthily} stole a ~~stealthy~~ glance at my little dark companion. ^{He was} up to his ears in the financial page. ^{Real estate} The train started to yawning and ^{professionally} adjusted the 'cello case between my legs. The train ^{began} started to slow down for the last stop before reaching the down town station.

"Excuse me, please."

It was ^{engaging} my little dark man that wanted out. With his quaint foreign accent it sounded exactly like: "Accuse a me, pliss."

"Of course," I said, emerging from my musical communion long

I turned and flashed her my most winning courtroom smile and returned to my musical reverie

Insert this ¶ to follow "Just from
Case" sentence on ^{bottom of} p. 3

The conductor suddenly popped ~~into~~
~~in the door~~ his head in the
doorway and cryptically barked
"Stash Stash"
"Stash (Wub glub - - mesh slop!"
and disappeared. Freely translated,
this meant that the next stop
was the last one before reaching
the downtown station. The train
began to slow down.

Mary

Eldredge: Dad + Abstr.

Johnson case to
McDonald.

Gunn

F. J. R.

Wesdunge: Bob

Lukas - Lloyd

9/29/50
Do

The conductor
suddenly appeared
on the down^{way} and
cryptically barked

"Stash glut glut--
nesh stop!" and then
disappeared. Freely
translated, this meant
that the next stop was
the last ^{one} before the
downtown station.

Many evenings I spent word - sketches I start with a
pencil more for the subject and then become defective
because the writer can't sustain the novel. Or he loses
it and has to pick it up again. This you have discovered.

Tues.

Dear John:

I have just read
"The monster and I"; I
am terrifically enthusiastic
about it. "Neat"; as Peter
says, to express his feeling
about something more
perfect than perfection.
"The monster" has evoked
a conviction that it
would be a crime to
change even one word; to
do so would be like
striking the wrong note
on the piano. Congratulations!

Will see you Sat.
night - late probably because
I may have a passage
to drop you at Antigo.

Tried to induce
Sara to drive up with
me but she must stay
here.

Raymond.

P.S. Submit it to the New Yorker;
if the New Yorker rejects
it then the New Yorker has
ceased to exist.

3 final - all on
Henry. Send orig. to
Collins.

$$\begin{array}{r} 80 \\ 17 \\ \hline 963 \\ 31 \end{array}$$

Written by:
John D. Voelker,
Bellevue, Nevada.

THE MONSTER AND I

~~FELLOW ARTIST~~

by Robert Hoover

I wrestled the monster and myself into the only seat left on the coach, next to a little dark man with ~~luxuriant~~ dark moustaches. "Pardon me," I said as I inadvertently jostled him--and gave myself over to reading the ~~uniformly~~ bad news in the morning paper. The "monster" was my son's 'cello which I had unhappily been commissioned to haul into the city to be restrung. ^{For days} I had postponed ^{doing it.} the thing for days. And it was really curious when I thought of the dark plans and strategems I had conceived to keep from being caught at large with the thing. First, I had taken the 8:42 "shoppers special" instead of my usual 8:17 train so that I wouldn't run into the regular morning canasta gang. They would have ribbed me unmercifully... Then, in an excess of caution, I had had Grace drive me to the opposite end of the train, as far from the smoker as possible, so that I wouldn't meet any late stragglers, I knew. If just one of the boys had caught me, all would have known...

"Tell them to be sure ~~to~~ ^{to} and have it ready for you to pick up by tomorrow afternoon," Grace had warned me for the tenth time as I had tugged and lurched the ungainly 'cello case out of the car. "Junior'll need ^{it} for the rehearsal tomorrow night at the school."

"Yes, Mrs. Fowler," I had gravely answered. "Your husband is deeply sensible that our son's ~~brilliant~~ musical future hangs in the balance." It would have been ^{and faintly indecent for me} preposterous to have tried to kiss her goodbye, with the monster looming there between us. "Good day, ^{my} Madam," I had said, instead, and sadly turned away.

^{my} The train clicked along the the next suburban stop, city bound. I turned to the editorial page of my paper, thereby the better to fortify my favorite prejudices. *Am... Truman was in hot water again...*

"The 'cello--you play it?" It was the little dark man sitting next to me. He spoke softly and with quite a pronounced foreign accent. From the battered leather briefcase he held on his lap I judged him to be a fellow lawyer--probably one of those suburban divorce or collection lawyers, I quickly concluded. Probably the kind that ^{sold} ~~sells~~ fire insurance and real estate on the side.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, sparring for time.

"You play the 'cello?" he repeated, smiling in a friendly eager sort of way.

"Oh, yes," I found myself saying to my utter amazement, immediately wondering why on earth I had uttered such a clumsy lie. But it seemed so much easier--and somehow more dignified--than explaining to a stranger that I was carting my son's 'cello into the city to get a ^{new} set of strings.

"Ah, the 'cello--a beautiful instrument," the little dark man said. "You play him professionally?"

"Oh, yes," I lied again, somehow irresistibly impelled to pile falsehood on grotesque falsehood. I was carried away. "First 'cello with the symphony down town." *I modestly bowed my head.*

"My, my," the little man murmured, impressed, as I buried my face deep in the editorial page, ^Nburying with shame, wondering what strange hidden quirk of ~~my~~ character could make me--a prosperous and reputable middle-aged lawyer--utter such a gratuitous series of lies. ~~Perhaps~~ Perhaps, I thought, I had better deliver the hateful 'cello ^{at the music store} and spend the rest of the day ^{lying} on some nice comfortable psychiatrist's couch. What sort of dark frustrations was I dredging up?

The train grated to another suburban stop, and I was debating whether or not to leap off and grab a cab the rest of the way into the city when I overheard a snatch of conversation between the two women who sat behind me. I was suddenly frozen in my seat. Where ^{were} ~~were~~ my weird falsehoods ^{leading} taking me?

"I'm positive it's him," one of the women was earnestly saying to her companion.

"I heard him play the solo part in his own 'cello concerto in Boston last winter." ^{she}
^{sighed.} "I'll never forget it -- it ^{was} simply divine. The critics say he's by far the best since poor Casals went ^{brave} into retirement. I strained to listen, caught in a fiend's clutch, feeling a strange sense of elation rather than ^{of} shame.

"Imagine such a celebrated artist and composer riding with us here on this rattly, dusty old suburban train," the other woman said in an awed voice. I ^{stole a glance} glanced ^{at} at the little dark man. From his ~~quiet~~ nodding little smile I saw that he had heard, too. ~~Shrugging~~ Shrugging mentally I decided I would play my part to the bitter end... I quickly cupped my hand to my brow, head bent, eyes closed, in an attitude which I hoped appropriately conveyed ^{my} artistic detachment; ^{a detachment} at once languid and emotionally consecrated; as though I were inwardly consumed by the ^{raging} wild fires of the music I had not yet written.

As the train started again I heard the first woman say: "I wonder, my dear, if he would think it too bold of me if I spoke to him. I've never done such a thing... ^{before} But his music gave me such deep pleasure --" The rest of her words were drowned in the clatter of the ^{moving} morning train.

Never ^{before} as a lawyer had I felt such a sense of importance; of accomplishment; of really belonging... On a sudden charitable impulse I turned and flashed my most winning courtroom smile at the two women, accompanied by ^{a quiet,} an understanding little nod. ^I Then immediately returned to my musical reverie, at the same time carelessly brushing my newspaper to the floor. After all, a composer and celebrated virtuoso on the 'cello ^{to be sitting} could scarcely ^{it was much too inartistic for} sit there reading prosaic newspaper editorials.

"May I?" It was the little man, still smiling, pointing at my discarded newspaper. I nodded grave assent and returned to the sombre contemplation of my muse. Instead I was debating how I might bolt from the train when we reached the city before one of these ^{fiendish} fiendishly innocent people lured me into further falsehoods.

The train clickety-clacked its way on to the city. I stealthily stole ^{another} a glance at my little dark companion. Hm... He was buried nicely up to ~~his~~ his ears in the financial page. Real estate was right, I thought. I yawned and professionally ~~adjusted~~ ^{deftly flecking an imaginary mote of dust from the case,} adjusted the 'cello case between my legs, [^] The train began to slow down for the last stop before reaching the downtown station. *+ (OK downtown in this case)*

"Excuse me, please."

It was my engaging little dark man that wanted out. With his quaint ~~foreign~~ foreign accent it sounded exactly like: "Accuse a me, pliss."

"Of course," I said, emerging from my musical communion long enough to enable him to hurdle both me and Junior's 'cello. ^{As he passed me} I thought I detected the faint aroma of garlic. "Thank you," he said, reaching the aisle. He stood there ^{for a moment} uncertainly gripping his leather briefcase. Then he turned and faced the two women sitting behind us. He removed his hat ^{with} ~~in~~ a courtly little flourish and smiled and bowed.

"Excuse me, please, my dear ladies," he said somewhat timidly. "I could not refrain hearing your conversation. It would be bad discourtesy, I feel, not to gratify your feminine curiosity--it was indeed I you heard playing my concerto in Boston the last winter. Thank you kindly for your good words." ^{Still smiling diffidently.} He paused, [^] "Perhaps chance may permit you to hear me play my latest composition with your symphony this Saturday." He turned to me, still smiling, his voice soft and kindly. "And I am extremely looking forward to playing my first rehearsal with you this afternoon, my fellow artist! Goodbye."

With a final ~~xxxxx~~ grave little bow he turned and quickly left the train. Just then Junior's 'cello thumped to the floor with a strangled "plink," ^{quickly} I buried [^] my face in my newspaper.

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

THE MONSTER AND I

by

Robert Traver

I wrestled the monster and myself into the only seat left on the coach, next to a little dark man with dark moustaches. "Pardon me," I said as I inadvertently jostled him--and gave myself over to reading the bad news in the morning paper. The "monster" was my son's 'cello which I had unhappily been commissioned to haul into the city to be restrung. For days I had postponed doing it. And it was really curious when I thought of the dark plans and stratagems I had conceived to keep from being caught at large with the thing. First, I had taken the 8:42 "shoppers' special" instead of my usual 8:17 train so that I wouldn't run into the regular morning canasta gang. They would have ribbed me unmercifully... Then, in an excess of caution, I had had Grace drive me to the opposite end of the train, as far from the smoker as possible, so that I wouldn't meet any late stragglers I knew. If just one of the boys had caught me, all would have been known...

"Tell them to be sure and have it ready for you to pick up by tomorrow afternoon," Grace had warned me for the tenth time as I had tugged and lurched the ungainly 'cello case out of the car. "Junior'll need it for the rehearsal tomorrow night at the school."

"Yes, Mrs. Fowler," I had gravely answered. "Your husband is deeply sensible that our son's musical future hangs in the balance." It would have been preposterous and faintly indecent for me to have tried to kiss her good-bye, with the monster looming there between us. "Good day, madam," I had said, instead, and sadly turned away.

My train clicked along to the next suburban stop, city bound. I turned to the editorial page of my paper, thereby the better to fortify my favorite prejudices. Hm... Truman was in hot water again...

"The 'cello--you play it?" It was the little dark man sitting next to me. He spoke softly and with quite a pronounced foreign accent. From the battered

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

THE MONSTER AND I
by
Robert Traver

I wrestled the monster and myself into the only seat left on the coach, next to a little dark man with dark ~~m~~ustaches. "Pardon me," I said as I inadvertently jostled him--and gave myself over to reading the bad news in the morning paper. The "monster" was my son's 'cello which I had unhappily been commissioned to haul into the city to be restrung. For days I had postponed doing it. And it was really curious when I thought of the dark plans and stratagems I had conceived to keep from being caught at large with the thing. First, I had taken the 8:42 "shoppers' special" instead of my usual 8:17 train so that I wouldn't run into the regular morning canasta gang. They would have ribbed me unmercifully... Then, in an excess of caution, I had had Grace drive me to the opposite end of the train, as far from the smoker as possible, so that I wouldn't meet any late stragglers I knew. If just one of the boys had caught me, all would have been known...

"Tell them to be sure and have it ready for you to pick up by tomorrow afternoon," Grace had warned me for the tenth time as I had tugged and lurched the ungainly 'cello case out of the car. "Junior'll need it for the rehearsal tomorrow night at the school."

"Yes, Mrs. Fowler," I had gravely answered. "Your husband is deeply sensible that our son's musical future hangs in the balance." It would have been preposterous and faintly indecent for me to have tried to kiss her goodbye, with the monster looming there between us. "Good day, madam," I had said, instead, and sadly turned away.

My train clicked along to the next suburban stop, city bound. I turned to the editorial page of my paper, thereby the better to fortify my favorite prejudices. Hm... Truman was in hot water again...

"The 'cello--you play it?" It was the little dark man sitting next to me. He spoke softly and with quite a pronounced foreign accent. From the battered

leather briefcase he held on his lap I judged him to be a fellow lawyer--probably one of those suburban divorce or collection lawyers, I quickly concluded. Probably the kind that sold fire insurance and real estate on the side.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, sparring for time.

"You play the 'cello?" he repeated, smiling in a friendly eager sort of way.

"Oh, yes," I found myself saying to my utter amazement, immediately wondering why on earth I had uttered such a clumsy lie. But it seemed so much easier--and somehow more dignified--than explaining to a stranger that I was carting my son's 'cello into the city to get a new set of strings.

"Ah, the 'cello--a beautiful instrument," the little dark man said. "You play him professionally?"

"Oh, yes," I lied again, somehow irresistibly impelled to pile falsehood on grotesque falsehood. I was carried away. "First 'cello with the symphony ~~down town.~~" I modestly bowed my head.

in the city

"My, my," the little man murmured, impressed, as I buried my face deep in the editorial page, burning with shame, wondering what strange hidden quirk of character could make me--a prosperous and reputable middle-aged lawyer--utter such a gratuitous series of lies. Perhaps, I thought, I had better deliver the hateful 'cello at the music store and spend the rest of the day lying on some nice comfortable psychiatrist's couch. What sort of dark frustrations was I dredging up?

The train grated to another suburban stop, and I was debating whether or not to leap off and grab a cab the rest of the way into the city when I overheard a snatch of conversation between the two women who sat behind me. I was suddenly frozen in my seat. Where were my weird falsehoods leading me?

"I'm positive it's him," one of the women was earnestly saying to her companion. "I heard him play the solo part in his own 'cello concerto in Boston last winter." She sighed. "I'll never forget it--it was simply divine. The critics say he's by far the best since poor Casals went into retirement." I strained to listen, caught in a fiend's clutch, feeling a strange sense of elation rather than of shame.

being

"Imagine such a celebrated artist and composer riding with us here on this rattly, dusty old suburban train," the other woman said in an awed voice. I stole a glance at the little dark man. From his nodding little smile I saw that he had heard, too. Shrugging mentally I decided I would play my part to the bitter end... I quickly cupped my hand to my brow, head bent, eyes closed, in an attitude which I hoped appropriately conveyed my artistic detachment; a detachment at once languid and emotionally consecrated; as though I were inwardly consumed by the raging fires of the music I had not yet written.

As the train started again I heard the first woman say: "I wonder, my dear, if he would think it too bold of me if I spoke to him. I've never done such a thing before... But his music gave me such deep pleasure---" The rest of her words were drowned in the clatter of the moving train.

Never before had I felt such a sense of importance; of accomplishment; of really belonging... On a sudden charitable impulse I turned and flashed my most winning courtroom smile at the two women, accompanied by a quiet, understanding little nod. Then I immediately returned to my musical reverie, at the same time carelessly brushing my newspaper to the floor. After all, it was much too inartistic for a composer and celebrated virtuoso on the 'cello to be sitting there reading prosaic newspaper editorials.

"May I?" It was the little man, still smiling, pointing at my discarded newspaper. I nodded grave assent and returned to the sombre contemplation of my muse. Instead I was debating how I might bolt from the train when we reached the city before one of these fiendish people lured me into further falsehoods. The train clickety-clacked its way on to the city. I stealthily stole another glance at my little dark companion. Hm... He was buried nicely up to his ears in the financial page. Real estate was right, I thought. I yawned and professionally adjusted the 'cello case between my legs, deftly flecking an imaginary mote of dust from the case. The train began to slow down for the last stop before reaching the downtown station.

"Excuse me, please."

It was my engaging little dark man that wanted out. With his quaint foreign accent it sounded exactly like: "Accuse a me, pliss."

"Of course," I said, emerging from my musical communion long enough to enable him to hurdle both me and Junior's 'cello. As he passed me I thought I detected the faint aroma of garlic. "Thank you," he said, reaching the aisle. He stood there for a moment uncertainly gripping his leather briefcase. Then he turned and faced the two women sitting behind us. He removed his hat with a courtly little flourish and smiled and bowed.

"Excuse me, please, my dear ladies," he said somewhat timidly. "I could not refrain hearing your conversation. It would be bad discourtesy, I feel, not to gratify your feminine curiosity--it was indeed I you heard playing my concerto in Boston the last winter. Thank you kindly for your good words." He paused, still smiling diffidently. "Perhaps chance may permit you to hear me play my latest composition with your symphony this Saturday." He turned to me, still smiling, his voice soft and kindly. "And I am extremely looking forward to playing my first rehearsal with you this afternoon, my fellow artist! Goodbye."

With a final grave little bow he turned and quickly left the train. Just then Junior's 'cello thumped to the floor with a strangled "plink." I quickly buried my face in my newspaper.

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

THE MONSTER AND I

by

Robert Traver

I wrestled the monster and myself into the only seat left on the coach, next to a little dark man with dark moustaches. "Pardon me," I said as I inadvertently jostled him--and gave myself over to reading the bad news in the morning paper. The "monster" was my son's 'cello which I had unhappily been commissioned to haul into the city to be restrung. For days I had postponed doing it. And it was really curious when I thought of the dark plans and strategems I had conceived to keep from being caught at large with the thing. First, I had taken the 8:42 "shoppers' special" instead of my usual 8:17 train so that I wouldn't run into the regular morning canasta gang. They would have ribbed me unmercifully... Then, in an excess of caution, I had had Grace drive me to the opposite end of the train, as far from the smoker as possible, so that I wouldn't meet any late stragglers I knew. If just one of the boys had caught me, all would have been known...

"Tell them to be sure and have it ready for you to pick up by tomorrow afternoon," Grace had warned me for the tenth time as I had tugged and lurched the ungainly 'cello case out of the car. "Junior'll need it for the rehearsal tomorrow night at the school."

"Yes, Mrs. Fowler," I had gravely answered. "Your husband is deeply sensible that our son's musical future hangs in the balance." It would have been preposterous and faintly indecent for me to have tried to kiss her goodbye, with the monster looming there between us. "Good day, madam," I had said, instead, and sadly turned away.

My train clicked along to the next suburban stop, city bound. I turned to the editorial page of my paper, thereby the better to fortify my favorite prejudices. Hm... Truman was in hot water again...

"The 'cello--you play it?" It was the little dark man sitting next to me. He spoke softly and with quite a pronounced foreign accent. From the battered

leather briefcase he held on his lap I judged him to be a fellow lawyer--probably one of those suburban divorce or collection lawyers, I quickly concluded. Probably the kind that sold fire insurance and real estate on the side.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, sparring for time.

"You play the 'cello?" he repeated, smiling in a friendly eager sort of way.

"Oh, yes," I found myself saying to my utter amazement, immediately wondering why on earth I had uttered such a clumsy lie. But it seemed so much easier--and somehow more dignified--than explaining to a stranger that I was carting my son's 'cello into the city to get a new set of strings.

"Ah, the 'cello--a beautiful instrument," the little dark man said. "You play him professionally?"

"Oh, yes," I lied again, somehow irresistibly impelled to pile falsehood on grotesque falsehood. I was carried away. "First 'cello with the symphony *in the city. I'm on my way to rehearsal.*"
~~down town.~~ I modestly bowed my head.

"My, my," the little man murmured, impressed, as I buried my face deep in the editorial page, burning with shame, wondering what strange hidden quirk of character could make me--a prosperous and reputable middle-aged lawyer--utter such a gratuitous series of lies. Perhaps, I thought, I had better deliver the hateful 'cello at the music store and spend the rest of the day lying on some nice comfortable psychiatrist's couch. What sort of dark frustrations was I dredging up?

The train grated to another suburban stop, and I was debating whether or not to leap off and grab a cab the rest of the way into the city when I overheard a snatch of conversation between the two women who sat behind me. I was suddenly frozen in my seat. Where were my weird falsehoods leading me?

"I'm positive it's him," one of the women was earnestly saying to her companion. "I heard him play the solo part in his own 'cello concerto in Boston last winter." She sighed. "I'll never forget it--it was simply divine. The critics say he's by far the best since poor Casals went into retirement." I strained to listen, caught in a fiend's clutch, feeling a strange sense of elation rather than of shame.

"Imagine such a celebrated artist and composer riding with us here on this rattly, dusty old suburban train," the other woman said in an awed voice. I stole a glance at the little dark man. From his nodding little smile I saw that he had heard, too. Shrugging mentally I decided I would play my part to the bitter end... I quickly cupped my hand to my brow, head bent, eyes closed, in an attitude which I hoped appropriately conveyed my artistic detachment; a detachment at once languid and emotionally consecrated, as though I were *being* inwardly consumed by the raging fires of the music I had not yet written.

As the train started again I heard the first woman say: "I wonder, my dear, if he would think it too bold of me if I spoke to him. I've never done such a thing before... But his music gave me such deep pleasure---" The rest of her words were drowned in the clatter of the moving train.

Never before had I felt such a sense of importance; of accomplishment; of really belonging... On a sudden charitable impulse I turned and flashed my most winning courtroom smile at the two women, accompanied by a quiet, understanding little nod. Then I immediately returned to my musical reverie, at the same time carelessly brushing my newspaper to the floor. After all, it was much too inartistic for a composer and celebrated virtuoso on the 'cello to be sitting there reading prosaic newspaper editorials.

"May I?" It was the little man, still smiling, pointing at my discarded newspaper. I nodded grave assent and returned to the sombre contemplation of my muse. Instead I was debating how I might bolt from the train when we reached the city before one of these fiendish people lured me into further falsehoods. The train clickety-clacked its way on to the city. I stealthily stole another glance at my little dark companion. Hm... He was buried nicely up to his ears in the financial page. Real estate was right, I thought. I yawned and professionally adjusted the 'cello case between my legs, deftly flecking an imaginary mote of dust from the case. The train began to slow down for the last stop before reaching the downtown station.

"Excuse me, please."

It was my engaging little dark man that wanted out. With his quaint foreign accent it sounded exactly like: "Accuse a me, pliss."

"Of course," I said, emerging from my musical communion long enough to enable him to hurdle both me and Junior's 'cello. As he passed me I thought I detected the faint aroma of garlic. "Thank you," he said, reaching the aisle. He stood there for a moment uncertainly gripping his leather briefcase. Then he turned and faced the two women sitting behind us. He removed his hat with a courtly little flourish and smiled and bowed.

"Excuse me, please, my dear ladies," he said somewhat timidly. "I could not refrain hearing your conversation. It would be bad discourtesy, I feel, not to gratify your feminine curiosity--it was indeed I you heard playing my concerto in Boston the last winter. Thank you kindly for your good words." He paused, still smiling diffidently. "Perhaps chance may permit you to hear me play my latest composition with your symphony this Saturday." He turned to me, still smiling, his voice soft and kindly. "And I am extremely looking forward to playing my first rehearsal with you this afternoon, my fellow artist! Goodbye."

With a final grave little bow he turned and quickly left the train. Just then Junior's 'cello thumped to the floor with a strangled "plink." I quickly buried my face in my newspaper.